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# **New Mexico Community Schools: Local Considerations for Sustainability and Impact**

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## Introduction

New Mexico is among a leading group of states investing in community schools to support students' academic success and healthy development.<sup>1</sup> Community schools marshal resources and cultivate partnerships to provide supports for physical and mental health; social services; enriched and expanded learning time; family and community involvement; and a safe, supportive, community-connected learning environment. Research supports these investments with findings that well-implemented community schools bring improved attendance, behavior, engagement, and academic outcomes, especially for students with poverty-related learning challenges.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the approach proves to be cost-effective, generating an estimated \$15 in social and economic value for each dollar spent.<sup>3</sup>

Community schooling is not a new idea, and New Mexico's experience with it is long-standing on tribal lands, in some rural locations, and more recently in the largest urban areas. The community schools strategy gained momentum after the 2018 *Yazzie/Martinez* decision, in which the judge ruled that the state's education system is constitutionally insufficient, especially for students most at risk.<sup>4</sup> Many educators and advocates found the community schools strategy to be well suited to addressing the needs of New Mexico's at-risk students while providing rich opportunities for learning and development for all children. In 2019, the legislature updated the existing community schools statute and allocated \$2 million to the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) to fund school-level grants for community school planning, implementation, and renewal—an allocation that has steadily increased since then to its current level of \$10 million.

In 2022, the ABC Community School Partnership, Communities in Schools of New Mexico, and National Education Association–New Mexico formed the Southwest Institute for Transformational Community Schools (SWIFT)—a nonprofit organization supporting the robust implementation of community schools statewide. These three organizations and SWIFT commissioned the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) to study potential strategies to strengthen implementation, including “certifying” fully implemented community schools.<sup>5</sup>

LPI conducted its research by interviewing New Mexico public officials, practitioners, and advocates, as well as officials from other states that are advancing capacity-building strategies for community schools. LPI also conducted observations at public meetings and biweekly meetings with SWIFT. It reviewed documents from the PED, nonprofits, and public websites, as well as research on community schools.

This report provides LPI's interim findings about four strategies the state can use to further support community schools:

1. Sustainable funding
2. Data-driven continuous improvement
3. A certification process
4. Coordination among PED initiatives

