Getting Down to FACTS

California Community Schools: Past, Present, and Early Impacts of the California Community Schools Partnership Program

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May 2026

Stanford | SCALE Initiative
Accelerator for Learning

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Acknowledgements

The authors thank the organizations and individuals who supported the parallel research studies synthesized in this report. For the quantitative research, we thank the California Department of Education State Transformational Assistance Center and Regional Technical Assistance Centers Advisory Board Members—including the UCLA Center for Community Schooling—for their thought partnership and feedback on Annual Progress Report and outcomes data for California Community Schools Partnership Program grantees. We are also grateful to Learning Policy Institute (LPI) colleagues Juno Dong, Tara Kini, Efrain Mercado, and Cassandra Rubinstein, for their support in this research. Finally, we thank our LPI colleague Aaron Reeves for his assistance designing graphics for the report.

For the qualitative research, we thank the leaders and educators in both Los Angeles Unified School District and the West Kern Consortium for Full-Service Community Schools for sharing their work with us. We send a special thanks to Cora Watkins, Esperanza Martínez, Michael Figueroa, and Fidelina Saso for graciously sharing their time, resources, and thought partnership through the research process. We also thank our LPI colleagues who contributed to the research grounding this report, including LPI case study authors Emily Germain, Sarah Klevan, Melanie Leung, Cassandra Rubinstein and Natalie Spitzer, as well as Rebecca S. Levine for her instrumental support in this study's data collection. Finally, we thank LPI colleagues Tara Kini, Efrain Mercado, and Tiffany Miller for their thoughtful feedback on this report.

This report benefited from the insights and expertise of Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Deputy Director and Senior Research Associate at Stanford University's John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. We are grateful for the care and attention he gave the report.

This research was supported by the Stuart Foundation and the Youth Thriving Through Learning Fund. We are grateful to them for their generous support. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

Abstract

California's students face persistent opportunity gaps rooted in poverty, racial inequality, and unequal access to educational resources. This report examines how and to what extent California community schools are working to close these gaps, with particular focus on the state's historic $4.1 billion investment in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), the largest state-level community schools initiative in the nation. Drawing on a convergent parallel research design that integrates a quasi-experimental statewide impact study with a qualitative multisite case study of two established local initiatives, the report finds that California's investment is yielding meaningful returns in its earliest stages of implementation. The statewide analysis using a matched difference-in-differences finds that CCSPP schools newly adopting the community schools model demonstrated significantly greater reductions in chronic absence and suspension rates than matched comparison schools, along with meaningful gains in math and English language arts achievement. Impacts were largest for Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, suggesting community schools are a particularly effective strategy for addressing long-standing opportunity gaps.

Data on two community school initiatives extend these findings by examining mature initiatives that predate the CCSPP and received state funding to deepen and expand their work. Quantitative analyses show that both initiatives diverged positively from high-need comparison schools at the outset of their local programs, with gains accelerating substantially after CCSPP support arrived. Qualitative findings illuminate how LEA leaders used community school resources to advance high-quality instruction and address chronic absence, providing concrete evidence of how community schools are producing measurable improvements in student outcomes. The report concludes with implications for policymakers and LEA leaders committed to sustaining and expanding community schools in California and beyond.

Introduction

California policymakers have made substantial investments in whole child educational reforms in recent years, including the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). These investments are responsive to substantial challenges impacting California children and families. To start, far too many of California's children and families are living in poverty. In 2024, the overall poverty rate was 17.7%, tied with Florida and Louisiana for the highest in the nation.[1] Child poverty in California nearly tripled in recent years, rising from an all-time low of 7.5% in 2021 (when the federal Child Tax Credit was in place as part of pandemic recovery efforts) to a high of 18.6% in 2024,[2] amounting to nearly 1 million additional California children living in poverty.[3]

The impact of poverty on California's students is reflected in outcomes for the state's highest-need schools. For example, schools with 90% or higher Unduplicated Pupil Count (UPC) enrollment—defined as low-income students, English learners, and foster youth—reported chronic absence rates of 20% prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, versus under 6% for more affluent (i.e., under 20% UPC) schools. The pandemic increased the disparity between these two groups, with high-UPC schools reporting chronic absence rates of 44% in 2022, compared to just 12% for low-UPC schools. Similar patterns are present for academic achievement, with 17% of students at high-UPC schools meeting or exceeding proficiency standards in math and 28% in English language arts in 2022, compared to 70% and 77%, respectively, in low-UPC schools.[4]

California's children and families are experiencing additional challenges that can affect their success and well-being. These include climate change-induced crises that impact schools and housing.[5] Other factors affecting student's educational experiences pertain to the political and economic environment, as families grapple with financial strain; racial hostility and discrimination; and growing

[1] California Budget & Policy Center. (2025). *California's persistent poverty crisis: 2024 rates remain alarmingly high*. https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-persistent-poverty-crisis-2024-rates-remain-alarmingly-high; Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). *Measuring access: 2025 update*. https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-measuringaccessupdate-2025.pdf

[2] California Budget & Policy Center. (2025). *California's persistent poverty crisis: 2024 rates remain alarmingly high*. https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-persistent-poverty-crisis-2024-rates-remain-alarmingly-high

[3] Sanganeria, V. (2025, October 22). Child poverty rate nearly triples in California, report finds. *EdSource,* https://edsource.org/updates/child-poverty-rate-nearly-triples-in-california-report-finds

[4] Swain, W., Leung-Gagné, M., Maier, A., & Rubinstein, C. (2025). *Community schools impact on student outcomes: Evidence from California*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/541.498

[5] Lurye, S., Jones, C., & Tagami, M. (2025, September 10). Seven years after California's deadliest fire, schools — and kids — are still recovering. *CalMatters*. https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2025/09/wildfire-california-schools/

fears of immigration raids. Statewide polling corroborates these concerns, with two-thirds of California adults and nearly three-quarters of public-school parents reporting concern about the impact of increased federal immigration enforcement on undocumented students and their families.[6] A recent survey of more than 1,800 California youth, families, educators, and organizers from diverse racial, cultural, and regional backgrounds captured their vision for well-resourced schools that support student success and well-being. [7] Respondents described a desire for relationship-centered schools that welcomed families, offered mental health and wellness support, and inhibited the presence of federal immigration officials and local law enforcement.

Community schools are aligned to the vision of relationship-centered and resource-rich educational hubs. California's investment in the CCSPP represents an unprecedented commitment to the growth of community schools—an evidence-based school transformation strategy that organizes in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities to enable student success in schools.[8] These resources and supports include mental health services, meals, health care, tutoring, after-school and enrichment programming, and other services and opportunities tailored to specific community needs. Community schools also embrace a shared whole child vision; cultivate a relationship-centered school culture; and emphasize meaningful collaboration and leadership among educators, families, local community members, and students as a means of enabling the conditions to drive change.

This report examines the evidence base for California community schools, answering the following research questions:

- What is the status, to date, of California's investment in community schools?
- What impacts are community schools having in California, particularly under the CCSPP grant program?
- How has the CCSPP supported community school implementation and student outcomes?

[6] Public Policy Institute of California. (2025). *PPIC statewide survey: Californians and education*. https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-education-april-2025/

[7] California Partnership for the Future of Learning. (2025). *California Youth & Families Speak: CA PFL 2025 listening campaign*. https://futureoflearningca.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/California-Youth-Families-Speak-CA-PFL-2025-Listening-Campaign-12-November-2025.pdf

[8] Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Framework: Essentials for community school transformation*. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward

This report provides an overview of the history of California community schools and an assessment of published research on their impact, quality, and spread. It also synthesizes findings from two parallel studies on community school impact and implementation.[9] (See the Appendix for a detailed description of this report's convergent parallel research design.) Specifically, this report takes a detailed look at the CCSPP and draws on findings from a quasi-experimental evaluation to estimate statewide impacts of community schools supported by CCSPP. Statewide impacts are then complemented by data from a qualitative case study of two community school initiatives that have received CCSPP funds—the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the West Kern Consortium for Full-Service Community Schools (West Kern Consortium). While different in size, geography, and student demographics, efforts in both regions demonstrate how local leaders and practitioners are using resources to develop a system of high-quality community schools.

Findings suggest that while community schools have a long-standing presence in California, CCSPP has greatly increased access to community schooling across the state. This has resulted in positive impacts on student attendance, English language arts and math achievement, and suspension rates for students in some of the highest-need schools in the state. California's community schools investment is also helping to close opportunity gaps in the state, with larger-than-average effects in one or more outcome area for Black students, Hispanic or Latino/a students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The LAUSD and West Kern Consortium case studies indicate that the combination of CCSPP supports with local initiatives have made even larger gains in academic achievement and in mitigating chronic absence and illustrate how these local educational agencies leveraged community school resources to enable these outcomes. Specifically, LAUSD and West Kern Consortium leaders made high-quality instruction a priority, investing community school resources into

[9] Findings from the parallel studies upon which this report is based have been published in individual reports. For more information on the research, please see these following references:

- Germain, E., Hernández, L. E., Klevan, S., Levine, R., & Maier, A. (2024). *Reducing chronic absenteeism: Lessons from community schools.* Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/510.597
- Hernández, L., & Germain, E. (2026). *Community schools in rural California: Leveraging shared resources in West Kern County.* Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/643.620
- Klevan, S., Spitzer, N., Hernández, L., Rubinstein, C., & Swain, W. (2026). *Community schools in Los Angeles Unified: Transforming teaching and learning.* Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ca-community-schools-los-angeles-unified-brief
- Swain, W., Leung-Gagné, M., Maier, A., & Rubinstein, C. (2025). *Community schools impact on student outcomes: Evidence from California.* Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/541.498

coherent capacity-building structures to drive instructional improvement and achievement. Leaders also directed resources toward reducing chronic absence and enabled community schools to implement whole child approaches, such as practices that promote relationships and school connectedness, family engagement and increased access to integrated services, that provided both proactive support and targeted intervention. This report concludes that the CCSPP is showing promising results in transforming schools and creating more equitable opportunities and outcomes for student learning. In turn, researchers elevate key implications and takeaways for policymakers and local leaders of community school initiatives and suggest areas for future research.

California Community Schools Partnership Program: An Overview

California policymakers have made substantial whole child education investments in recent years that support the academic, physical/mental health, and social-emotional needs of California children and families. These investments include universal school meals, preschool for all (via the expansion of transitional kindergarten), broader access to expanded learning and school-based behavioral health services, and increased college and career opportunities through dual enrollment and career-themed learning pathways in high schools.[10] Among the state's most significant and ambitious investments seeking to advance whole child aligned school transformation is the CCSPP, a competitive grant program that allocates an historic $4.1 billion for the development and growth of community schools through the 2031-32 fiscal year. In 2020, the California legislature allocated $45 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support existing community

[10] Universal school meals reached full implementation in 2022–23 with an ongoing investment of $1.8 billion per fiscal year, transitional kindergarten and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program both reached full implementation in 2025 with ongoing investments of $1.9 billion and $4.6 billion per fiscal year, respectively. Beginning in 2022, the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative received $4.2 billion, and the Community Engagement Initiative received $100 million. Also in 2022, the College and Career Pathways Access grant program received $100 million, and in 2023 the Golden State Pathways grant program received $500 million. Additional investments include over $4 billion for educator recruitment, retention, and training; an ongoing investment of $2.2 billion per fiscal year to improve services for students with disabilities; and investments to improve literacy such as $200 million for literacy coaches and reading specialists in high-need schools. Burns, D., Griffith, M., & Maier, A. (2023). *Funding community schools in California*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/funding-community-schools-california-brief; *California Department of Finance. (2026). 2026–27 governor's budget summary: TK-12 education*. https://ebudget.ca.gov/2026-27/pdf/BudgetSummary/TK-12Education.pdf

schools during pandemic-related closures.[11] In 2021 and 2022, California passed legislation formally establishing the CCSPP. A budget proposal is currently under consideration to provide $1 billion annually in ongoing funding for community schools, starting in the 2026–27 fiscal year.

According to the California Department of Education, a community school is "any school serving pre-Kindergarten through high school students using a 'whole-child' approach, with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement."[12] A state-approved framework identifies four key areas of focus to guide CCSPP grant implementation: (1) pillars or foundational practices of community schools; (2) key conditions for learning grounded in the science of learning and development; (3) cornerstone commitments that are essential features in community schools, including assets-driven practice and shared decision-making; and (4) proven practices drawn from long-standing community school initiatives, including employing a community school coordinator. (See Table 1). This framework is intended to support high-quality implementation that is grounded in both research and lessons learned from experienced community school practitioners and initiatives.

CCSPP funding has provided grants to establish, sustain, and expand community schools throughout the state. Qualifying local education agencies (LEAs) and schools have a UPC of 50% or higher, meaning that more than half of enrolled students are either eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, or foster youth. Students who fall into more than one of these categories are only counted once. Additionally, LEAs can qualify for CCSPP funding if they have rates exceeding the state average for dropouts, suspensions, expulsions, child homelessness, youth in foster care, or justice-involved youth. While these qualifications serve as a baseline for grant eligibility, the CCSPP statute established a priority to fund applicant schools serving 80% or more of pupils from the UPC

[11] California Department of Education. (2024). *Report to the governor and the legislature: 2024 formative evaluation of the California Community Schools Partnership Program*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/ccspp24execsummary.asp

[12] California Department of Education. (2022). *California Community Schools Framework*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/documents/ccsppframework.docx

categories, including those from low-income households, English learners, or youth in foster care.[13] The California State Board of Education also identified a priority to fund small and rural applicant schools.[14]

Table 1. The "4 x 4" State-Approved Framework for CCSPP

The Four Pillars of Community Schools	The Four Key Conditions for Learning
1. Integrated student supports 2. Family and community engagement 3. Collaborative leadership and practices 4. Extended learning time and opportunities	1. Supportive environmental conditions that foster strong relationships and community 2. Productive instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning 3. Social and emotional learning that fosters skills, habits, and mindsets that enable academic progress, efficacy, and productive behavior 4. System of supports that enable healthy development, respond to student needs, and address learning barriers
The Four Cornerstone Commitments	**The Four Proven Practices**
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 4. A commitment to shared decision-making and participatory practices	1. Community asset mapping and gap analysis 2. The community school coordinator 3. Site-based and local education agency–based advisory councils 4. Integrating and aligning with other relevant programs

Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *California Community Schools Framework* (accessed 02/10/2026).

There are three main CCSPP grants: 1) Planning grants offered up to $200,000 per LEA for up to two years; 2) Implementation grants providing between $150,000 and $500,000 per school site annually for 5 years, with the funding amount dependent on school enrollment size,[15] and 3) Extension

[13] California Education Code § 8900-8902 (2021). https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=1.&title=1.&part=6.&chapter=6.&article=

[14] This led to a UPC priority threshold of 70% for small and rural LEAs. California Department of Education. (2022). *California State Board of Education January 2022 agenda item #02.* https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr22/agenda202201.asp

[15] Per-site grant funding is awarded by enrollment category. "Very small" schools with 10 to 24 students receive $75,000 annually for years 1-4 and $56,500 in year 5. "Small schools" with 25 to 150 students receive $150,000 annually for years

grants planned to offer up to $100,000 annually per site for two years after the implementation grant ends, starting in the 2027-28 fiscal year. In total, CCSPP grants are reaching 2,493 school sites—approximately 25% of California public schools (See Table 2 for information on the number of sites and amount of funding per cohort).

Table 2. Distribution of CCSPP Planning and Implementation Grants

Grant types	Budget year			
	2021–22	**2022–23**	**2023–24**	**2024–25**
Planning	193 LEAs $38.4 million	226 LEAs $44.9 million	--	--
Implementation	*Cohort 1* 76 LEAs 458 schools $625.6 million	*Cohort 2* 128 LEAs 570 schools $750.5 million	*Cohort 3* 288 LEAs 998 schools $1.3 billion	*Cohort 4* 121 LEAs 458 schools $618.2 million

Alongside grants to develop and sustain community schools were approximately $282 million in CCSPP investments in technical assistance, allocated through 2031-32. These resources included $142 million for a statewide center to coordinate a network of eight regional centers—typically led by county offices of education with support from statewide and local community partners—to provide direct on-the-ground support to grantees within this region. The technical assistance resources also included approximately $140 million in coordination grants for county offices of education to support the coordination of services for CCSPP grantees within their county.[16]

CCSPP grants can support a broad range of services, professional learning, engagement, strategic planning, and sustainability efforts. Eligible expenses include those related to conducting assets and needs assessments and collecting and evaluating data. Additionally, costs pertaining to the creation of collaborative leadership and professional development structures, including codifying consistent time for planning and collaboration time for school staff, can be subsidized by CCSPP funds.

