



West County Full Service Community Schools

Five Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. WHAT IS A FULL SERVICES COMMUNITY SCHOOL?
2. What are the major differences between a community school and a regular school?
3. Are there differences between the terms community school, full-service community school, and community learning center?
4. What are the guiding principles driving the operation of community schools?
5. Why do we need community schools? How do community schools address equity?

1. WHAT IS A FULL SERVICES COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

- Both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources
- Integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement
- Improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities
- Access to services, recreation facilities, and other resources
- Center of community – welcoming students, their families, and local residents

2. What are the major differences between a community school and a regular school?

Community schools are an intentional school transformation strategy focused on results with participation from school and community leaders, educators, community partners, students, families, and residents. A regular school may have community partners and programs, but they typically operate in silos and are not well-aligned with the school's academic plans and goals.

Community schools also differ in how they view the community around them and how they work with community partners. Community schools see the community as a resource for learning and development and as a partner in the education of its children. They develop respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with families, neighborhood residents; and agencies and organizations are concerned with the well-being of children and youth.

Community schools have three major advantages that schools acting alone do not. Community schools:

- Garner additional resources to reduce the demand on school staff for addressing all the challenges that students bring to school.
- Provide learning opportunities that develop cognitive, social, emotional, physical and civic competencies.
- Build social capital—the networks and relationships that support learning and create opportunities for young people—while strengthening their communities.

Operationally, community schools typically have a coordinator who is responsible for aligning the work of educators and community partners and aligning their programs with the goals of the school. Community schools coordinators sit on the School Leadership Team. Look here for position descriptions of community school coordinators

3. Are there differences between the terms community school, full-service community school, and community learning center?

No. The term "community school" is the most common. However, many people use the terms above and others interchangeably. The Coalition is less concerned with the nuanced differences between these terms and focuses more on encouraging people to expand on their own vision of school and community relationships, strengthening the learning experience, and adding additional opportunities and supports over time to achieve better outcomes for young people as well as their families and communities. We believe this approach will lead people toward the vision of a community school that we have set forth. Each community develops its own language to describe its community schools (e.g., Beacons, schools as hubs, community resource centers, Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) schools).

4. What are the guiding principles driving the operation of community schools?

There are many community school models that tend to share a core set of operating principles. These include:

- Strive towards equity – Fairness and opportunity are fundamental moral underpinnings of American education and democracy. Community schools mobilize the human, institutional, and financial resources of their communities needed to close the opportunity gap and the achievement gap and ensure that all young people have a fair chance at success.
- Foster strong partnerships -- Partners share their resources and expertise and work together to design community schools and make them work.

- Share accountability for results -- Clear, mutually agreed-upon results drive the work of community schools. Data helps partners measure progress toward results, and agreements enable them to hold each other accountable and move beyond "turf battles."
- Set high expectations for all -- Community schools are organized to support learning. Children, youth and adults are expected to learn at high standards and be contributing members of their community.
- Build on the community's strengths -- Community schools marshal the assets of the entire community -- including the people who live and work there, local organizations, and the school.
- Embrace diversity -- Community schools know their communities. They work to develop respect and a strong, positive identity for people of diverse backgrounds and are committed to the welfare of the whole community.
- Advocate local decision-making -- To unleash the power of local communities, local leaders make decisions about their community schools strategy, while individual schools respond to their unique circumstances.

5. Why do we need community schools? How do community schools address equity?

Research and experience tell us that all of our young people need a wide range of learning opportunities and supports to succeed. A quality academic program is necessary, but it is not sufficient. It is also essential to address the myriad interdependent factors that affect our young people's success, including the rising opportunity gap and the inequities in many students' lives. Community schools are the vehicle for doing both. For data related to each of these factors see the following reports: [Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools](#) (Chapter 1); [Parsing the Achievement Gap \(ETS\)](#); and [Healthy Students are Better Learners](#). To understand how community schools address equity, review our [Equity Framework](#).

Source: [Coalition for Community Schools](#)