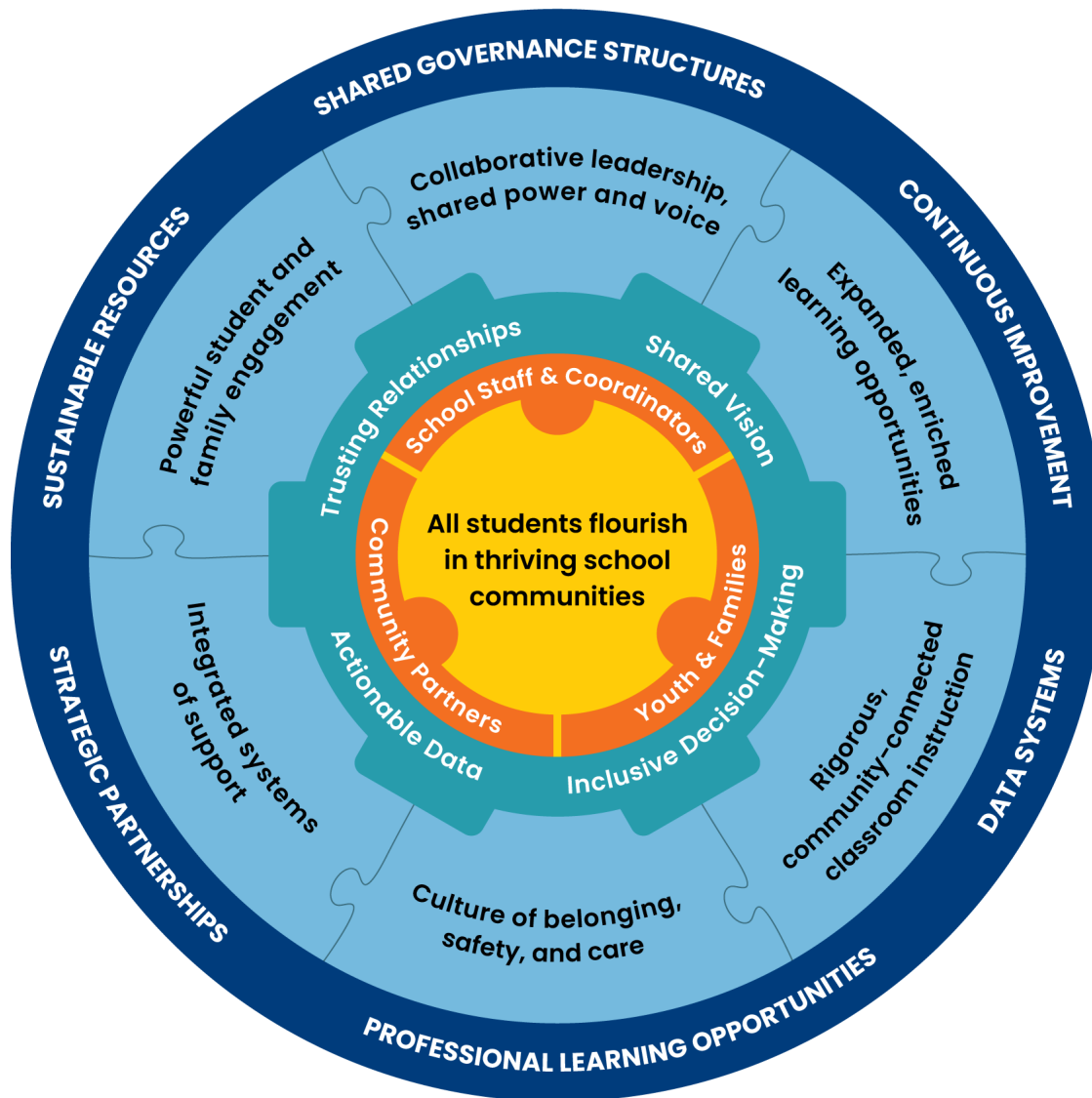
The findings and their policy implications can inform policymakers, education leaders, and community advocates and support ongoing conversations leading to long-term sustainability and impact of community schools in the state.

## The Community Schools Strategy

The community schools strategy in New Mexico aims to create thriving learning environments for all students. Community schools prioritize students' well-being, sense of belonging, and active engagement in school, as well as their academic achievement. They also seek to be vital community hubs supporting families and the broader community with resources and opportunities. Each of these priorities rests heavily on the principle of respect for the ideas and values of students, families, and community partners. Collaborative leadership and practices enhance the voice and power of the community's multiple interests and sectors.

Community schools today rely on specific, evidence-based practices to transform schools.<sup>6</sup> New Mexico has incorporated these practices into its community schools legislation and state-funded grants. The 2013 Community Schools Act focused on extended learning, school-based health care, and family engagement and services. The 2019 update introduced a community schools framework, which added collaborative leadership to the key features of community schools.<sup>7</sup> It also identified as essential culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and restorative approaches to supporting student behavior. Most recently, the PED adapted a national framework for fully implemented community schools, which specifies the infrastructure, key practices, enabling conditions, and processes that community schools use to create optimal conditions for learning and healthy development.<sup>8</sup> This new framework aligns with and builds on the Community Schools Act by including two additional key practices of implementation informed by the science of learning and development: rigorous, community-connected instruction and a culture of belonging, safety, and care.<sup>9</sup> (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Essentials for Community School Transformation Framework\*



**LEGEND**

- Why we do this work
- Who drives this work
- Enabling conditions
- Key practices
- Supportive infrastructure

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

\*The New Mexico Public Education Department adapted this framework so that “expanded, enriched learning opportunities” is “expanded, culturally enriched learning opportunities.”