1-4 and $112,500 for year 5. “Small/medium” schools with 151 to 400 students receive $250,000 annually for years 1-4 and $187,500 for year 5. “Medium” schools with 401 to 1,000 students receive $300,000 annually for years 1-4 and $187,500 for year 5. “Medium/large” schools with 1,001 to 2,000 students receive $400,000 annually for years 1-4 and $300,000 for year 5. “Large” schools with 2,001 or more students receive $500,000 annually and $375,000 for year 5.

[16] Legislative Analyst’s Office. (2026). *The 2026–27 budget: K-12 proposals*. https://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2026/5131/2026-27_K-12_Proposals_021926.pdf

Expenses related to hiring personnel (e.g., community school coordinator, counselor) and providing integrated services—often in collaboration with community-based partner organizations—can also be financially supported through CCSPP funding. Each LEA receiving CCSPP funds indicates how they will use the monies to support eligible expenses to meet the unique needs of their communities, typically in response to input from students, families, educators, and community members.

The CCSPP exemplifies a generational commitment to transforming California's highest-need schools into centers of learning, health, and community support. With program implementation now in full swing and the first cohort of implementation grantees preparing to enter their fifth and final year (2026–27), this is an important moment to take stock of the investment to date. This includes a look at the emerging impacts for students at CCSPP sites, as well as how districts and schools have been using these grant funds to establish, sustain, and expand community school practices. However, community schooling is not a new approach in California. The next section examines the history of California community schools and provides a brief overview of the state and national evidence base.

California's Community Schools: Their History and Growing Evidence Base

Community schooling is not a new concept, in California or nationally. For more than a century, American educators and community leaders including John Dewey and Jane Addams have envisioned public schools as democratic institutions that can anchor local neighborhoods and communities, particularly in neighborhoods experiencing poverty and racial isolation.[17] Community schooling is also grounded in African American struggles for quality education and local control, as civil rights and education activists worked with Black communities to build schools that became powerful community hubs. [18] For example, the Black Panther party founded the Oakland Community School in 1973, where it operated independently in East Oakland for nearly a decade with skilled Black educators, a curriculum focused on critical thinking and experiential learning, and free school meals (an inspiration for the

[17] Rogers, J. (1998). *Community Schools: Lessons from the past and present*. Los Angeles: UCLA.
IDEA; Blank, M. J., Harkavy, I., Quinn, J., Villarreal, L., & Goodman, D. (2023). *The community schools revolution: Building partnerships, transforming lives, advancing democracy*. Collaborative Communications Group, Incorporated.
[18] Blank, M. J., Harkavy, I., Quinn, J., Villarreal, L., & Goodman, D. (2023). *The community schools revolution: Building partnerships, transforming lives, advancing democracy*. Collaborative Communications Group, Incorporated.

federal school meals program).[19] In the 1990s, the work of Joy Dryfoos brought a renewed focus on community schooling with an emphasis on full-service community schools that combined a quality education with comprehensive social services for students, all under one roof.[20]

History and Early Growth of California Community Schools

In 1991, the California legislature passed the Healthy Start Support Services for Children Act (Healthy Start) to support work aligned with Dryfoos' full-service community schools concept.[21] Healthy Start provided one-time seed funding to build partnerships between school districts, local government (e.g., county offices of education and other county or city agencies), and community-based organizations. These partnerships were intended to provide children and families with a comprehensive array of learning supports and to increase school-linked services. Healthy Start grants were available from 1992 to 2006, reaching over 1,500 school sites and one million students[22] and leading to significant improvements in reading and math scores and meaningful decreases in student mobility.[23] Although Healthy Start's funding was cut during the 2001 recession, many of its school-based health and family resource centers persisted, laying a foundation for California's current investment in community schools.

The federal Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant program, established in 2008, has also provided important seed funding for many of California's established community school initiatives that predate the CCSPP investment. Funding for FSCS grants rose to $150 million by fiscal year 2023, with 14 California initiatives receiving grant support over the program's history.[24] This includes Oakland Unified

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[19] Harshaw, P. (2024, January 11). Celebrating the Black Panthers' Oakland community school. *KQED.* https://www.kqed.org/arts/13940221/black-panthers-oakland-community-school-50th-anniversary

[20] Dryfoos, J. G. (1994). *Full-service schools: A revolution in health and social services for children, youth, and families*. Jossey-Bass.

[21] California Education Code § 8800-8807 (1991). https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=8800.&nodeTreePath=1.1.6.7.1&lawCode=EDC

[22] Bookmyer, J. & Niebuhr, D. (2011). *California Healthy Start: Seed funding to build partnerships for student success, executive summary.* UC Davis School of Education and Partnership for Children and Youth. https://www.sophe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/HealthyStartCA_Report_2011May_ExecSummary_rev2012Apr.pdf

[23] Zellman, G. L., & Waterman, J. M. (1998). *California's Healthy Start school-linked services initiative: Final evaluation report*. RAND.

[24] U.S. Department of Education. *Full-Service Community Schools Program (FSCS), FSCS grant awards.* https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-birth-grade-12/school-and-community-improvement-grants/full-service-community-schools-program-fscs#fscs-grant-awards (accessed 02/27/2026).

School District, which received $2.5 million in federal FSCS grant funding in 2014 to support its commitment to districtwide community schools implementation.[25] Additional FSCS grants have supported work throughout California, including in Fresno, Hayward, Long Beach, Pasadena, and several Tulare County districts. The FSCS grant program has helped to establish experienced community school initiatives throughout the state—many of which have gone on to receive CCSPP grants—that can serve as examples and resources for newer CCSPP grantees.

Growing Research on California Community Schools

The national evidence base has grown substantially in recent years as a number of states have joined California in funding community schools. [26] Many of these studies, ranging from systematic research reviews and evaluations of large-scale, mature community school initiatives in New York and Maryland among others, find that well-implemented community schools enable improvement in student and school outcomes, including increases in student achievement, attendance, and school climate measures.[27] However, some studies have found more modest or mixed effects for community schools, potentially reflecting differences in research design, local context, and implementation

[25] McLaughlin, M. W., Fehrer, K., & Leos-Urbel, J. (2020). *The way we do school: The making of Oakland's full-service community school district*. Harvard Education Press.

[26] Learning Policy Institute. (2025). How Community Schools Improve Outcomes [Fact sheet]. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4718/download?inline&file=Community_Schools_Improve_Outcomes_FACTSHEET.pdf

[27] Maier, A, Daniel, J., Oakes, J. & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute; Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L. (2020). *Illustrating the promise of community schools: An assessment of the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative*. RAND Corporation. https://doi.org/10.7249/RR3245; Covelli, L., Engberg, J., & Opper, I. M. (2022). *Leading indicators of long-term success in community schools: Evidence from New York City* (EdWorkingPaper No. 22-669). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. https://doi.org/10.26300/59q2-ek65; Durham, R., Shiller, J., & McDowell, J. (2024). *Building better learning environments: The positive impact of community schools on school climate.* Towson University, Maryland Center for Community Schools, https://www.towson.edu/coe/centers/maryland-center-community-schools/mccs-research-brief-2.pdf; Durham, R., Shiller, J., & McDowell, J. (2025). *From absence to engagement: Community schools' innovative approaches to reducing chronic absenteeism and increasing attendance,* Towson University, Maryland Center for Community Schools, https://www.towson.edu/coe/centers/maryland-center-community-schools/mccs-research-brief-3.pdf

supports.[28] This variation underscores the importance of seeking to understand not only the impacts of community schools, but also how and under what conditions implementation is most effective.

Research on the growing population of community schools in California has followed suit in examining the impact and implementation of the community school strategy to answer these open questions. Prior to the CCSPP, California-focused community schools research primarily consisted of qualitative case studies and mixed-methods evaluations of individual schools and districts. For instance, the long-standing community school initiative in the Oakland Unified School District has garnered significant research attention. Researchers with Stanford University's Gardner Center conducted longitudinal research on Oakland Unified's progression from a pilot effort to the nation's first district-wide full-service community schools initiative, highlighting how Oakland community schools built student-centered learning environments and how schools operating with the highest implementation quality supported positive student outcomes.[29]

Other research highlights how Oakland's community school initiative has benefited from a supportive district infrastructure. The systems-level support in Oakland Unified facilitated shared governance, coordinated partnerships, and instituted coherent professional development structures, thereby enabling district-wide implementation.[30] Cross-sector coordination and partnership at the county level also helped schools to effectively integrate site-level services for students.[31] Descriptive reports of individual community schools in Oakland have also emerged from research on its initiative.

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[28] Corrin, W. J., & Parise, L. *MDRC's evaluation of Communities In Schools (CIS), North Carolina and Texas, 2011–2014*. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [Distributor], 2018-08-22. https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37037.v1; Truwit, M. (2025). Investigating the promise of integrated student supports: An evaluation of the community school model in Tennessee. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *100*(2), 252–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2025.2483144

[29] Fehrer, K., Leos-Urbel, J. (2015). *Oakland Unified School District community schools: Understanding implementation efforts to support students, teachers, and families*. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University. https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/oakland_unified_school_district_community_schools_implementation_report_0.pdf; Fehrer, K., & Ruiz de Velasco, J. (2020). *Oakland Unified School District: Creating learner-centered community schools.* John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University. https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/ousd_brief_elmhurst_and_new_highland_rise_0.pdf; McLaughlin, M., Fehrer, K., & Leos-Urbel, J. (2020). *The way we do school: The making of Oakland's full-service community school district*. Harvard Education Press. 8 Story Street First Floor, Cambridge, MA.

[30] Fehrer, K., Myung, J., & Kimner, H. (2023). *The district's role in community school development*. Policy Analysis for California Education. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED633105.pdf;https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED633105.pdf; Klevan, S., Daniel, J., Fehrer, K., & Maier, A. (2023). *Creating the conditions for children to learn: Oakland's districtwide community schools initiative*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/784.361

[31] Maier, A., Klevan, S., & Ondrasek, N. (2020). *Leveraging resources through community schools: The role of technical assistance* (policy brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/leveraging-resources-community-schools-technical-assistance-brief

These reports typically elevate how school practices (e.g., deeper learning pedagogy, positive relationships, family and community engagement) support student progress and meet the distinct needs of local communities in assets-driven ways.[32]

Researchers also featured community school sites and local initiatives from other parts of the state in their mixed-method or qualitative investigations. For example, one of the few pre-CCSPP quantitative studies of California community schools found that Redwood City community school programming reached over 70% of enrolled students and supported measurable gains for English learners.[33] Other examples include qualitative studies of high-quality community schools in Los Angeles—a metropolitan area with a long history of community schooling. These reports illustrated how the focus schools enabled student achievement and well-being through approaches that align with evidence-based, whole child practices.[34]

With the substantial investment in CCSPP, researchers have increasingly sought to assess the statewide initiative's impact through varied study designs. For instance, a 2020 survey-based study of the ESSER-funded cohort of community schools that pre-dated the major state investment in the CCSPP identified significant school design shifts within the 206 community schools studied, with the most prominent changes observed in expanded learning time and collaborative leadership. Respondents reported fewer changes in the 19 LEAs studied, indicating that school-site implementation was progressing more rapidly than systemic infrastructure development during the early phase of the initiative.[35]

A growing body of qualitative research documents how specific schools and districts are translating the CCSPP investment into practice and seeks to lend guidance to leaders and practitioners

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[32] Fehrer, K., & Ruiz de Velasco, J. (2020). *Bridges Academy: Community school lessons from East Oakland*. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University.; Markham, L. (2023). A community school in service of newcomer students: Lessons from Oakland International High School. *Policy Analysis for California Education, PACE*. https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/pb_markham-aug2023.pdf; Thompson, C. (2023). *Oakland International High School: A thriving community school for Oakland's newcomer students*. Learning Policy Institute. http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/shared-learning-oakland-international

[33] Castrechini, S., & London, R. A. (2012). Positive Student Outcomes in Community Schools. *Center for American Progress*.

[34] Saunders, M., Martínez, L., Flook, L., & Hernández, L. E. (2021). *Social Justice Humanitas Academy: A community school approach to whole child education*. Learning Policy Institute.; Thompson, C. (2021). *Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School: A community school that honors its neighborhood's legacy of educational justice*. Learning Policy Institute.

[35] Boal, A. L., Gara, T., Zimiles, J., & Cerna, R. (2025). California's historic investment in community schools: Early evidence to understand shifts in community school practices before and after grant participation. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, *30*(4), 337–364.

engaged in community school transformation efforts. For example, researchers have highlighted evidence-based approaches that help to build positive school climate in community schools,[36] a key condition and cornerstone commitment in California's state-approved CCSPP framework. The UCLA Center for Community Schooling has also contributed practitioner-oriented research through its role as a part of the Statewide Transformational Assistance Center. Center researchers have produced deep dive reports that provide detailed examinations of how select Cohort 1 CCSPP grantees implemented the community school strategy in different local contexts, including urban, suburban, and rural settings, as well as district- and county-led models. The deep dives document how schools and systems move from planning to practice by establishing concrete routines for collaboration, data use, and service coordination that are shaped by local needs and assets and enable continuous improvement and collaborative leadership,[37] thus providing the field with implementation guidance.

Taken together, the community schools evidence base paints an increasingly consistent and well-substantiated picture regarding positive student and school outcomes, particularly when community school strategies are coherently implemented with sufficient support and time to mature. California's community schools research pre-CCSPP aligns with the national picture, although the largely qualitative and mixed methods research has been lacking a large-scale quantitative impact study to round out the picture. This report seeks to address this research gap by combining a well-designed quantitative study of CCSPP outcomes with detailed qualitative studies of two California initiatives that pre-date the CCSPP investment and now receive state funding to grow and improve their systems of community schools. In doing so, this study shows the positive impacts of community school implementation on students and schools and suggests how investments in instructional improvement and the promotion of other whole child approaches (e.g., relationship-centered practices, increased access to targeted supports, structures that promote a positive school climate) have propelled these strong outcomes in two mature initiatives.

[36] Germain, E., & Klevan, S. (2025). *Developing a healthy school climate in community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/858.128

[37] Garcia, L.W. & Fensterstock, N. (2024). *Deep dive strategy report: Cohort 1.* UCLA Center for Community Schooling. https://communityschooling.gseis.ucla.edu/deep-dive-strategy-report-cohort-1/

Statewide Impacts of the CCSPP: Evidence from the First Year of Implementation

California's historic $4.1 billion investment in the CCSPP yielded measurable improvements in student outcomes during the first full year of implementation. This statewide analysis focused specifically on schools newly implementing community school approaches through CCSPP support. The study examined Cohort 1 CCSPP implementation grantees that had not previously received federal FSCS grants and had not reported carrying forward established community school practices prior to the CCSPP, i.e., schools for which the state grant represented the primary vehicle for initiating the community schools approach. Using a matched difference-in-differences design, the study compared these schools against similar high-need schools that did not receive grants, tracking outcomes from 2018–19 through 2023–24.

Across all three outcome areas examined (chronic absence, school discipline, and academic achievement) CCSPP schools outperformed their matched comparison schools in the first full year of grant implementation. Chronic absence rates fell by approximately 30% more than in comparison schools, and suspension rates declined by roughly 15% on average in community schools. On academic achievement, CCSPP schools impacts were equivalent to approximately 43 and 36 additional days of learning[38] in Math and ELA respectively (akin to approximately one-quarter of a grade level equivalence). These gains were largest among historically underserved students: Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students all had notably large benefits across the range of outcomes. The subsections below summarize findings for each outcome area and present results disaggregated by student subgroup.

[38] Estimates of days of learning and grade-level equivalence are calculated using a conversion of 0.25 standard deviations per academic year, consistent with Bloom et al. (2008) and the empirical pattern that 4th and 8th grade NAEP performance differs by approximately 1 standard deviation across four years of schooling. A standard school year of approximately 180 days is used to convert fractions of a grade level into days of learning. These figures are approximations and should be interpreted accordingly, as growth rates vary across grades and subjects.

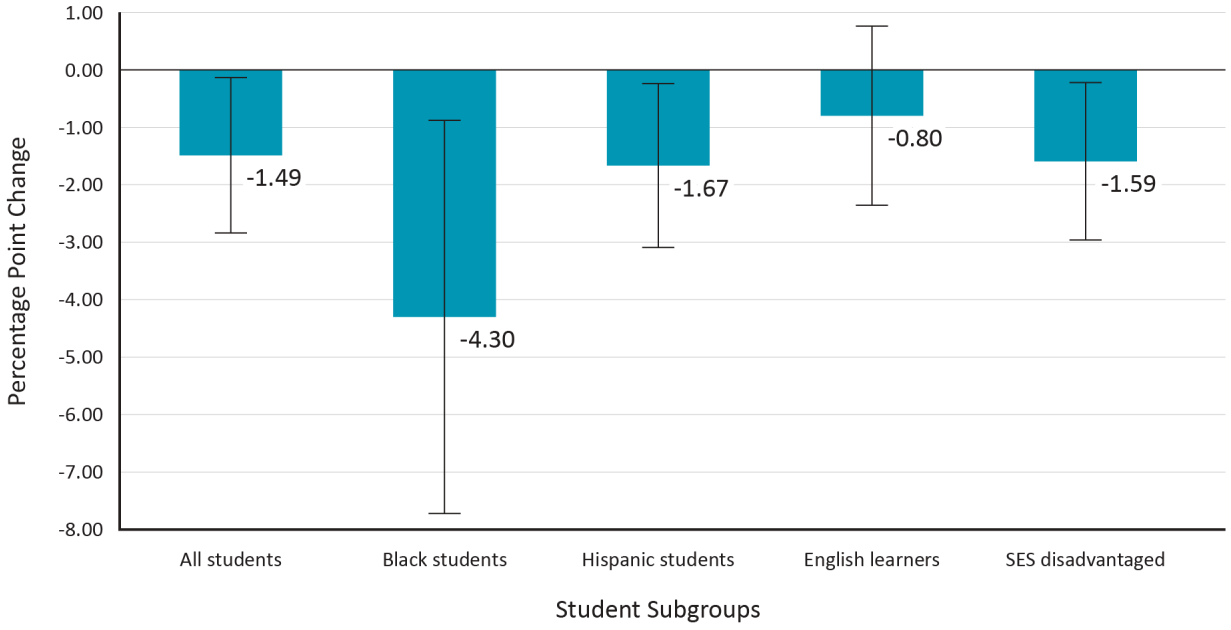
Significant Attendance Improvements

Schools implementing community school strategies with CCSPP support demonstrated substantially greater reductions in chronic absence compared to similar high-need schools without such support. Overall, CCSPP schools reduced chronic absence rates by 1.49 percentage points more than matched comparison schools, a finding that is statistically significant at the 0.10 level. This translates to more than 5,000 additional students attending school regularly across the first cohort. Given that chronic absence rates in California's highest-need schools reached 44% in the first year following the return to in-person instruction, reductions of this magnitude represent a meaningful step toward restoring the regular attendance patterns that are foundational to student learning and well-being.

Figure 1 disaggregates chronic absence reductions by student subgroup, revealing a pattern consistent with the discipline and achievement findings: the largest improvements were concentrated among students who have historically faced the greatest barriers to consistent school attendance. Black students at community schools experienced reductions in chronic absence rates of 4.30 percentage points relative to comparison schools, a finding that is statistically significant and nearly three times the overall average effect. This is a particularly notable result given that Black students entered the post-pandemic period with some of the highest chronic absence rates in the state, and that attendance barriers for this population are often rooted in systemic factors — including housing instability, health disparities, and school climate — that the community schools model is explicitly designed to address.

Hispanic or Latino/a students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students also showed reductions in chronic absence larger than the overall average, with effects of 1.67, 0.80, and 1.59 percentage points, respectively, as shown in Figure 1. The consistency of this pattern across all subgroups examined reinforces the finding that CCSPP community schools are broadly improving attendance conditions rather than producing gains for a narrow segment of the student population.

Figure 1. Community School Effects on Chronic Absence Rates, by Student Group



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Reduced Exclusionary Discipline

The adoption of community school approaches through CCSPP funding corresponded with meaningful reductions in exclusionary discipline among Cohort 1 schools relative to matched comparison schools. Overall, CCSPP schools reduced suspension rates by 0.52 percentage points more than comparison schools. These reductions are practically meaningful given that baseline suspension rates in the high-need schools studied were already among the highest in the state, and that exclusionary discipline has well-documented negative consequences for student engagement, attendance, and academic achievement.

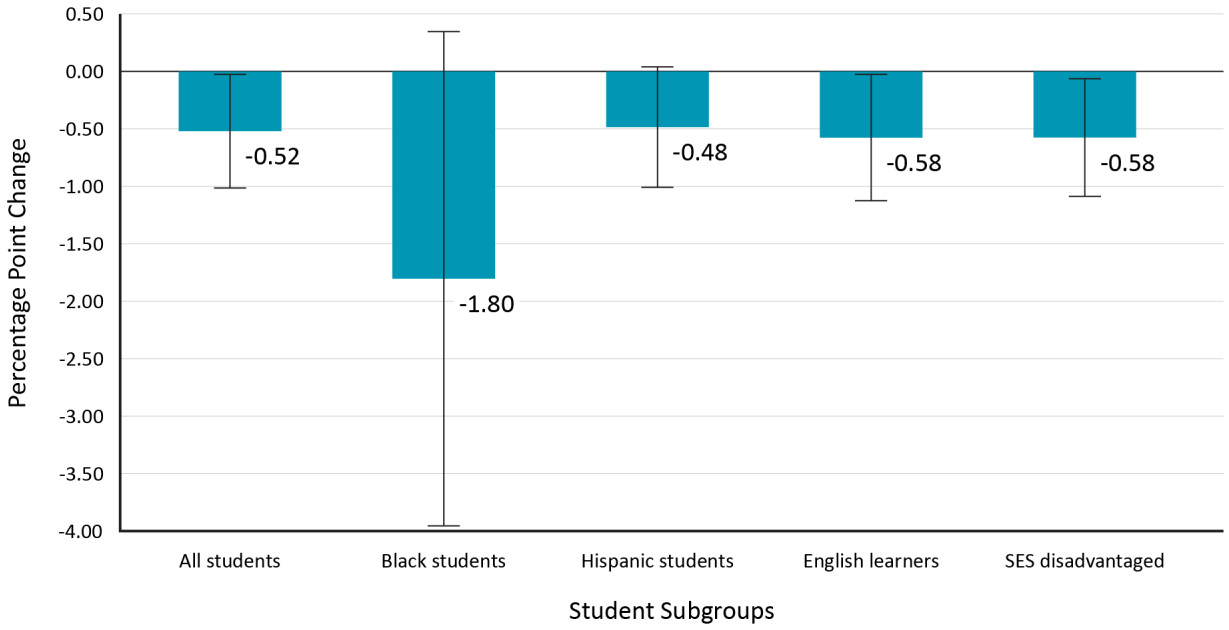
Figure 2 disaggregates suspension rate reductions by student subgroup, revealing that, as with attendance and academic achievement, the largest improvements were concentrated among students

who have historically been subject to the highest rates of exclusionary discipline. Black students experienced reductions in suspension rates of 1.80 percentage points relative to comparison schools, a finding that is statistically significant and more than three times larger than the overall average effect. This pattern is consistent with research documenting that community schools' emphasis on restorative practices, positive school climate, and relationship-centered approaches to discipline may be particularly effective in disrupting the disciplinary disparities that have long characterized high-need schools.

English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students also showed suspension rate reductions larger than the overall average, with effects of 0.80, and 0.58 percentage points, respectively, as shown in Figure 2. While effect sizes vary in their statistical precision across subgroups, the consistency of the pattern across all groups examined reinforces the finding that CCSPP community schools are broadly reducing reliance on exclusionary discipline rather than producing improvements concentrated in a narrow segment of the student population.

These improvements are notable given the context in which they occurred. Suspension rates in California rose sharply following the return to in-person schooling after the pandemic, reflecting heightened behavioral challenges and strained school climates across the state. The fact that CCSPP schools reduced suspensions at significantly higher rates than comparison schools during this period suggests that the community schools model helped buffer against these broader trends. These apparent impacts on suspensions are consistent with qualitative findings that community schools' investments in school climate, social-emotional supports, and staff professional development on restorative and de-escalating practices created conditions in which behavioral challenges were addressed through supportive rather than punitive means.

Figure 2. Community School Effects on Suspension Rates, by Student Group



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Academic Achievement Gains

Schools newly implementing community school practices through CCSPP funding showed measurable academic improvements compared to similar high-need schools. Among all students, math achievement increased by 0.06 standard deviations overall. English language arts scores improved by 0.05 standard deviations, though this overall effect did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. While the overall effects are modest in magnitude, they are notable given that they emerged in the first full year of implementation, a relatively short window for detecting academic gains from whole-school reform efforts.

Figure 3 disaggregates these achievement impacts by student subgroup for both math and ELA, revealing substantial variation in the magnitude of effects across groups. The pattern is consistent

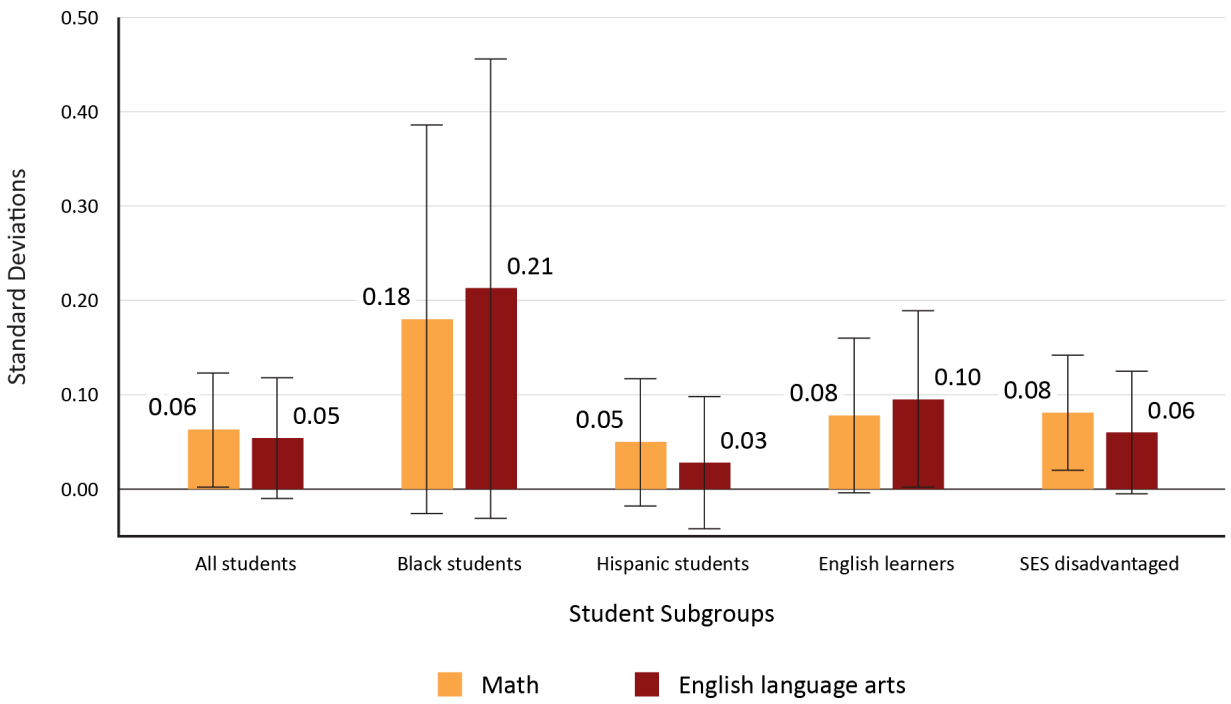
across subjects: students who have historically experienced the greatest barriers to educational opportunity showed the largest gains, and effects for almost all subgroups reach statistical significance at the 0.10 level or better.

Black students showed the largest achievement gains of any subgroup, with impacts of 0.18 standard deviations in math and 0.21 standard deviations in ELA, both statistically significant at the 0.10 level. The magnitude of these gains suggests that the community schools model, with its emphasis on integrated student supports, relationship-centered school culture, and meaningful family and community engagement, may be particularly well-suited to addressing the compounding barriers that have historically contributed to persistent opportunity gaps for Black students.

English learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students also demonstrated stronger gains than the overall average. English learners improved by 0.08 standard deviations in math and 0.10 standard deviations in ELA. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students gained 0.06 standard deviations in math and 0.08 standard deviations in ELA. Hispanic or Latino/a students, who constitute the majority of students served in CCSPP community schools, showed gains of 0.05 standard deviations in math and 0.03 standard deviations in ELA.

These subgroup patterns carry important implications for the CCSPP's equity goals. The program explicitly targets California's highest-need schools and prioritizes schools serving concentrated populations of low-income students, English learners, and foster youth. The finding that impacts are largest precisely among the student groups facing the steepest opportunity gaps suggests that the community schools model, as implemented through the CCSPP, is functioning as an equity-oriented intervention rather than simply raising average outcomes.

Figure 3. Community School Effects on Math & ELA Scale Scores, by Student Group



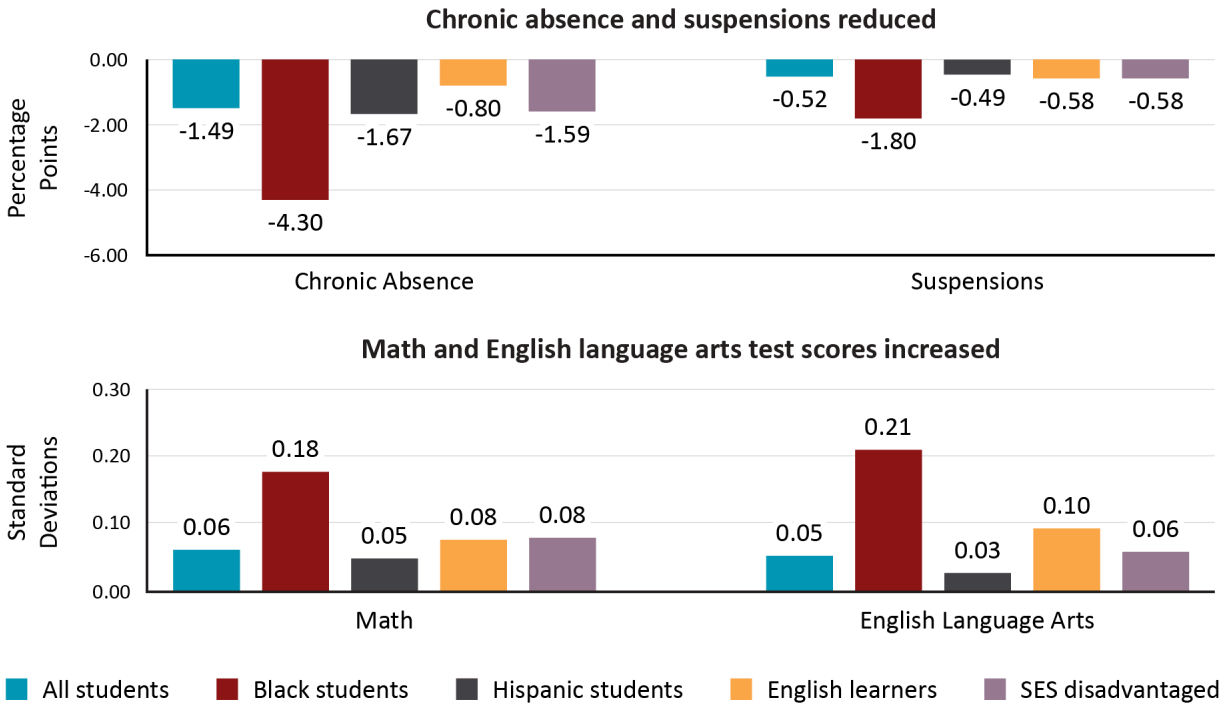
Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include grade fixed effects, school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Math and English language arts scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.
Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Greatest Benefits for Historically Underserved Students

While the community school approach benefited students across all backgrounds, the impacts were substantially larger for Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students (see Figure 4). Black students in CCSPP community schools experienced gains equivalent to approximately two-thirds of a grade level equivalence. English learners' benefits translated to roughly 58 and 72 additional days of learning in math and English language arts, respectively, roughly one-third of a grade level equivalence. Black students also experienced reductions in chronic absence and suspensions at more than double the overall rates, suggesting that community school approaches may

be particularly effective at addressing long-standing barriers disproportionately affecting this population. Hispanic or Latino/a students, who are the majority of students served in CCSPP community schools, had larger than average reductions in absenteeism rates, and outpaced Hispanic or Latino/a students in non-CS comparison schools on all outcomes.