Effective implementation of these practices requires the development of trusting relationships and inclusive, data-informed decision-making, in addition to establishing supportive infrastructure.<sup>10</sup>

## **New Mexico’s Existing Support for Community Schools**

New Mexico has taken important steps to support the implementation and scaling of community schools statewide. Since 2019, \$28.9 million in Community Schools Grant funding has been distributed by PED, allowing the strategy to spread across the state and extend grantees’ funding to 4 years.<sup>11</sup> For the 2023–24 school year, 91 schools received funding for a planning, implementation, or renewal grant.<sup>12</sup> The New Mexico Coalition for Community Schools, a multi-sector state body established by the 2019 legislation, collaborates with the PED to provide advocacy, capacity-building, and technical assistance.<sup>13</sup> To provide technical assistance to community schools, the PED and the Coalition developed the New Mexico ECHO for Community Schools in partnership with the University of New Mexico. ECHO is a virtual community of practice based on the Project ECHO model for medical professionals in remote locations, which provides virtual access to the latest medical resources and expertise. This partnership provides access to expertise on the design and implementation of community schools. Most recently, the legislature passed House Memorial 44 in 2023, creating a task force to study sustainable funding—including the use of certification models—and develop a strategic plan for community schools.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and Taos received 2022 Full-Service Community School grants, with total expected funding of \$7.5 million, from the U.S. Department of Education to implement and operate community schools.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. Department of Education has also provided federal funding through a congressionally directed spending award of \$1.8 million, secured by U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich. The focus of the award is to provide technical assistance to and build the capacity of New Mexico community schools.<sup>16</sup>

## **Opportunities to Support Full Implementation of Community Schools at Scale**

The research on community schools is clear that implementation quality matters for achieving community school outcomes.<sup>17</sup> In the following sections, we outline LPI’s findings and recommendations around four high-leverage opportunities for improving community schools implementation across the state: sustainable funding, data-driven continuous improvement, certification processes, and increased coordination. We conclude with the implications of these findings for state policy and practice.

### **Funding for Community Schools**

New Mexico’s first cohorts of community school grantees are reaching the conclusion of the existing 4-year grant program and, thus, absent renewal, the possible end of their dedicated state funding. Consequently, policymakers face the challenge of finding a durable and sustainable

funding source for the implementation of community schools. The ultimate goal is to establish a robust and effective funding model for community schools that promotes long-term success and equitable access to quality education for all students.

To inform this policy discussion about sustainable funding, we examined how other states use various funding mechanisms to support community schools. The following three approaches are most prevalent: (1) competitive grants, (2) ongoing funding through school funding formulas, and (3) funding for capacity-building and technical assistance.<sup>18</sup> For more information about these investments, see Table A1 in Appendix A.

1. **Competitive grants:** Several states, including California, Illinois, New Mexico, and Vermont, offer competitive grants to support community schools. These grants are often categorized as planning, implementation, or renewal grants and are time-limited. While competitive grants can serve as a stepping stone to establish ongoing funding (as occurred in New York, for example), they do have inherent limitations. For instance, they may favor well-resourced applicants that have the time and personnel to dedicate to grant writing, potentially leaving schools in greater need with fewer resources. Additionally, changes in administrative or legislative priorities could lead to the elimination of grant programs, making community school funding more precarious and the strategy less predictable in the long run.
2. **Ongoing funding:** Some states, like Maryland and New York, opt for ongoing funding mechanisms, often referred to as above-the-line funding. This type of funding, included within the school finance formula, can be achieved through entitlement programs or annual set-asides in the state budget. Ongoing funding provides more predictability and sustainability, making it easier for districts and schools to plan and sustain community school initiatives over time. By ensuring a stable source of funding, ongoing models can support staffing needs and the time required to effectively implement community schools.

Maryland stands out for its innovative Concentration of Poverty entitlement grant program, which provides dedicated funding to create and support community schools in low-income communities.<sup>19</sup> The Concentration of Poverty grant program provides two complementary sources of state funding—personnel grants employing essential community school staff and a per-pupil allocation. The entitlement grant funding is distributed based on the income level of the community, effectively prioritizing schools with a higher concentration of poverty.<sup>20</sup> This approach ensures that schools with the greatest need receive the necessary resources to implement and sustain community school initiatives.