Figure 4. Consistent Improvements Across All Outcomes for Historically Underserved Groups



Notes: SES = socioeconomic status. Chronic absence is calculated as the percentage of students who miss 10% or more of the school year. Suspensions are the percentage of students with at least one suspension. Coefficients are modeled controlling for school characteristics (enrollment; percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless students, English learners, and youth in foster care; and racial/ethnic composition) and include school and year fixed effects. Models for student achievement also include grade fixed effects. Math and ELA scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year. For each student subgroup, the sample is restricted to schools with at least 10% representation of that group.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Early-Stage Implementation Success

These positive findings are especially notable given the relatively short implementation timeline, with grant funding announced in May 2022 and many schools still hiring staff during the first

official year of grant implementation (2022–23). Research on other community school initiatives typically shows impacts strengthening over time as partnerships deepen and practices mature.[39] The emergence of significant effects within the first full year of CCSPP implementation suggests that California's comprehensive support structure (including substantial funding, clear frameworks, and regional technical assistance) may be accelerating the benefits of community school approaches for schools newly adopting this strategy. The initial evidence indicates that California's investment in expanding community school practices is generating meaningful returns, particularly for students who have historically been underserved by traditional school models.

A Closer Look at Community School Impact in Two Initiatives

The statewide analysis provides a compelling picture of what CCSPP has accomplished at scale. But by design, it tells us most about schools for which the grant represented a genuine entry point into the community schools model. An equally important story lies in districts where the community schools approach took hold before the CCSPP was established and where the state's investment arrived not as an introduction to a new model, but as a catalyst for programs already demonstrating momentum.

Two such initiatives stand out: the West Kern Consortium in California's Central Valley, and LAUSD, the nation's second-largest district. Both programs predate the CCSPP by several years, having built local community schools infrastructure, partnerships, and school culture through sustained district leadership, and community organizing. Both also serve student populations that are among the most economically disadvantaged in the state. And in both cases, the data show that progress was already underway before the state's support arrived, with achievement trajectories that strengthened further as CCSPP resources and technical assistance came online.

In both sites, the community schools diverge positively from local high-need non-community schools at the outset of their community school initiatives, with significant gains following their engagement with CCSPP. These differential improvements in student outcomes are particularly noteworthy given that the comparison schools served similar student populations with nearly identical concentrations of high need students, faced similar pandemic-related challenges, and generally had

[39] Covelli, L., Engberg, J., & Opper, I. M. (2022). *Leading indicators of long-term success in community schools: Evidence from New York City (EdWorking Paper No. 22–669).* Annenberg Institute at Brown University. https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai22-669.pdf

access to similar state and district supports for mental health, expanded learning, transitional kindergarten, and other supports outside of the community schools program. The pattern of early local investment followed by accelerated gains with state support is itself an important finding. It suggests that the CCSPP is not simply effective when it introduces the community schools model to unprepared schools, but also when it amplifies and sustains efforts that communities have been building on their own.

The following sections describe each initiative in turn. They provide an overview of each initiative's history, characteristics, and supportive infrastructure before drawing on school-level achievement data to trace their outcome trajectories over time. Impact data in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium is followed by the presentation of qualitative data, detailing how these accelerated gains were associated with implementation strategies designed to spur academic gains as well as positive school climates and student well-being.

LAUSD

LAUSD serves more than 500,000 students across over 1,300 schools. The district's enrollment reflects the racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity of Southern California. Nearly three-quarters of students identify as Hispanic or Latino/a (74%), followed by 7.1% Black students, 5.1% Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander students, 10.1% White students, and 2% multiracial students. Approximately one in five students is designated as an English learner, with more than 150 home languages represented across the district. In addition, 82.4% of LAUSD students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, underscoring the district's high level of economic need.

History and Funding of the LAUSD Community School Initiative

LAUSD has a long tradition of community schooling, and local officials have garnered investments to implement the community school approach in select sites over the past two decades. For example, the Los Angeles Education Partnership received FSCS grants, totaling approximately $7.5 million in 2008, 2014, and 2018, to develop community schools throughout Los Angeles. This effort contributed to LAUSD's Community Schools Initiative (CSI), which was formally established in 2017 through a board resolution that articulated a long-term commitment to districtwide implementation of

the community schools strategy. This commitment was further solidified in 2019, when funding for community schools was embedded in a revised collective bargaining agreement with United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), moving the initiative from aspirational policy to concrete reform. UTLA has co-led design and implementation of the CSI alongside the district, with support from other key partners including UNITE-LA (a nonprofit co-founded by the City of Los Angeles, LAUSD, and the LA Community College District) and the UCLA Center for Community Schooling. The involvement of educators from the start has helped to keep community-connected instruction elevated as a priority for CSI. Although CSI is one of several improvement efforts underway in LAUSD, it plays a central role in advancing educational equity, addressing systemic opportunity gaps, and cultivating racially just, relationship-driven school communities.

Since its launch, the CSI has expanded through sustained local investment and significant state support. LAUSD provides annual funds to ensure that each community school is staffed with both a community school coordinator and a community representative. CSI district funding provided $150,000 per site in 2019–20 and $250,000 per site in 2020–21, serving a total of approximately 30 schools across two cohorts. In 2022, the district's efforts were bolstered by a $44 million CCSPP implementation grant—the largest awarded to any local education agency—which supported 31 schools in the program's first cohort (primarily comprised of the CSI schools that were previously established with district funding). Cumulatively, LAUSD has secured more than $83 million in CCSPP funding and has used this momentum to scale the initiative to 70 community schools. The district's early adoption of the model, combined with its emphasis on high-quality implementation, created a unique opportunity for researchers to examine sustained systems change and the enactment of whole child–aligned practices.

Common Features and District Infrastructure

Across the district, community schools are grounded in a shared set of roles, processes, and organizational features. Each site is supported by a community school coordinator who leads partnership development and family engagement, alongside a community representative who facilitates work with coordinators to connect families to resources. Under the coordinator's leadership, schools conduct an Assets and Needs Assessment during their initial year and revisit it periodically to gather perspectives from students, staff, families, and community partners; establish shared priorities;

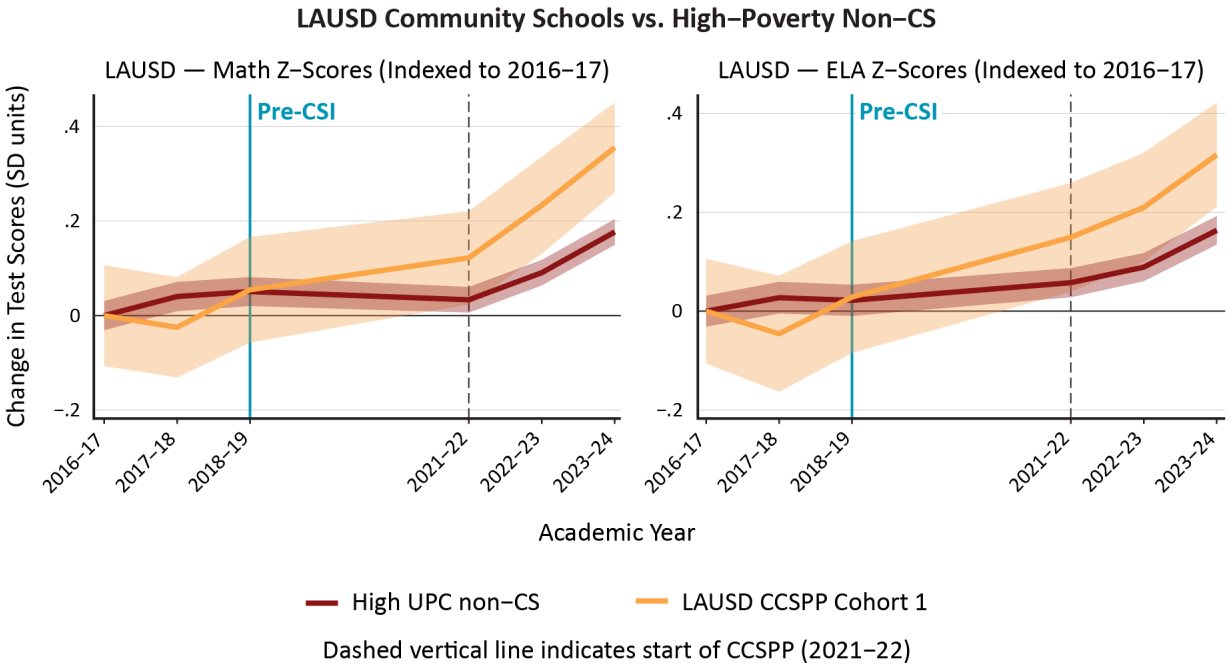
and develop action plans through Community School Implementation Teams. Schools also maintain inclusive, school-based governance structures—such as Local School Leadership Councils—that support shared decision-making. While these elements provide a common framework, individual schools adapt strategies to reflect local contexts and community priorities.

This work is sustained by a district-level infrastructure designed to support coherence and capacity building. The CSI Department has expanded from a single position to a multi-role team that includes regional community school coordinator coaches and instructional or grade-level specialists who provide guidance to school sites. UTLA has also strengthened the initiative by adding a lead coach and two parent organizers that work with the district support team to deepen family engagement. In addition, CSI offers extensive professional learning opportunities, including annual institutes, ongoing professional learning communities, targeted coaching for community school coordinators, and districtwide professional development for educators, school leaders, and out-of-classroom staff. These learning experiences emphasize inclusive school climates and community-connected, project-based instructional approaches.

Community Schools and Academic Growth in LAUSD

Through their CSI augmented by CCSPP funding, LAUSD community schools have enabled impressive outcomes in student achievement and in the reduction of chronic absence. This analysis compares LAUSD community schools against non-community schools within LAUSD that have an UPC rate exceeding 80% (the threshold the state uses to identify the highest-need schools eligible for CCSPP implementation grants in non-rural settings). Restricting the comparison group to high-need schools within the same district controls for the many district-level factors (e.g., funding decisions, leadership, labor agreements, and local policy context) that could otherwise confound comparisons across districts. This within-district comparison provides a direct test of whether LAUSD's community schools have outperformed similarly situated schools in the same system.

Figure 5. LAUSD Community schools Outpace Comparison Schools on Math and ELA



Notes: Math and ELA scale scores are standardized by subject, grade, and academic year using the full population of California schools, producing z-scores that reflect each school's position in the statewide distribution in a given year. Scores are indexed to 2016–17 so that values reflect the change in standardized scores relative to the baseline year. Positive values indicate improvement relative to the statewide distribution; negative values indicate that scores have declined relative to other California schools. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals. The dashed vertical line indicates the start of CCSPP implementation in 2021–22. Line at 2018–19 marks final year before CSI funding. The comparison group consists of non-community schools in LAUSD with an Unduplicated Pupil Count (UPC) rate exceeding 80%. Pandemic years (2019–20 and 2020–21) are excluded.

Figure 5 plots standardized test scores in math and ELA for LAUSD community schools and the high-poverty comparison group from 2016–17 through 2023–24. Scores are standardized by subject, grade, and year, so each school's position on the y-axis reflects where it falls relative to other California schools in that year. Positive values indicate that the group of schools is improving their standing within the statewide distribution. 2018–19 represents the last year before the start of the local community schools initiative, and 2020 years are omitted due to covid-19 disruptions in standardized testing. The sharp upticks post-pandemic indicate that both groups are outpacing the rest of the state in academic recovery, though significantly more so in the community schools.

Prior to the CCSPP, LAUSD community schools and the comparison group followed broadly similar trends through 2018–19. A modest divergence begins to appear after 2018–19, coinciding with the launch of LAUSD's local community schools initiative, suggesting that the district's own investment began to produce modest results even before state funding arrived. Beginning in 2022–23, the first year of CCSPP implementation for Cohort 1 schools, LAUSD community schools diverged more substantially from the comparison group in both subjects, with their standardized scores rising faster and reaching significantly higher levels than comparison schools over the same period. This divergence is sustained through 2023–24, the most recent year of analysis.

The formal difference-in-differences analysis, reported in Table 3, estimates the average treatment effect of CCSPP participation on standardized test scores during the post-implementation period (2022–23 and 2023–24). Controlling for school and year fixed effects, and time-variant school characteristics, LAUSD community schools outperformed the high-poverty comparison group by approximately 0.14 and 0.12 standard deviations in math and ELA respectively. This effect is statistically significant and educationally meaningful. Taken together, the trend data and regression estimates indicate that LAUSD's community schools made substantial achievement gains relative to similar high-need schools following the onset of CCSPP support, and that gains built on a foundation of local investment that predates the state program and have continued to strengthen as implementation has deepened.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the CCSPP grants helped schools improve academically at a faster pace than what would have happened on their own, without CCSPP funding. Notably, while all high-need schools in LAUSD have made progress recovering from pandemic era achievement lows, by the 2023–24 school year, CCSPP community schools math and ELA achievement levels exceeded their pre-pandemic achievement levels—an outcome not observed in comparable non-CCSPP schools.

West Kern Consortium

The West Kern Consortium is a collaboration among six rural districts instituting the community schools strategy in California's Central Valley. Four districts—Elk Hills Elementary School District (Elk Hills), Lost Hills Union Elementary School District (Lost Hills Union), Maple Elementary School District (Maple), and Semitropic Elementary School District (Semitropic)—serve grades K–8 and enroll between

roughly 140 and 300 students each. With the exception of Lost Hills Union, which operates separate elementary and middle schools, these districts consist of a single K–8 campus. The consortium also includes two high school districts, Taft Union and Wasco Union, each operating one comprehensive high school and one alternative learning program and enrolling between approximately 1,100 and 1,800 students.

Together, the consortium serves more than 3,800 students across rural West Kern County. The student population is predominantly Latino/a (more than 80%), with White students comprising the second-largest group (16.6%). Across districts, 76% of students are identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, approximately 10% receive special education services, and more than one in five students are classified as English learners.

History and Initiative Priorities

The West Kern Consortium was formally launched in 2018, when three founding districts—Lost Hills Union, Maple, and Semitropic—collaborated to create a cross-district community schools initiative supported by a five-year, $2.5 million federal FSCS grant. The following year, the initiative broadened to include Elk Hills, enabled by the consortium's successful acquisition of a nearly $650,000 federal School Climate Transformation Grant. In 2022, the consortium expanded again to incorporate Taft Union and Wasco Union, the high school districts that serve as feeders for the participating elementary systems. This expansion was made possible through a $9.5 million CCSPP implementation grant awarded during the 2021–22 funding cycle.

As a partnership of six autonomous rural districts, the West Kern Consortium needed to establish a formal administrative apparatus to manage its community schools initiative. Following receipt of the 2018 federal grant, the consortium designated Lost Hills Union, a founding district, as the local education agency responsible for grant administration because it had an assistant superintendent, whereas the other founding districts were each staffed by a single district administrator at the time the federal grant was awarded. The consortium then identified two individuals—the Lost Hills Union Assistant Superintendent and an external consultant with whom the consortium had a long-standing relationship—as the initiative's co-managers who were tapped to manage and support grant activities and related community school implementation efforts.

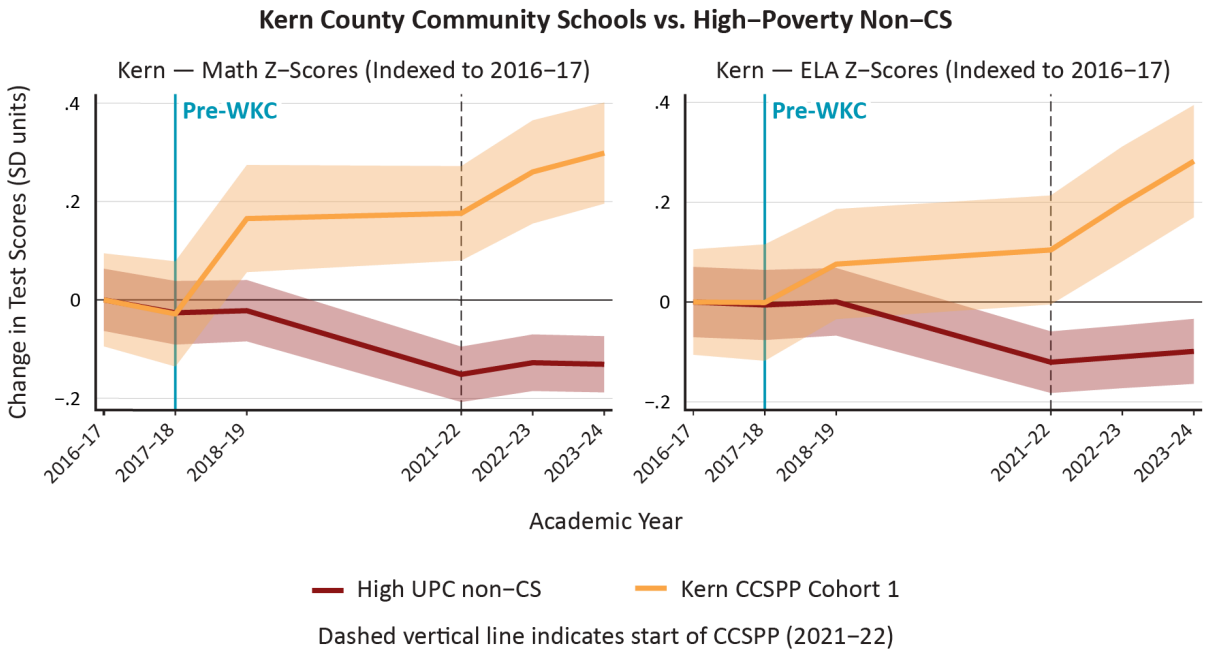
With this administrative structure in place, the consortium has worked to collectively advance five priorities: (a) early childhood education, (b) expanded learning, (c) math and literacy education, (d) family and community engagement, and (e) social and mental health services. To advance these aims, the West Kern Consortium has invested in placing full-time community school coordinators and social workers in each district—individuals who have facilitated improvements in family and community engagement and service provision. The consortium has also invested in instructional coaches and introduced a data-driven improvement strategy to support increases in math and literacy achievement. (These strategies are discussed in detail later in the report as important drivers of change.)

Improved Achievement in the WKC and Broader Kern Community Schools

To maximize statistical precision, the quantitative analysis presented here draws on the full population of 48 Kern County CCSPP Cohort 1 community schools, of which the 8 West Kern Consortium schools are a subset, rather than restricting the sample to the consortium schools alone. This broader sample provides a more reliable basis for estimating county-wide effects, though it is worth noting that the exceptional gains documented in West Kern Consortium schools may contribute disproportionately to the county-wide estimates reported here.

This analysis compares Kern County community schools against non-community schools within Kern County with an UPC rate exceeding 70% — the threshold the state uses to identify the highest-need schools eligible for CCSPP implementation grants in rural settings. Restricting the comparison group to high-need schools within the same county controls for the regional economic conditions, labor market, and local policy context shared across Kern County districts. The within-county comparison thus isolates school-level differences in outcomes rather than broader regional variation. The comparison group includes schools across a diversity of districts in the county, as does the treatment group, which includes schools participating in the West Kern Consortium, the multi-district community schools network described previously that has been among the more prominent community school initiatives in the region.

Figure 6. Kern Community Schools Outpace Comparison Schools on Math and ELA



Notes: Math and ELA scale scores are standardized by subject, grade, and academic year using the full population of California schools, producing z-scores that reflect each school's position in the statewide distribution in a given year. Scores are indexed to 2016–17 so that values reflect the change in standardized scores relative to the baseline year. Positive values indicate improvement relative to the statewide distribution; negative values indicate that scores have declined relative to other California schools. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals. The dashed vertical line indicates the start of CCSPP implementation in 2021–22. Line at 2017–18 marks final year before WKC. The comparison group consists of non-community schools in Kern County with an Unduplicated Pupil Count (UPC) rate exceeding 70%. Pandemic years (2019–20 and 2020–21) are excluded.

Figure 6 plots standardized math and ELA scores for Kern County community schools and the high-poverty within-county comparison group from 2016–17 through 2023–24. As with the LAUSD analysis, scores are standardized by subject, grade, and year, so upward movement reflects improvement relative to the statewide distribution—gains that outpace broader state trends rather than simply tracking them.

The trend data in Figure 6 show a clear and sustained pattern of divergence between community schools and comparison schools in Kern County with additional uptick after CCSPP support. Through 2017–18, both groups tracked closely. Beginning in 2018–19, coinciding with the launch of the West Kern Consortium in the county, community schools begin to pull ahead of comparison schools in

both math and ELA. This early divergence is notable: it suggests the local program initiated by the West Kern Consortium was generating measurable academic benefits from its initial years of implementation. Following the onset of CCSPP funding in 2022–23, the gap widens further and substantially, with Kern community schools continuing to improve their standing relative to the statewide distribution while comparison schools' scores remain comparatively flat.

The difference-in-differences estimates focused on CCSPP period reported in Table 3 confirm the pattern visible in Figure 6. Controlling for school and year fixed effects as well as time-variant school characteristics, Kern County community schools outperformed the within-county high-poverty comparison group by more than 0.20 standard deviations in both math and ELA during the post-CCSPP period. The magnitude of these estimates likely reflects both the depth of local investment that preceded the CCSPP and the concentration of resources through the West Kern Consortium model, which enabled coordinated implementation across multiple small districts that individually might have lacked the capacity to sustain a community schools initiative at scale.

Together, the trend data and regression estimates describe a program that began making progress before the state's support arrived and that has continued to strengthen with that support, suggesting that community schools impacts deepen as implementation matures and that state support and infrastructure can meaningfully amplify locally driven efforts.

Table 3. Difference-in-Differences Results: CCSPP Effect on Z-Scores

Variables	(1) Kern Math	(2) Kern ELA	(3) LAUSD Math	(4) LAUSD ELA
CCSPP	0.215** (0.049)	0.211*** (0.045)	0.135* (0.057)	0.118* (0.057)
***N* (grade-school-year)**	3,676	3,676	13,143	13,143
R-squared	0.7152	0.7545	0.670	0.701

Notes: Grade fixed effects, school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Math and English language arts scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year. Post-treatment years include 2022–23 and 2023–24, and pre-treatment years include 2016–17 through 2018–19 and 2021–22, with pandemic years omitted. * p <0.05, ** p <0.01 *** p <0.001.
Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Reductions in Absenteeism in Both LAUSD and Kern County Community Schools

In addition to the academic achievement gains documented above, community schools in both LAUSD and Kern County demonstrated significant reductions in chronic absence relative to high-need comparison schools within the same geographic area. Table 4 reports difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of CCSPP participation on log-transformed chronic absence rates, controlling for school and year fixed effects with standard errors clustered at the school level.

LAUSD community schools reduced chronic absence rates by approximately 8% more than high-UPC comparison schools within the district, with a coefficient of -0.084 that is statistically significant. Kern County community schools achieved even larger reductions, with a coefficient of -0.182, indicating that CCSPP schools reduced chronic absence by approximately 18% more than high-UPC comparison schools within the county. Both estimates are net of the recovery in attendance that comparison schools also experienced during this period, meaning they reflect the additional reduction in chronic absence attributable to community school participation above and beyond broader post-pandemic attendance trends.

The consistency of findings across both achievement and attendance outcomes reinforces the broader picture: in both a large urban district and a rural multi-district collaborative, CCSPP-supported community schools have made measurable progress on multiple dimensions of student outcomes relative to similarly situated schools that did not participate in the program.

Table 4. Difference-in-Differences Results: CCSPP Effect on Chronic Absence

Variables	(1) LAUSD	(2) Kern County
CCSPP	-0.084* (0.039)	-0.182** (0.060)
R-squared	0.532	0.564
Number of id2	828	217

Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Outcome variables are log-transformed. For ease of interpretation, coefficients represent approximate differences in percentage changes between the groups. All models include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. * p <0.05,** p <.01

Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2018–19 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

How Local Educational Agencies Are Supporting Student Outcomes

The evidence demonstrating that California community schools are enabling positive outcomes begets questions as to *how* these schools and the systems that support them are bringing about marked improvements. Self-reported statewide data from CCSPP grantees illuminate implementation trends that may be contributing to improved metrics.

Three years of data from the CCSPP Annual Progress Report[40]— a reporting tool completed by grantees to document implementation and support continuous improvement at the school and LEA levels—suggest that Cohort 1 grantees have used funding to strengthen the implementation of whole child supports. [41] For example, Cohort 1 grantees most often indicated that their sites expanded partnerships and provided professional development, particularly in areas related to school climate, student mental health, and leadership development.[42] They also reported an increase in the average number of whole child supports available to students and families, such as mental health services, particularly in their second year of implementation. This included a 10-percentage-point increase in capacity for health screenings and services and a 7-percentage-point increase in capacity to provide nutrition supports. Furthermore, over three years of implementation, Cohort 1 grantees reported consistent increases in the engagement of school actors, including students, families, school staff, and community partners.[43]

[40] The Annual Progress Report has several main sections, including a self-assessment of capacity-building strategies aligned to the CCSPP framework (e.g., strategic community partnerships, sustaining staff and resources), a self-report of educational partner engagement, documentation of whole child and family supports and services, and grant goals/actions.
[41] Yang, D., Sabat Bass, N., Vergara Fernandez, A., Saunders, M., Dong, J., Garcia, L.W., Fensterstock, N., and Durazi, A. (2025). *Year 2 growth and progress report*. UCLA Center for Community Schooling. https://ucla.app.box.com/s/qdtq3shizsucotfd9renm8ih9xufl7dm
[42] Sabat Bass, N., & Saunders, M. (2024). *Annual Progress Report findings: 2022–2023*. UCLA Center for Community Schooling. https://communityschooling.gseis.ucla.edu/annual-progress-report-findings-2022-2023/
[43] State Transformational Assistance Center. (2026). *California Community Schools Partnership Program Annual Progress Report: Highlights portal.* UCLA Center for Community Schooling: https://uclacommschool.github.io/stac-apr-site/

While the Annual Progress Report data suggest that Cohort 1 community schools are embracing a range of whole child practices that can contribute to achievement and well-being, the self-reported nature of these results leaves many questions unanswered: What specific practices and structures are instituted to enable whole child learning? How has implementation of these practices been supported to ensure quality and positive impact in school communities? In the following sections, we shed light on these questions by highlighting approaches that were systematically implemented in the LAUSD and West Kern Consortium initiatives. As demonstrated above, each LEA has made notable gains in ELA and math achievement as well as dramatic decreases in chronic absence with the community school investments it has received. These improvements are greater than progress seen in demographically and geographically similar schools, even as outcomes are improving for both groups. The sections below draw upon qualitative data (e.g., interviews with LEA leaders and practitioners, observations of community school-related activities) to illustrate how the LEAs leveraged resources to spur these improvements.

Data suggest that officials in LAUSD and West Kern prioritized high-quality instruction in their initiatives and allocated community school resources to robust professional development to spur instructional improvement and academic achievement. LEA leaders also used resources to support their sites in stemming chronic absence. Specifically, LAUSD and West Kern Consortium leaders helped community schools institute a range of complementary strategies, including efforts to enhance school climate, family engagement, and data processes, that could increase attendance through proactive measures and targeted interventions.

Enabling Academic Achievement in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium

Leaders in both LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium were successful in enabling increased academic achievement though the implementation of the community school strategy. At a foundational level, LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium made academic learning and instructional quality central pillars of their initiatives. Fidelina Saso, who co-managed the West Kern Consortium and served as the assistant superintendent of one of its districts, reflected on the decision to anchor the consortium's community schools vision in academic learning:

> We wanted the academic piece to be a big part of community schools. … We said, if we're going to do this work—because we knew it was going to be a lot of work—we want to make sure that we're seeing results in academics and student learning.

With this commitment, consortium leaders identified "mathematics education" as one of five initiative priorities after receiving the federal Full-Service Community Schools grant in 2018. This priority later expanded to include "literacy education" as the West Kern Consortium expanded its member districts with the infusion of additional federal and CCSPP grant funds.

CSI leaders in LAUSD similarly described how the initiative placed classroom learning at the heart of its community school strategy. Cora Watkins, the initiative's recently retired director, explained:

> Everything you bring in has to be in service of improving academic outcomes for students. Community schools are about parent engagement, [integrated] services, and shared decision-making, but first and foremost they are about strong tier one instruction [instructional approaches for all students].

To ingrain this commitment, LAUSD houses the CSI Department in its Division of Instruction—a decision that supports collaboration with other instructional teams (such as Linked Learning and Career and Technical Education) and the integration of community school strategies with other LAUSD instructional goals. Furthermore, the LAUSD school board passed the 2024 resolution, *Supporting Meaningful Teaching and Learning in LAUSD's Community Schools Initiative*, which authorizes the selection of up to ten community schools to receive supports to enable high-quality instructional practices like those that are community-connected and project-based. With their commitments to enabling academic achievement and high-quality instruction, both LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium leaders used their community school resources to invest in structures that drove ongoing improvements in teaching and learning.

Growing High-Quality Instruction in LAUSD Community Schools

In LAUSD, efforts to improve student achievement began by establishing a shared vision for high-quality instruction in community schools. Specifically, LAUSD identified community-connected, project-based learning (PBL) as the cornerstone practice of the initiative's instructional vision. This vision, which was developed collaboratively by district officials, school staff, and external partners,

centered PBL as a signature practice because of its ability to enable deeper learning. The CSI Director explained:

> The instructional aspect that we're training on is the project-based learning interdisciplinary instruction. And the reasoning for this is our commitment to have meaningful rigorous curriculum for students, and meaningful in the sense that they actually care about it. Our hypothesis is that project-based learning where there's more student voice and more student choice is what's going to make it meaningful.

With this shared vision, LAUSD officials allocated community school resources to support educators in their capacity to enact PBL.

LAUSD's primary investments in PBL included professional development opportunities on the deeper learning approach. Specifically, LAUSD officials partnered with two external professional development providers—Defined Learning and the Center for Powerful Public Schools—to facilitate trainings on the topic. During 2023–24 and 2024–25, Defined Learning delivered a three-part professional learning series totaling 11 hours, offered twice to increase participation and designed primarily for educators, with additional participation from community school coordinators, administrators, and other school staff. The Center for Powerful Public Schools concurrently provided a more intensive training sequence spanning 10 sessions (totaling 40 hours), which allowed participating community schools to deepen their focus on community-connected PBL. Roughly 200 practitioners from more than 20 LAUSD community schools gained critical knowledge on PBL via their participation in a range of partner-facilitated professional development opportunities, including in-person and virtual workshops, professional learning communities, individualized coaching, and access to digital tools that helped educators design interdisciplinary, community-connected projects.

As CSI officials made systems-wide professional development available to community school educators, they used resources to institute structures at the school level to support PBL implementation. Specifically, the CSI provided an annual stipend to a designated PBL champion at each community school—a teacher with PBL expertise who supports PBL implementation. An instructional coach with the CSI department described how PBL champions played an important communications role with the district: "We're creating a champion, like a point-of-contact person at every school, so that hopefully going into next year I have an actual person at each school site that I can ask, 'Hey, how

are things going with professional learning for your teachers?'" The instructional coach further suggested that the Champions' feedback informed the CSI's continuous improvement efforts to support PBL implementation at school sites.

While providing LAUSD officials with key feedback on PBL uptake, PBL champions also maintain general responsibilities related to PBL adoption in community schools. These include facilitating whole-school professional development, individualized coaching, and advocating for PBL planning time, among others. However, the specific responsibilities held by PBL champions vary depending on a school's knowledge and familiarity with the approach. For instance, at one elementary school in its early stages of PBL integration, a 5th grader teacher who served as the school's PBL Champion worked closely with her 5th grade colleagues to support initial implementation—the grade selected for initial onboarding on the school's path to schoolwide PBL adoption. In addition to working alongside her colleagues during external and site-based professional development, the Champion introduced the broader school faculty to Defined Learning's instructional materials and shared interdisciplinary units and lesson plans designed by the 5th grade team to introduce PBL in their teaching approach. Conversely, the PBL Champion at a high school that had long implemented PBL focused her efforts on ensuring the sustainability of the approach. To this end, interviewees explained that she supported new teacher and administrator induction; helped educators secure grant funding for PBL-related field trips; and successfully advocated to codify additional teacher collaboration time dedicated to project design, rubric development or refinement, and/or other differentiated supports.