New York created a community schools set-aside in its school funding formula for high-need districts and funded three regional technical assistance centers for community schools. Since 2016, the ongoing set-aside has been part of the state’s Foundation Aid formula (i.e., Community Schools Set-Aside), which can be used to fund community school site coordinators, academic supports, mental and physical health services, enrichment and expanded learning, and other needs. New York’s ongoing funding



strategy for community schools followed an initial state investment in 2013 in a community school competitive grant program.

3. **Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance:** Investing in capacity-building supports and technical assistance programs is an approach that some states have taken to support community schools.<sup>21</sup> California and New York have set up regional technical assistance centers to increase local capacity to implement the strategy. Florida has likewise funded a university-led technical assistance center. These investments provide support to community school practitioners, often to school- and district-level staff brought on as coordinators to support students, families, school staff, and community partners, in an effort to strengthen implementation and outcomes.

Because the community schools strategy encompasses all aspects of the school, community schools are not solely supported by direct funding. To implement community schools effectively, states and local education agencies “blend and braid” a combination of funding sources, ranging from federal Medicaid and other health funds to McKinney-Vento funds for serving students experiencing homelessness to education funds under Titles I and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Programs under the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Justice, and Department of Labor can also be leveraged to support community schools.<sup>22</sup> New Mexico has, for example, leveraged Title I school improvement funds to support a community schools strategy in schools designated as in need of improvement.<sup>23</sup>

Flexible state resources that could be used to support community schools include New Mexico’s State Equalization Guarantee, which allocates supplemental funding to districts serving students with additional needs based on an “at risk” weight. This funding can be directed toward various research-based social, emotional, or academic supports, such as case management, tutoring, culturally relevant professional learning, and whole-school interventions, including school-based health centers—all supports that can be aligned with a community schools strategy. New Mexico’s Family Income Index provides another funding source, funded at \$15 million, that can help sustain community school initiatives. Other funded initiatives in the state, such as K–12 Plus, investments in career and technical education, and grants related to the Indian Education Act, might also support implementation of the community schools strategy. However, these funding sources are not always new funds to schools and may not be sufficient to cover all costs of additional community school staff and services.

By adopting sustainable funding strategies, investing in capacity-building, and prioritizing equity in resource allocation, New Mexico can create a supportive environment for community schools long term that benefits students, families, and communities alike.

## **Data Infrastructure to Support Continuous Improvement**

High-quality, timely, and accessible data can help community schools improve their practice and monitor progress toward their goals. In community schools, those data are used in an ongoing cycle of “continuous improvement,” an essential part of the community schools infrastructure. Continuous improvement begins with a collaborative, inclusive leadership group creating a

shared vision and related goals grounded in baseline data. It continues as the school and its community partners implement practices and reflect on a set of key indicators showing their impact and progress. Indicators, which we describe more fully below, are regularly measured characteristics of the school environment and students' experiences that play a pivotal role in gauging progress. The analyses of indicators and the data that comprise them enable the school community to make necessary adjustments to their practices based on what they learn. This continuous improvement is the key to strengthening implementation.

As school leaders in New Mexico learn about the community schools strategy, they recognize the importance of an infrastructure that makes high-quality data and indicators available to them. For example, leaders attending a learning exchange conversation hosted by SWIFT in May 2023 expressed their need for support around data, measurement, and the continuous improvement process generally. More specifically, they wanted support around data collection and analysis, gathering and organizing community-wide data, looking at individual student data, and measuring outcomes and impact in real time.<sup>24</sup> They also wanted help with defining and measuring outcomes that may be more loosely defined or measured less often, such as school culture and climate.

Our research pointed to three potential steps that New Mexico could take to strengthen its data infrastructure to support continuous improvement in community schools: (1) building a framework for community school indicators, (2) supporting a local infrastructure around data and continuous improvement, and (3) developing an evidence-based way to identify community schools.