In addition to the PBL Champion role, CSI officials allocated resources to enable teacher collaboration more broadly in LAUSD community schools. Specifically, the district allowed sites to use discretionary funds to compensate educators for collaborative planning to support PBL implementation. A teacher at the aforementioned elementary school newer to PBL implementation explained the importance of having resources for increased collaboration:

> As part of community schools, you can get collaborative hours. You can use that to meet as a team and work. It could be data. It could be lesson planning or whatever you need. That's something that we have as a resource that we didn't have before we became a community school.

Taken together, LAUSD's investments in PBL Champions and increased teacher collaboration allowed community school educators to have access to day-to-day supports that could help them implement and improve PBL in their classrooms. These supports worked in congress with districtwide development offerings to create a multifaceted system of professional learning that reinforced the CSI's vision to make community-connected PBL a defining feature of instruction in community schools.

Driving Instructional Improvement in the West Kern Consortium

Consortium leaders in West Kern County also leveraged community school funds to enable instructional improvement and did so in ways that responded to the conditions of living and working in rural communities. For instance, consortium leaders invested in math coaching as a central mechanism for advancing academic improvement through their community schools model. Initially, they invested resources to secure access to Harvard University's Mathematical Quality of Instruction (MQI) coaching—a program that engages math educators in virtual, video-based coaching cycles. This approach increased both access to and the frequency of math coaching to educators across consortium districts, which had previously been unavailable or cost-prohibitive and challenging to sustain in remote or outlying communities. Leaders later expanded the consortium's coaching portfolio to include a shared math coach who conducted on-site professional development as well as additional math coaches from the Kern County Superintendent of Schools who provided in-person coaching—actions taken in response to educator feedback and increasing calls for on-site coaching support. Now, educators in consortium districts have the option of virtual and/or on-site coaching to meet their professional and personal preferences.

West Kern Consortium educators reflected on the impact that these coaching opportunities had on instruction and academic achievement. For instance, an elementary school math teacher at Lost Hills Union who opted for virtual math coaching explained: "It [MQI] is honestly the only time I've probably been able to actually stop and reflect, besides looking at data. … I feel like that's contributed a lot to our math growth." Her middle school colleague at Lost Hills Union shared similar sentiments as he reflected on the benefits of ongoing coaching and its direct support in helping him to pose stronger questions for deeper student learning. He explained:

> I'm able to see where I could have asked follow-up questions. That's one of the things that my coaches have been helping me with… It makes me reflect on what I'm doing, so I think it's helped me grow a lot.

Overall, West Kern Consortium leaders used community school resources to ensure educator access to job-embedded, sustained math coaching as a means of advancing instructional improvement. Importantly, consortium leaders remained responsive to teacher and district input and ultimately implemented a range of coaching approaches that enabled educators to participate in capacity-building experiences aligned with their needs.

In addition to investing in external math coaches, West Kern Consortium leaders facilitated a data-driven, localized improvement process to drive professional development and instructional improvements in math and literacy. Michael Figueroa, the consortium's lead consultant and co-manager, introduced leaders and practitioners to the Data Wise Improvement Process (Data Wise)—a multistep framework that supports educator teams in collaboratively using data to strengthen teaching and learning.[44] Data Wise begins with the identification of a problem of practice—a challenge identified in a given content area through collaborative analysis of data and student artifacts. Once a problem of practice is identified, educators and school leaders nominate evidence-based instructional strategies to address the learning challenge and collaboratively determine which nominated approach will be used to drive instructional improvement for the coming school year. Practitioners then engage in ongoing professional development to enable strong implementation of the strategies and continuous improvement. Professional development on the strategies in West Kern Consortium districts occurred during all-staff meetings throughout the year and during dedicated teacher collaboration times (e.g., PLCs), which allowed educators to analyze data and reflect on instruction in targeted ways.

Classroom observation is also a core component of the Data Wise process, and West Kern Consortium leaders instituted multiple structures to provide educators with meaningful feedback on their instruction. For instance, consortium districts implemented optional "check-ins," during which teachers received feedback from consortium leaders and rotating peers addressing the school's focal instructional strategies. Leaders also conducted more formal learning walks four to eight times a year. Learning walks brought together consortium leaders, principals, and select educators to observe

[44] *Data Wise Project*. (2025). Harvard Graduate School of Education. https://datawise.gse.harvard.edu (accessed 06/22/2025).

literacy and math instruction across classrooms and provided leaders with an opportunity to assess instructional progress and to identify areas for professional development.

Although Data Wise is driven by sustained collaboration among educators and leaders within a consortium district, Figueroa played a pivotal role in facilitating this instructional improvement work. Veronica Gregory, a principal of one elementary consortium district, explained how Figueroa worked with practitioners at her site:

> He [Figueroa] is one of the people that leads the charge on it. He helps us with our agenda and helps us get organized. He brings us back to like, "Are we meeting our problem of practice? Are we working on that?"—so, really looking at our mission and our vision, collaborating with other schools.

As Principal Gregory explained, Figueroa facilitated ongoing reflective and collaborative discussions tied to the Data Wise process and supported consortium districts in remaining focused on their instructional goals and strategies. In addition, interviewees noted that Figueroa consistently participates in check-ins and learning walk observations at consortium schools, offering direct feedback on instructional quality.

In allocating time and resources to implementing the Data Wise approach, the West Kern Consortium enabled its educators to engage in a coherent set of activities focused on improving math and literacy instruction—central priorities within its community schools initiative. With this, the process represents an important structure for enabling continuous instructional improvement and contributing to community school sustainability as the consortium builds locally driven capacity in its rural setting. The Data Wise approach, coupled with the consortium's investments in instructional coaching, represent critical supports that the consortium invested in to foster academic growth in its community schools.

Summary

Community schools in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium have supported impressive gains in academic achievement among their student populations. A sustained focus on high-quality instruction and the use of community school resources to establish a system of professional learning opportunities in line with their instructional visions enabled instructional improvement among community school educators and likely contributed to these gains. While systems-level instructional supports varied in the two sites, each LEA supported its educators in improving their knowledge and implementation of

evidence-based instructional strategies. In addition, each LEA instituted ongoing and coherent professional supports that allowed educators to improve their pedagogical practices over time rather than engage educators in single-dose professional development experiences—a strategy that supports sustained instructional improvement.

Stemming Chronic Absence in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium

In addition to improving academic outcomes, community schools in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium have made impressive reductions in chronic absence—a challenge widely faced across U.S. schools since the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to affect student learning and well-being today. Findings suggest that CCSPP-supported community schools implemented whole-school approaches that effectively addressed attendance challenges. Specifically, LAUSD and West Kern Consortium officials supported educators and school leaders in cultivating a positive school climate and in building meaningful relationships with students and families to promote consistent attendance. They also helped community schools establish effective data systems, tiered supports, and community partnerships to identify and deliver targeted interventions. Notably, community school coordinators were central in these attendance efforts, as they worked with principals and school staff to collaboratively support increased attendance. Together, these approaches built a cohesive system that combined proactive measures and targeted interventions to mitigate chronic absence.

Fostering School Connectedness Among Students

Community schools in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium consistently prioritize the development of supportive and trustful school climates, and LEA officials and practitioners often pointed to this central commitment as a foundational feature of their approach to improving school attendance. A reflection shared by one principal of an LAUSD community school captured the importance and impact of a positive school climate as she discussed her school's efforts to combat chronic absence: "I feel like kids come to school when they feel like they belong here, and they're connected to other individuals…[I can] see their excited faces, I hear their voices, I go into the classroom and they're learning." To foster a sense of belonging and connectedness across their systems

of community schools, LEA officials in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium instituted structures to better enable community school practitioners to cultivate inclusive and safe learning environments.

With its vast system of community schools, LAUSD's CSI leaders sought to support its practitioners by offering professional learning opportunities focused on the development of welcoming and inclusive classrooms. These included three professional learning series—Joyful Disruption, Start With Hello, and The Art of De-Escalation—that reached more than 500 educators and staff across nearly all community schools in the district. Developed by Claremont Graduate University faculty, Joyful Disruption engaged educators in a multisession exploration of inequitable educational structures, addressing topics such as educator identity, classroom design, and culturally responsive curriculum. Start With Hello, offered through the Sandy Hook Promise Partnership, provided school teams with strategies to enable student-to-students connections and reduce social isolation. The Art of De-Escalation, facilitated by LAUSD's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports/Restorative Practices team, prepared classified and out-of-classroom staff to prevent and manage conflict while sustaining positive climates.

Following CSI trainings, community school staff reported concrete changes in practice. Learning environments were redesigned to promote student well-being—such as adding Calm Corners and "Zen Dens"—and teachers incorporated routines and activities, including social-emotional check-ins, community circles, small-group work, gender-affirming language, and projects grounded in students' lived experiences, that furthered a sense of belonging and connection. School staff also indicated that their schools had shifted away from punitive discipline in favor of using restorative practices that centered connection and de-escalation to build more inclusive and relationship-centered environments. Together, these shifts suggest that district efforts to support LAUSD community schools in developing positive school climates are having an impact, as community schools integrate approaches that research links to reduced stress, resilience, and student engagement[45] as well as reductions in chronic absence. [46]

[45] Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children. (2021). *Design principles for schools: Putting the science of learning and development into action.*

[46] Germain, E., Hernández, L. E., Klevan, S., Levine, R. S., & Maier, A. (2024). *Reducing chronic absenteeism: Lessons from community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/510.597; Van Eck, K., Johnson, S. R., Bettencourt, A., & Johnson, S. L. (2017). How school climate relates to chronic absence: A multi–level latent profile analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, *61*, 89–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.10.001

Efforts to cultivate positive school climates in the West Kern Consortium's community schools took a different form given the small size of its districts and the noted sense of connection that interviewees said characterized their rural settings. For instance, LEA and community school leaders often described their districts and schools as a "tight-knit community" or a "family," where students were well connected with and known by school staff. A principal of an elementary consortium described explained, "We're really small, so all of us have some sort of relationship with our students. There's someone on staff that knows each student, so it's very individual." A teacher in another consortium district explained how these connections were reinforced by the close-knit relationships in the broader community: "The community is very small...just seeing that closeness…There's a lot of family values here, and there are a lot of families who aren't blood related but are family otherwise."

While their school and community size contributed to the sense of family and connection in consortium districts, LEA officials nonetheless instituted strategies to strengthen relationships in their schools. For example, multiple consortium districts codified small-group instructional time into their master schedules to both enable closer connections between students and staff and provide targeted academic support and enrichment. Several LEA officials also established mentorship programs, where each classified and non-classified staff member meets monthly with a group of mixed-grade mentees to engage in activities that support social and emotional learning and build bonds in a low-stakes environment. A teacher reflected on the power of these mentorship groups in her district:

> Our mentorship groups have helped a lot, because kids have gotten to be able to connect on a deeper level than with just a school teacher on campus and that gives them a safe space. ...It has shifted the attitude of a lot of our kids.

Through these structures, consortium districts aim to cultivate healthy school attachments among students, which can not only promote student learning and engagement but also increase a young person's enthusiasm to attend school.

Overall, leaders in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium instituted structures that supported community school practitioners in building a sense of belonging, safety, and care on their campuses. While cultivating a positive school climate was central to the overall community schools approach in each setting, these efforts were seen as critical to improving attendance and reinvigorating students' desire to be in school.

Improving Family Engagement

An increased emphasis on family engagement was also a central strategy for addressing chronic absence in both LAUSD and West Kern Consortium community schools. Interviewees in both regions explained that student absences triggered a continuum of responses, from immediate outreach—such as phone calls or text messages to families who had not reported an absence—to more intensive supports for students approaching or exceeding the chronic absence threshold. Among the more intensive interventions were individualized meetings and home visits with families of chronically absent students, typically organized or led by a community school coordinator or other community school staff. A social worker in a West Kern Consortium elementary district described these efforts: "We brought in parents, met with them, and showed them 'Hey, your kid is missing 20 days of school this whole year. What can we do? We have this person, and this person, and this person [at the school] that can support you.'" As her comments suggest, these extended conversations regularly paired discussions of attendance concerns with concrete offers to connect families to school-based resources and personnel.

In addition to these activities, LEA leaders and community school staff also described proactive communication efforts designed to reinforce the value of regular attendance. In consortium districts, community school coordinators used social media, flyers, emails, and door hangers to promote healthy home routines—such as consistent sleep schedules and time management—that support student wellness and attendance. A principal at one LAUSD community school noted her school's use of similar strategies and how they helped cultivate parent and guardian investment in daily attendance. She emphasized that these campaigns were especially important in the wake of the pandemic, when many families had developed different understandings of what constituted satisfactory attendance during remote learning, making renewed "re-education" about expectations essential.

As staff in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium community schools discussed these attendance-focused strategies, they emphasized that building and maintaining trust with families was a critical component of their efforts to reduce chronic absence. To do this, practitioners in community schools described day-to-day strategies to strengthen relationships, such as welcoming parents and guardians at the gate during arrival and dismissal and hosting community events that create space for families and staff to connect. An LAUSD community school principal explained how these everyday

exchanges reinforced consistent attendance: “Trust is built through small actions over time. I think when they identify the school as a safe, trusting place to send their kids, they're more willing to come.” A community school coordinator in West Kern Consortium also reflected on the impact of these trust-building activities, noting the significant improvement in her communication with parents. She explained: “The relationships I've built with parents who were really unavailable—who didn't call in the absences, didn't come to campus, didn't come to events—now they're here, and they're calling in. They're emailing or texting me.”

By centering relationships in their approach to reducing chronic absence, community schools in the two sites have emphasized supportive strategies to increase attendance rather than rely on punitive measures that seek to compel attendance under the threat of penalty and legal consequences. An LAUSD principal noted, “We have families for whom there was always a negative connotation: ‘Oh no, you're tardy or absent’… Now…they just go to the gate. The community rep can help them with anything they need and answer questions. They're welcomed to school.” Together, these examples suggest that prioritizing family engagement and relationship-building can reduce fears of stigma or punishment that may otherwise discourage families from reconnecting with schools after extended or inconsistent attendance.

Using Data Systems and Tiered Interventions

Community school leaders in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium have established consistent systems for collecting, monitoring, analyzing, and responding to attendance data in response to the sharp increase in chronic absence. The daily routine of the community school coordinator in one consortium elementary district demonstrates this work in action. Each morning, after greeting students and families during arrival, the coordinator reviews attendance records, noting which students are absent, which families have not reported absences, and which classes achieved perfect attendance and are progressing toward incentives such as a pizza party. In addition to these daily attendance activities, the coordinator meets monthly with the principal and the school’s multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) team and in preparation, uses Everyday Labs—an online platform secured by LEA officials to support data tracking—to analyze chronic absence rates, individual student risk levels, and attendance patterns. The coordinator described how the platform enables data analysis:

> It will show an overall view that's updated every other day with your chronic absenteeism rate. You can go to each child. It'll show you how many absences they have, where they stand, are they at risk, are they moderately chronic, severely, no attendance issues. You can create groups on there, and it'll show you attendance patterns. So, if a student is missing Wednesdays all the time because that's our short day or if they tend to be a vacation extender, it'll group those students together.

Similar routines exist at community schools in LAUSD. At one LAUSD community school, the pupil services and attendance counselor collaborates with the leadership team to review monthly attendance data by grade level and subgroup, organizing students into attendance "bands" (chronic, basic, excellent) based on accumulated absences. In both instances, data systems and collaborative data analysis help the school teams identify potential barriers underlying attendance patterns and conduct targeted outreach to connect students and families with appropriate supports.

Engaging in collaborative analysis of real-time data enables school teams to efficiently align students and families with available services and to activate tiered systems of support. As with academic and social-emotional interventions, schools employ universal (Tier 1) strategies for all students alongside targeted and intensive (Tiers 2 and 3) supports for those with greater needs. Tier 1 efforts center on fostering belonging and connection like those described above. In addition, community schools also use incentives to reinforce attendance as Tier 1 strategies, such as raffles for students with strong monthly attendance, special events on typically low-attendance days, and public displays highlighting improvement. For students requiring more intensive support, schools implement targeted strategies informed by data. Community school staff in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium conduct parent conferences and home visits to understand attendance barriers and connect families with resources. In more complex Tier 3 cases, students may be referred to additional services, including mental health counseling, financial assistance, or housing and transportation supports. Overall, leaders in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium have enabled community school staff to use data-driven, tiered systems to address chronic absence. These efforts, paired with universal strategies, allows schools to connect students and families to the resources necessary for consistent attendance.

Leveraging Partnerships

Officials in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium also highlighted the importance of partnerships and pointed to their role in addressing chronic absence. Specifically, interviewees noted how external partners supported schools in instituting approaches that enhanced their programming and provided students and families with key resources. For instance, leaders in one LAUSD community school described how staff leveraged partnerships to expand after-school programming—a move intended to enrich the school's whole child educational approach while increasing student enthusiasm to attend school. According to the school principal, students could now participate in after-school sports and enrichment clubs or either of two partner-supported after-school programs—World Fit for Kids and Youth Services Program—which were subsidized by community school funding and offered to families free of charge.

Alternatively, officials in the West Kern Consortium described how partnerships helped to enhance integrated systems of support, particularly as it relates to mental health—an underlying factor that can contribute to chronic absence.[47] Consortium leaders pointed to the stronger and more consistent presence of mental health professionals on district campuses that were enabled by the improved partnership between the consortium and Clarvida, a nonprofit that contracts with Kern County to provide children's mental health support. According to Figueroa, the consortium's co-manager, districts now have mental health providers on their campuses 1-3 days a week and have seen improvements, as "more students [were] getting more services and [fewer] things fell between the cracks." While efforts to refine its systems of support continues, community school leaders in the West Kern Consortium have successfully managed to increase consistent access to mental health services for students. This not only represents a significant feat in rural communities, which can face challenges in securing resources, but also an important step in providing services that can address a common factor underlying attendance challenges.

As external partnerships can help community school officials connect youth and families to site-based services that promote school attendance, findings from the West Kern Consortium indicate that cross-sector collaboration can also help identify effective approaches to reducing chronic absence.

[47] Finning, K., Ukoumunne, O. C., Ford, T., Danielson-Waters, E., Shaw, L., Romero De Jager, I., Stentiford, L., & Moore, D. A. (2019). Review: The association between anxiety and poor attendance at school – a systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, *24*(3), 205–216. https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12322

Since 2018, a rural Children's Cabinet—composed of school leaders, parents, community school coordinators, and representatives from agencies such as the Community Action Partnership of Kern, Clarvida, and Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services—has guided consortium leaders in identifying attendance barriers, advancing promising solutions, and strengthening progress monitoring. Its cross-sector collaboration has produced concrete tools and strategies for consortium-affiliated schools, including home-visit protocols, targeted attendance-awareness messaging, and the development of strong attendance teams. Marked declines in chronic absence across consortium districts suggest these cross-sector strategies are delivering results.

Community Schools Coordinators as Key Actors

As LAUSD and West Kern Consortium community schools instituted varied approaches to combat chronic absence, community school coordinators played a central role in their implementation. Specifically, coordinators lent essential capacity and critical attention to attendance-related efforts, often leading or participating in their school's range of activities to support increased attendance.

This included their significant, leadership role in family engagement and proactive outreach to attendance promotion efforts. They often initiated contact with families when a student was absent, making phone calls home and engaging in more in-depth conversations when students were chronically absent or approaching that threshold. Coordinators also led broader communication strategies, including messaging campaigns about the importance of regular attendance and incentive initiatives such as monthly raffles to encourage strong attendance. Beyond direct outreach, coordinators maintained a strong, visible presence on campus to cultivate relationships with students and families. They often greeted students each morning and sought informal opportunities to connect with families throughout the day. They also supported structures designed to strengthen student connectedness and well-being, including mentorship programs in West Kern Consortium districts.

In addition to these relationship-centered strategies, community school coordinators in elementary schools across both LEAs contributed to data tracking and analysis processes that identified students in need of targeted attendance interventions. These data-informed efforts enabled schools to align their tiered systems of support with specific student and family needs, ensuring that engagement strategies were responsive and timely.

Overall, activities that promote attendance—such as routinely reviewing attendance data, engaging families and students, and connecting families to key resources and services—require significant time, energy, and expertise. Community school coordinators in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium are adept in executing these activities and have provided their schools with dedicated capacity to enact multifaceted approaches to combatting chronic absence.

Summary

Community schools in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium instituted varied and reinforcing strategies to make significant reductions in chronic absence—efforts enabled and supported by LEA officials leading these local initiatives. Strategies included: (a) promoting healthy school attachments and a sense of school connectedness among students; (b) improving family communication and engagement; (c) using data systems and tiered interventions; (d) leveraging partnerships; and (e) maintaining a community school coordinator who was typically at the center to help lead and coordinate these varied efforts. This suite of strategies not only demonstrates how positive relationships and data-driven processes enable successful efforts to combat chronic absence but also points to the importance of enacting proactive measures alongside targeted interventions to enhance school attendance.

Implications and Takeaways

California's historic investment in the growth and scale of community schools is an ambitious element of the state's efforts to build a schooling system with equity and whole child education at its foundation. This report suggests that this large-scale investment is beginning to deliver measurable outcomes, as the infusion of resources is supporting stronger attendance, accelerating academic growth, and reducing exclusionary discipline practices—particularly among students from marginalized groups and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Analyses of impacts on student outcomes in this report demonstrate that in the first full year of implementation, community schools receiving CCSPP funding reduced chronic absence and suspensions at significantly higher rates than comparable high-need schools and posted meaningful gains in math and English language arts achievement. An overall decline in suspensions also

corresponded with the adoption of the community school strategy. These impacts were strongest for students that have historically been underserved by schools (e.g., Black students, English learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged students), who saw disproportionately large improvements in attendance, discipline, and academic growth. These early results suggest that community schools are not only raising averages, but they are also helping narrow opportunity gaps. Moreover, these improvements emerged quickly, suggesting that California's investments and implementation guidance may be enabling early results among newly established community schools.

In highlighting the community school initiatives in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium, this report also shows through its quantitative analyses that improvements in student outcomes are not limited to one type of setting. In both a large urban district and a small, rural collaborative community schools outpaced similarly high-need comparison schools in academic growth and made significant strides in reducing chronic absence. Moreover, as mature initiatives that began prior to CCSPP legislation, positive outcomes in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium provide insights into the impact of sustained community school efforts and the importance of ongoing investment. In these contexts, outcomes strengthened after CCSPP funding was layered onto earlier local and federal investments, suggesting that state support can enhance and accelerate community school impact in previously established initiatives.

Qualitative data from LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium deepen our understandings of how initiative leaders used community school resources to enable outcome gains. While the two LEAs are different in size, geography, and community schooling approaches, they both made high-quality instruction a central focus in their initiatives and invested in professional development opportunities aligned with that vision. In LAUSD, leaders offered partner-facilitated trainings and additional supports to teachers to enable implementation of the initiative's cornerstone instructional practice of project-based, community-connected learning. In the West Kern Consortium, leaders used resources to secure increased access to instructional coaches and to facilitate an ongoing data-driven improvement process. While distinct, the professional supports established in each LEA represented ongoing and coordinated learning structures that enabled educators to refine their instructional practices in ways that can drive student achievement.

To stem sharp increases in chronic absence, officials in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium also similarly embraced a multifaceted approach to addressing this growing challenge. LEA leaders supported their schools in implementing approaches that combined proactive measures, like fostering ongoing attention to relationship-building, student connectedness, and family engagement, with the data-driven identification and implementation of targeted interventions. They also supported community school staff in leveraging partnerships to enhance their attendance strategies and allocated resources for community school coordinators, whose leadership and dedicated capacity made the facilitation of these multipronged strategies possible and successful. Together, efforts in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium supported increases in attendance among their students and highlighted the power of using a range of whole child approaches to promote attendance and healthy school attachments.

Collectively, evidence from this report's mixed-methods study points to a promising conclusion: California's investment in community schools is contributing to strong outcomes and is enabling the systematic implementation of community-engaged school-based approaches that support equitable change and whole child aligned practice. At the same time, further research is needed to more comprehensively understand the CCSPP's impact and the implementation strategies that drive change. This includes examining a broader range of outcomes in impact analyses, as community schools influence varied outcomes (e.g., student grade progression, graduation rates, social-emotional development) that are critical for healthy youth development and thriving. In addition, longitudinal impact studies that trace how community schools progress with additional years of implementation and how differing mechanisms and conditions are associated with these results will provide a more complete picture of the CCSPP's effectiveness.

More qualitative research is also critical for understanding the conditions and factors that enable community schools to support academic gains and student well-being with the support of state funds. To generate stronger conclusions about impactful implementation, researchers should examine other community school initiatives in California to surface similarities and differences in how LEAs leveraged community school resources to systematically advance their identified priorities. These additional studies can also provide insights into how priorities, including an intentional focus on instructional quality and achievement within initiatives, can propel positive change. Considering this

report's findings on how prioritizing instructional improvement was associated with academic gains in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium, additional studies that examine instructional improvement in community school efforts—including initiatives that have identified high-quality, community-connected instruction as a key implementation practice—can corroborate its role in driving stronger outcomes. This research also affords an opportunity to include settings (e.g., continuation high schools, community day schools) that infrequently receive additional investments that can promote instructional quality and increased deeper learning opportunities for youth that have been historically underserved by schooling systems.

Implications for Policy

While more research is needed to more comprehensively assess the impact of California's community school investments, this report's findings carry lessons for policymakers, education advocates, community members, and practitioners pursuing the development and growth of community schools in their settings. These include:

- **Providing ongoing funding given the equity implications associated with this investment.** The promising results for CCSPP Cohort 1 sites—with the greatest impacts for historically underserved student groups—suggest that this investment is helping to close opportunity gaps. To continue this progress, districts need access to ongoing funding to sufficiently staff and carry out this work. Time and dedicated capacity to support implementation (e.g., coordinative staff at the district and school levels) are critical to improving student outcomes, as the LAUSD and West Kern Consortium cases demonstrate. If schools and districts know they can count on continuity of support for investments in the pillars of community school implementation, it empowers leaders and coordinators to plan and build towards ambitious partnerships to address student needs and make greater long-term progress.
- **Continuing technical assistance for CCSPP grantees that promotes effective implementation.** As the evidence base in California and nationally shows, community schools are most impactful when implementation is mature and well-supported. California has made an important investment in statewide and regional technical assistance for CCSPP grantees that is robust and multi-layered in nature, with a statewide hub, regional centers, and direct county-level support from the coordination grants offered to county offices of education. While there are certainly

opportunities to refine and streamline the technical assistance system, it is important to continue providing this support throughout the state, especially for newer grantees. In addition, technical assistance at all levels of the system—including state and regional hubs—would benefit from a focus on key elements of effective implementation identified through the CCSPP Framework and CCSPP case studies, including those featured in this report: 1) Centering high-quality, community-connected instruction, 2) Providing ongoing and coherent professional development for community school staff, 3) Cultivating a positive and relationship-centered school climate, and 4) Instituting data-driven practices alongside a culture of continuous improvement. See the next section, Implications for LEA Leaders, for additional details on these key elements.

- **Maintaining flexibility for local decision-making alongside evidence-based guidance to support effective and coherent implementation.** CCSPP is not a traditional categorical grant program that dictates who and what the funds can be spent on. Rather, the grant emphasizes local flexibility to respond to specific assets and needs. For example, LAUSD used some of the CCSPP resources to support project-based learning and connect with Linked Learning, while the West Kern Consortium used some of the resources to address rural transportation challenges and math instruction. It is important to maintain this local flexibility, especially since CCSPP schools report an increased capacity to engage students, families, and staff in collaborative priority-setting and decision-making. At the same time, evidence-based guidance from the CCSPP framework and state and regional technical assistance providers—including the elements of effective implementation identified above, such as centering high-quality, community-connected instruction—can help to ensure consistent implementation and enable positive student outcomes across the state. The investment in local resources and decision-making can also build site-level capacity to engage in other community-informed activities like developing a school Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) and a district Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Increased coordination and engagement in the highest-need schools in the state can lead to more coherent implementation of complementary funding sources, such as the Local Control Funding Formula equity multiplier, the Expanded

Opportunities Learning Program, and support for literacy coaches/reading specialists in high-poverty schools.

- **Planning for longitudinal evaluation efforts.** The evidence base in California and nationally shows that community schools implementation needs sufficient time to mature. This is reinforced when looking at the timeline of impacts for LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium. In both cases, the growth in outcomes started sooner than other CCSPP Cohort 1 grantees, in alignment with when the initiatives started, and strengthened over time. It will be important to closely track ongoing progress for Cohorts 1-4 for students as a whole and for a wide range of student subgroups (including students with disabilities, foster youth, and students experiencing homelessness), both to see if these trends hold and to understand ongoing implications for closing opportunity gaps in California. Qualitative research, including studies informed by self-reported Annual Progress Report data from grantees, can also help to identify key practices and implementation strategies—including those related to instructional quality and improvement—driving observed impacts.
- **Developing a state inter-agency working group, such as a children's cabinet, to support community school implementation.** Just as the West Kern Consortium did at the county level, the state could benefit from an inter-agency working group, such as a children's cabinet, to support community school implementation and continuous improvement. These working groups, which have been established in many U.S. states, formally gather state agency representatives overseeing programs that serve children and families to better align their work, increase service access, and engage in strategic planning and collective problem-solving. This can be particularly helpful for issue areas such as community schools, early childhood education, and support for students with disabilities, which often include programs and resources overseen by multiple state agencies. For example, in California many community schools have school-based health centers and behavioral health partnerships, which could benefit from ongoing collaboration and aligned support from the California Department of Education and the California Department of Health Care Services (i.e., Medi-Cal and the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative). State inter-agency working groups can also be a venue for addressing key state priorities established by the governor and legislature (e.g.,

reducing chronic absence, increasing access to youth mental health supports) and streamlining state administrative processes to support local implementation (e.g., aligning state application processes, community engagement expectations, reporting timelines/requirements for state funds), which could enhance community schooling approaches across the state.

Implications for LEA Leaders

As this research surfaces implications for policy and for the continued investment in community schools as an equity-driven and evidence-based transformation strategy, it also carries lessons for LEA leaders seeking to grow and sustain high-quality community schools at scale. Findings from the qualitative investigation of efforts in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium point to how LEA leaders may allocate community school investments to build powerful learning environments that support improved student outcomes in diverse geographic and district settings. These lessons include:

- **Centering High-Quality Instruction in Community School Efforts**. Community schools less commonly featured instructional improvement as a central priority, as officials attended to building school and system infrastructure to institute integrated systems of support and expanded learning opportunities. Efforts in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium illustrate how initiatives can effectively prioritize and integrate academic learning as a central pillar of community school transformation. Leaders of both initiatives established goals for academic achievement and instructional quality and used these aims to design and institute professional learning structures that could enable systemwide instructional improvements at community school sites. These findings suggest that establishing a collective vision for high-quality instruction and enabling educators to develop their abilities in enacting that vision are important steps in driving instructional improvement and enabling strong academic outcomes.
- **Instituting Ongoing and Coherent Professional Development Structures for Community School Educators.** Enabling high-quality instruction in community schools requires coherent and ongoing professional learning opportunities that support educators along their development trajectories. Leaders in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium invested resources into the creation of reinforcing professional development structures that aligned with their instructional visions and the capacity-building needs in their communities. Across the sites, these included

ongoing opportunities to grow educator knowledge of effective instructional approaches and inclusive classroom practices as well as increased access to coaching and collaborative planning time. Collectively, these professional development experiences represented ongoing supports that enabled educators to refine their pedagogical practice over time and likely contributed to students' academic progress in both settings.

- **Cultivating a Positive and Relationship-Centered School Climate**. High-quality community schools maintain positive school climates grounded in the development of trusting relationships among students, families, and staff. Leaders in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium supported community school staff in cultivating environments with these characteristics. Through dedicated professional development on welcoming and inclusive classrooms in LAUSD and/or the day-to-day efforts by staff to engage in trust-building exchanges in both sites, local actors built connections with students and families that made community schools places where students and families wanted to be. These strategies improved school attendance in both settings and demonstrated how embracing a restorative rather than punitive approach to tackling chronic absence can bring about results.
- **Fostering a Culture of Data-Driven Continuous Improvement.** Establishing systems that actively engage local actors in continuous improvement cultivates a culture that supports high-quality implementation and long-term sustainability of community schools. Leaders in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium implemented varied localized structures that fostered this orientation. They instituted professional development structures rooted in a commitment to ongoing development, allowing staff to consistently identify and respond to emerging challenges in practice. Leaders also supported community school staff in engaging with real-time data, which enabled them to assess emerging challenges and to identify targeted supports to meet student, family, and educator needs. Data-driven processes, coupled with schools' tiered systems of support, were particularly impactful in mitigating attendance challenges, as community school staff identified the root causes fueling absenteeism and supportive interventions to increase attendance. Overall, structures like these not only accelerate improvement but also strengthen the long-term sustainability of community schools by building locally driven capacity.