### **Building a framework for community school indicators**

To support continuous improvement and strong implementation, New Mexico can develop an indicator framework that helps schools identify and track a set of statewide goals and outcomes. Prior research and practitioner advice suggest that community school indicator frameworks should:

- **Strike a balance between state-determined indicators and locally determined ones.** New Mexico's legislature requires several state-level indicators of school performance as a part of its 2019 School Support and Accountability Act. These indicators are drawn from aggregated student data, climate survey data, and data on teacher qualifications and experience. They are currently displayed for each school on the New Mexico VISTAS website. As part of the 2019 amendment to the Community Schools Act, New Mexico required that community schools collect and use local indicators in addition to state-determined ones.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, an indicators framework for community schools should include a core set of common indicators the state uses to inform its oversight and support of community schools.

Alongside the state-determined indicators, the framework can encourage the development of locally determined indicators that allow schools to focus on areas that are of particular importance to them. These indicators should be co-developed with community members and should align with the needs and assets of the community. As one interviewee

explained, “Community schools should be innovative. That innovation comes from the community. Innovation is not going to come from one point on a map.” Another interviewee reiterated, “Community schools are about local voice, local community.”

For example, a local community school that is concerned about student absences being a function of students not feeling safe may want to supplement state indicators about chronic absence with student survey data reporting students’ perceptions of how safe they feel getting to and from school, how safe they feel on campus, and/or whether they have an adult who they trust to share any worries about safety that they might have. These indicators would be particularly useful if the community school was mounting a schoolwide intervention promoting safety at school and in the surrounding neighborhood. Those data would both shed light on why their absentee data is what it is and, over time, whether their intervention is having a positive impact.

- **Include both implementation and outcome indicators.** A helpful framework will allow schools to understand progress in (1) key aspects of implementation and (2) student and school-level outcomes. The inclusion of implementation indicators (i.e., evidence of shifts in practice and policy) provides schools with data needed to assess progress in changes that lead to positive outcomes. Without these data, schools cannot easily understand why desired outcomes are or are not being achieved, and they have limited information on how practice can improve. Data on both types of indicators are essential for continuous improvement, as they make it possible to understand the extent to which the strategy is being implemented well, and the extent to which students and their families are better off as a result.

For example, to complement state-required indicators of students’ disciplinary incidents, local indicators could monitor the community schools’ efforts to create a school climate of safety, belonging, and care. Implementation indicators can track whether and to what extent policies and practices are being implemented to promote school climate, while student and school-level indicators can track whether and to what extent students, families, and educators experience a safe and welcoming school climate. Measures to track implementation progress, for example, may include evidence of school policies that replace exclusionary discipline with restorative approaches, as well as evidence of teacher practices that build belonging and community within classrooms. Measures to track progress toward student and school-level outcomes might include survey responses about trusting relationships or perceptions of safety and belonging. Both types of indicators can provide insight into why there have or have not been reductions in disciplinary incidents by examining progress in both implementing the strategy and any shifts in student and school-level outcomes along the way.

- **Capture a range of “whole child” outcomes.** The community schools strategy presents an opportunity to reimagine the data collected and to include a full range of outcomes related to whole child success. A key question to consider is what data are available to assess practice and outcomes across several dimensions of community schools implementation: schools as community hubs, school climate and discipline practices,

student participation and engagement, staffing and enrollment stability, community-connected learning opportunities, empowered students and families, student and family well-being, academic growth and deeper learning, and academic attainment and postsecondary readiness.<sup>26</sup> New Mexico already collects data on a wide range of student and school-level outcomes, including measures of academic achievement as assessed by state tests; chronic absenteeism, including excused and unexcused absences; student engagement and well-being as measured by the state’s Opportunity to Learn survey; college, career, and civic readiness as measured by participation and success in specific college and career opportunities; an “on track to graduate” indicator based on early warning signs; graduation rates; and a survey of parents and families to better understand attendance and student engagement.

State and local leaders may want to consider building out data collection to develop more robust data on certain indicators to capture a broader picture of holistic well-being, while considering reasonable reporting burden. For instance, there is limited existing data on schools as community hubs, school climate, learning opportunities, school staff satisfaction, and student and family well-being.