- **Leveraging Partnerships to Support Community School Responsiveness**. Maintaining partnerships with community organizations and other agencies enhances the implementation of the community schools strategy. In LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium, leaders supported their schools in engaging partners, helping them to enhance school programming in the case of LAUSD and to engage in strategic problem solving to address pressing issues in the West Kern Consortium. In addition to enhancing school quality through school-community partnerships, these collaborations played an important role in combatting chronic absence, as they supported school improvement efforts and the identification of research-based strategies to address the growing attendance crisis.
- **Maintaining Dedicated Capacity to Shepherd Community School Efforts**. Allocating resources for staff who collaborate with school actors to bring the community schools strategy to life is essential for high-quality implementation. At the site level, this includes community school coordinators, who centrally focus on the execution of the strategy and have lent critical capacity to efforts to address chronic absence, as evidenced by the work in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium. Investments in systems-level personnel—individuals who work in LEAs to support and coordinate efforts across a system of community schools—are also critical. Efforts in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium demonstrate how LEA officials play a pivotal role in developing and sustaining the multifaceted and reinforcing structures that have allowed their schools to support student progress and improved outcomes. Investing in both site-based and systems-level personnel provides an important infrastructure to enabling community school implementation. Attending to the ongoing professional development of individuals in these distinct community schools roles (e.g., community school coordinators) via professional learning communities, interschool exchanges, and individualized coaching are also essential investments to support high-quality community schooling.

Appendix: Methodology

This report investigated the impact and implementation of CA community schools, particularly under the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). Researchers sought to understand how the state's investments in this whole-school reform strategy have affected schooling approaches, student outcomes, and systems-level operations. Specifically, this study answered the following research questions:

- What is the status, to date, of California's investment in community schools?
- What impacts are community school having in California, particularly under the CCSPP grant program?
- How has the CCSPP supported community school implementation and student outcomes?

LPI researchers employed a convergent parallel research design—a mixed methods approach that enables researchers to surface unique insights based on the integration of data from independent and concurrently conducted studies— to investigate these research questions. In a convergent parallel study design, data from separate quantitative and qualitative studies are merged, allowing researchers to compare and combine findings and to explore their complementary and/or corresponding nature.[48]

For this report, LPI researchers integrated data from two parallel and independently conducted studies on the impact and implementation of CA's community schools initiative. Specifically, the research team drew on quantitative research that assessed the impacts of early CCSPP implementation grants and explored differences in and interactions among outcomes by student subgroups, geographies, and school levels. Researchers combined quantitative data with findings from a qualitative, multisite case study of select CA local educational agencies that received CCSPP implementation grants and used those resources to build supportive infrastructures that developed and sustained impactful community schools. More details on the methodologies and data sources used in these independent and complementary studies are described below.

[48] Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications.

Quantitative Research: CCSPP Impact Study

Data Sources and Sample

The quantitative analysis draws on publicly available school-level administrative data from the California Department of Education (CDE), supplemented by CDE records on CCSPP grant program participation. Academic outcome data include school-level mean scale scores and proficiency rates from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) in mathematics and English language arts, as well as rates of chronic absence and suspension. Demographic and school characteristic data include enrollment, Unduplicated Pupil Count (UPC) rates, and the share of students in key subgroups including Black students, Hispanic or Latino/a students, English learners, foster youth, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

The statewide analysis spans the 2018–19 through 2023–24 academic years, excluding 2019–20 and 2020–21 due to pandemic-related disruptions to school operations and the suspension of statewide assessments. The district-level analyses of LAUSD and Kern County extend the panel back to 2016–17 to capture pre-program trends for initiatives that predate the CCSPP, as described below. The primary analytic sample is restricted to schools with a UPC rate exceeding 50%, consistent with the baseline eligibility threshold for CCSPP participation. For the statewide analysis, schools with prior federal Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant experience and schools that self-reported carrying forward established community school practices prior to CCSPP are excluded from both the treatment and comparison groups. This restriction focuses the statewide analysis on schools for which the CCSPP represented the primary mechanism for initiating community school practices, allowing the study to isolate the effect of the state initiative from the effects of longer-standing local programs. Patterns among FSCS-affiliated schools are examined separately.

Outcome Measures

The primary academic outcome is the school-level mean CAASPP scale score in mathematics and English language arts, standardized by subject, grade level, and academic year. Standardization is conducted within the full population of California schools in each subject-grade-year cell, producing z-scores that reflect each school's position in the statewide distribution in a given year. This approach allows for meaningful comparisons across grades and over time. Positive values indicate that a school's

scores are above the statewide average for schools serving students in the same grade and subject in that year, and upward movement indicates improvement relative to the statewide distribution rather than simply tracking statewide trends. Chronic absence is measured as the percentage of enrolled students missing 10% or more of the school year. Suspension rates are measured as the percentage of enrolled students receiving at least one out-of-school suspension during the academic year.

Analytic Approach: Statewide Analysis

The statewide analysis employs a matched difference-in-differences (DiD) design. The treatment group consists of schools receiving CCSPP Cohort 1 implementation grants, with 2022–23 as the first year of post-treatment observation, reflecting the academic year in which grant-funded implementation was first underway. Comparison schools are drawn from the population of high-need California schools that did not receive CCSPP implementation grants during the study period and meet the UPC eligibility threshold. Exact and propensity score matching procedures are used to identify a comparison group that closely resembles the treatment group on key baseline characteristics, including UPC rate, enrollment, school level, prior achievement trajectories, and student demographic composition.

The difference-in-differences estimator compares the change in outcomes between treatment and comparison schools before and after CCSPP implementation, under the assumption that, absent the intervention, both groups would have followed parallel outcome trajectories. Pre-treatment trend analysis is used to assess the plausibility of this parallel trends assumption. All models include school fixed effects (which control for time-invariant school-level characteristics) and year fixed effects (which absorb common statewide shocks to outcomes in each year). Standard errors are clustered at the school level to account for serial correlation in school-level outcomes over time. Subgroup analyses are conducted for Black students, Hispanic or Latino/a students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students by estimating the same model on subgroup-specific outcome measures.

Analytic Approach: LAUSD & Kern Analyses

The district-level analyses of LAUSD and Kern County use the same difference-in-differences framework as the statewide analysis but differ in several important respects. First, the panel extends back to 2016–17, providing four pre-treatment years of data that allow for a more detailed examination

of pre-program trends and the timing of program effects. Second, because both LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium launched local community school initiatives several years prior to the CCSPP, the comparison group is restricted to high-need schools within the same geographic boundary. Specifically, the LAUSD analysis uses non-community schools within LAUSD with a UPC rate exceeding 80%, and the Kern County analysis uses non-community schools within Kern County with a UPC rate exceeding 70%. These thresholds reflect the state's priority funding criteria for non-rural and rural settings, respectively. Restricting the comparison group within the same district or county controls for shared administrative context, labor agreements, local funding conditions, and regional economic factors that could otherwise confound cross-district comparisons.

Third, because LAUSD and West Kern Consortium community schools were already staffed, operationally established, and in many cases deepening existing practices when CCSPP implementation grants were awarded, 2022–23 is treated as the first year of the post-CCSPP period in the district-level DiD models. This is consistent with the fact that Cohort 1 schools received grant awards in summer 2022 and began implementation in the 2022–23 academic year. The post-CCSPP period thus encompasses 2022–23 and 2023–24, the two most recent years of available data. The pre-CCSPP period includes all available years from 2016–17 through 2021–22, excluding the pandemic years of 2019–20 and 2020–21.

All district-level models include school, year, and grade fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the school level. A supplementary specification adds time-varying school-level covariates (including enrollment, UPC rate, and the share of students in key demographic subgroups) to assess the robustness of the primary estimates to the inclusion of controls for changes in school composition over time. The primary estimates and the covariate-adjusted estimates are reported together. The covariate-adjusted models are restricted to years for which all covariates are available, which in practice limits the sample to 2018–19 onward due to data availability.

Limitations

Several limitations bear note. The difference-in-differences design identifies the average effect of CCSPP participation on the schools studied but cannot fully account for the possibility that treated and comparison schools differed in unobserved ways that also changed over the study period. While pre-treatment trend analyses support the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption in most

specifications, pandemic-related disruptions introduce uncertainty into trend comparisons that span 2019–20 and 2020–21, even though those years are excluded from the main models. The district-level analyses are further limited by the relatively small number of treated schools in Kern County in particular, which reduces statistical precision and increases the influence of individual schools on estimated effects. Finally, because the study period captures only the first one to two years of CCSPP implementation for Cohort 1 schools, the estimates should be interpreted as early-stage effects that may not reflect the full impact of the program as implementation matures.

Qualitative Research: Multisite Case Study on California Community School Implementation

A qualitative study of LEAs that received CCSPP grants is also at the center of this report. Qualitative work examined how LEA officials used state investments to implement structures and practices that developed a system of high-quality community schools. Specifically, the study examined the structures and processes implemented and/or redesigned by LEAs that received CCSPP grants to support community school implementation and sustainability and how those approaches enabled the development of high-quality community schools and emergent outcomes. To do this, LPI researchers conducted a multisite case study, allowing them to generate understandings of LEA practices and the ways they supported community school implementation within and across settings. Case study methodology also enabled investigators to analyze varied data sources, allowing them to examine the LEAs as they operated, rather than exert control over the research sites.[49] Furthermore, the study's multi-site design enabled holistic and comparative analyses, which supported systematic comparisons of patterns within and across the study's sample to corroborate evidence.[50]

LPI researchers used purposive sampling to identify "information-rich cases"[51] that could generate insights into the study's guiding questions. Bounding criteria included the identification of LEAs that were early recipients of CCSPP implementation grants so that insights could be garnered into the sustained change process and its emerging systematic impact. Researchers also based their site

[49] Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
[50] Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *13*(4), 544–559.
[51] Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (Fourth edition). SAGE Publications.

selection on additional bounding criteria: geography, to capture diverse settings; the initiative's attention to a range of whole child practices rather than service provision alone; and LEAs' demographic composition and student outcomes, to assess how the community school strategy supported students and families from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds.

This selection process led researchers to identify three LEAs for in depth examination in the broader multisite case study. Data from two of those cases—LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium—were included in this report. Both LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium were among the first cohort of CCSPP implementation grant recipients, aligning with the cohort at the center of the CCSPP impact study described above. The LEAs had also maintained long-standing initiatives, which enabled researchers to examine the LEAs' sustained change process, their implementation of whole child–aligned practices, and the ways they enabled student success. While similar in these ways, LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium vary considerably in their size, LEA structure, and geography, allowing LPI researchers to understand how LEAs developed a system of high-quality community schools in diverse settings.

With its multisite case study design, this qualitative research surfaces insights into how community school transformation unfolded in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium and how LEA officials leverage CCSPP resources to enable strong student outcomes

Data Collection

Data for the multisite case study was collected from November 2023 to May 2025. Primary data sources for this study included interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews. Interviews were primary data sources, with researchers interviewing 73 individuals affiliated with the LAUSD or West Kern Consortium initiative. Interviewees include initiative leaders, district officials, principals, community school coordinators, licensed social workers, teachers, and parents (See Table 5 for a complete list of the study's participants.) These participants, which were identified though purposive and snowball sampling,[52] were asked to speak to the initiative's history, its evolving priorities and approaches, and the challenges and successes it has faced in developing and sustaining community schools. Interview prompts also asked interviewees to reflect on community

[52] Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (Fourth edition). SAGE Publications.

school implementation, its impact on their experience and the broader school community, and the ways LEAs supported school-based efforts.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted 45–120 minutes. (Longer interviews were conducted over multiple sessions). In most instances, study participants were interviewed once, but several district and initiative leaders, community school coordinators, and additional school personnel were interviewed multiple times to solicit additional information given their leadership in community school efforts. In five instances, two study participants requested to participate in joint interviews due to scheduling reasons. Interviews were primarily conducted virtually via Zoom, but researchers did conduct 13 in-person focus groups with select participants during site visits (described below). With permission, all interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed to support data analysis.

Table 5. Study Interviewees

Role	Local education agency	
	LAUSD	West Kern Consortium
District and initiative leaders	15	5
Superintendents/Principals	-	2
Principals	2	1
Community school coordinators	2	6
Community partner representatives	1	2
Teachers	10	5
Additional school-based personnel (e.g., social workers, parent liaisons, literacy specialists)	4	7
Parents	3	5
Students	3	-
Total per case site	40	33

Notes: While there were 40 individuals interviewed in the LAUSD case study, researchers conducted a total of 33 interviews, including 4 focus groups. In West Kern case study, researchers conducted a total of 41 interviews with 33 local actors. Because of the small school and district size of select districts affiliated with the West Kern Consortium, two interviewees in the case study held the roles of superintendent and principal simultaneously.

Observations. Researchers also conducted observations to corroborate case study research. Observations included a 2.5-day site visit to West Kern County in March 2024 and a 3-day site to LAUSD in May 2025. Site visits enabled researchers to observe the day-to-day observations of community school implementation at select sites, which were identified for deeper study based on performance data and information gathered from systems-level interviews about robust site-based implementation. In these community schools, researchers observed classroom instruction, on-site professional development, and collaborative leadership meetings. Investigators also shadowed community school coordinators to observe their daily activities and how they advanced community schooling in everyday exchanges.

Researchers also conducted observations (*n* =38.5 hours) of other community school-related structures and processes, including governance meetings and professional learning opportunities. For the West Kern Consortium, researchers conducted virtual observations of quarterly Children's Cabinet of West Kern meetings and monthly convenings of the community of practice for community school coordinators during the 2023–2024 school year. In LAUSD, investigators observed professional development for community school coordinators (e.g., coaching sessions, 2-day summer institute) and instructional showcases facilitated by the Community School Initiative. They also virtually observed two steering committee meetings and a professional learning session for teachers facilitated by Joyful Disruption.

Overall, these observations provided insight into how schools used the systems-level supports in the implementation of community school approaches and in advancing community school aims. Furthermore, observations allowed researchers to triangulate and corroborate data obtained from interviews and relevant documentation. Raw field notes were taken during observations and converted into narrative field notes.

Documents. The research team collected and reviewed approximately 125 organizational documents related to community school implementation in LAUSD and the West Kern Consortium. (LAUSD = 50; West Kern Consortium = 75). Documents included:

- Consortium and district documents, such as programming or community school role descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, memorandums of understanding, webpages, and service inventories;

- Publicly available reports and initiative evaluations;
- Detailed meeting notes from community school governance meetings;
- Professional learning materials for community school coordinators and school staff, including meeting agendas, session slide decks, and shared resources

In addition to these documents, the research team accessed publicly available data on student demographics as well as student outcomes. Investigators reviewed these data sources to better understand the initiative's history, its mission, and its evidence of success. Detailed meeting notes from governance and professional development opportunities also helped researchers triangulate data regarding the implementation of structures to support high-quality community school implementation.

Data Analysis

Investigators employed a multistep qualitative analysis process, beginning with the development of an initial set of descriptive and deductive codes informed by the semi-structured interview protocols. Researchers then refined the code list after a review of select interview transcripts to include themes, structures, and practices reflected in the data. Codes were clarified, added, or removed to capture key concepts more precisely, reduce redundancy, and strengthen definitions related to the dynamics and structures supporting community school implementation. Following codebook refinement, investigators worked to establish interrater reliability. Each research team member independently applied codes to selected interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, then met to compare applications and resolve discrepancies. After achieving strong interrater reliability, the team coded all data sources using Dedoose qualitative analysis software, a web-based qualitative analysis software.

After completing qualitative coding, researchers examined code frequencies and analyzed patterns within and across the case and its embedded units. A conclusion was considered a finding when it was supported by triangulated and convergent evidence. Concurrently, researchers explored divergent results to better capture the complexity, nuance, and variation present in community school implementation where applicable.