- **Stage indicators over time.** Given that community schools implementation is a long-term school transformation process, the indicators and goals used to evaluate community schools will look different at each stage of development. Staging indicators over time helps to set realistic expectations and avoids premature assessments of impact. Early indicators may focus on laying the groundwork for the strategy and gathering baseline data, while later indicators track shifts in practice, student outcomes, and overall impact. Table A2 in Appendix A provides an example of how indicators can be staged for the key practice of community-connected instruction. Several interviewees stressed the need for staging indicators over time. As one state leader shared:

“What happens is they [policymakers, for example] want results fast, and that is hard to do when it’s actually changing structure and it’s changing the way that decisions are made and bringing in community. It takes a while to understand what we’re doing—that it’s not a program. Attendance could be one of the first [indicators]. Graduation rates is one of the later indicators ... something that you see 4 years in, you know, down the road, maybe 5 years. It’s not something that you see in the first 2 years.”

An example set of indicators that showcases (1) a range of whole child outcomes, (2) both implementation outcomes and student outcomes, and (3) staging over time can be found in Appendix B. This is not a comprehensive inventory, and it will be important for state and local leaders to select or develop indicators most suitable for their context.<sup>27</sup>

## **Supporting a local infrastructure around data and continuous improvement**

Professional development, data coaching, and technical assistance to build data-savvy personnel at the district and school level could make the state’s requirements for local data as a tool in the implementation of community schools more meaningful. For example, training on data and data use might focus on characteristics of a high-quality measure: reflect multiple perspectives,

measure disparities as well as averages, report growth over time, and combine quantitative data with qualitative insights. Professional learning communities emphasizing continuous improvement hosted at schools can build skills, provide needed time, and foster collaboration and learning among educators, community partners, parents, and stakeholders that enables the examination and use of data in decision-making. For example, the state could promote local coaching that supports a school community in leveraging data to drive a Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle to assess progress on measured goals. Financial and infrastructure support, along with recognizing successful schools' growth and learning, are other ways the state can demonstrate investment and commitment to this important work.

The state already requires an inquiry process for all schools through the DASH system, which community schools can use to monitor progress and engage in continuous improvement.<sup>28</sup> However, in its current form, the 90-day plan is quite narrowly focused on academic achievement and staff or curriculum interventions. Expanding the 90-day plan to include a broader range of indicators could create greater alignment for community schools as they engage in continuous improvement.

### **Developing an evidence-based way to identify community schools**

Currently, schools self-identify as community schools, leading to inconsistencies and an inability to assess the impact of the strategy accurately. While schools can be identified based on receipt of federal Full-Service Community School or state grant funding, that will only enable evaluation of the impact of investments, but not the strategy itself. Constructing a community schools identifier based on the presence of key practices, such as integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership, would enable the state to understand which schools are implementing the community schools strategy. Fortunately, some data are already collected through the state's Multi-Layered System of Supports process, which may provide a helpful starting point for constructing a community school identifier.

The importance of having a way to identify and classify schools as community schools is probably best illustrated by policymakers' and the public's interest in knowing whether New Mexico's community schools are more effective than non-community schools. Without an evidence-based community school identifier, one cannot answer that question or many others that follow from it.

### **A Certification Process for Community Schools**

Certification is an external review and recognition process that attests to the presence of a set of elements and accomplishments deemed essential to quality practice in many domains. Some states have developed a certification process for community schools; other school transformation efforts have also created certification strategies to stimulate high-quality implementation and ongoing improvement. When accompanied by elements inherent in continuous improvement, a certification process could strengthen community schools. It would offer school communities a standards-based process that builds their capacity and assesses their progress toward meeting

their goals. It could enhance implementation by establishing common indicators, benchmarks, and guardrails for those within and outside the schools to use to assess the quality of their own work. The community schools strategy is a good candidate for certification because of the centrality of continuous improvement to the strategy and the fact that achieving benefits from the strategy requires long-term implementation. Schools themselves might be interested in pursuing certification not only because of access to guidance and professional learning that supports implementation, but also because attaining certification affirms and validates their transformation efforts and signals their impact.

There is promising evidence that certification can effectively support community school implementation. A study of Florida’s community school certification system found that standards and guiding indicators helped schools stay focused on key components of implementing the model with fidelity and were associated with improved student attendance, decreased disciplinary incidents, and academic gains over time.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, an evaluation of Linked Learning—a school design model analogous to community schools and focused on college and career pathways—found that achieving certification led to positive outcomes, including increased graduation rates and accumulation of credits. The authors attribute this, in part, to the level of quality or full implementation resulting from the certification process.<sup>30</sup> Certification also meets three needs identified by New Mexico stakeholders:

1. **Common standards.** Across the interviews we conducted, we heard a strong desire for consistent and formalized definitions and standards for community schools across the state. As one state agency leader noted, “You want some guidelines ... to be creative within.” Reflecting on past rounds of grantees, another state agency leader noted that “we’ve done a good job of getting [state grantees] to understand the four pillars and to align their work across them. We haven’t done a great job as a state to define standards of implementation for those four pillars.” Clear standards were considered a method of strengthening and supporting school implementation.
2. **Structures that support continuous improvement.** Certification, as described in this report, comes with resources, technical assistance, professional learning, and potential peer and mentor networks. Certification provides structures and discrete time frames for using data to make informed and strategic decisions.
3. **Recognition.** Establishing criteria for certification allows for the identification and recognition of community schools that are effectively and fully implementing the strategy, which enables the state to better understand the impact of its investment and can serve as a point of pride for schools and communities.

We examined three examples of certification and standards-based capacity-building systems: The Center for Community Schools at the University of Central Florida; the Office of Whole Child Supports at the Georgia Department of Education; and the Linked Learning Alliance. Each of these systems is rooted in established standards and practices, but they differ in their organizational structure, timeline, and focus. For more details on these programs, see Table A3 of Appendix A.

**Center for Community Schools at the University of Central Florida (UCF Center).** The University of Central Florida’s Center for Community Schools provides technical assistance, university-assisted partnerships, and assessment and evaluation. It houses the certification process for the Community Partnership Schools model. Beginning in 2014, the legislature appropriated money to establish the UCF Center as the entity to support high-quality replication and sustainability of the Community Partnership Schools model. By 2019, the UCF Center had developed a certification system anchored in 12 standards, each with sub-indicators (see Appendix B for more details).<sup>31</sup> The UCF Center also administers state-funded planning and 5-year implementation grants, which they award to the lead nonprofit agency partnering with the participating schools. Schools submit yearly self-assessments, undergo a readiness check in their third year, and go up for certification in their fifth year. Depending upon their readiness check, more “advanced” schools may acquire certification earlier. Certification involves a review of data and self-assessment materials as well as a site visit conducted by UCF staff and peer reviewers (i.e., staff from other community schools). Once certified, a check-in and recertification occur every third and fifth year. In nearly all cases, schools that do not meet all the criteria for certification are given extra time and access to supports (e.g., coaching) for the areas needing improvement.

**Office of Whole Child Supports (OWCS) at the Georgia Department of Education.** The OWCS helps districts and schools identify and address non-academic barriers to success while expanding learning opportunities. In 2021, the OWCS received \$10 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding to support its work, including the development of an online Whole Child Toolkit and a pilot certification process for model community schools—or “whole child” schools, as they are referred to in the state.<sup>32</sup> After piloting a certification process that was tied to both implementation fidelity and outcomes, in spring 2023 the OWCS shifted to what they called a “recognition system.” Subsequently, the pilot program concluded due to restructuring in the Office of Whole Child Supports. The office decided to provide professional development on whole child supports in all schools instead of focusing on specific schools seeking to become a whole child model school.

The prior shift to a recognition system had emphasized the developmental nature of significant schooling improvements, allowed for growth over time, and modeled collaborative leadership. The process documented the fidelity of implementation assessed through benchmarks met in the early stages (i.e., a school community team is in place and priorities are determined using patterns, trends, and data analysis), growth and development of structures and practices, and growth in impact. The rubric of specific benchmarks was redesigned in summer 2023 based on feedback from coordinators, principals, and district managers from the first cohort. The resulting rubric includes four stages of implementation—learning, emerging, achieving, and distinguished. Georgia’s model involved coaching and technical assistance for district leaders, as well as community school leaders, with the state department of education providing this support in a train-the-trainer model whereby district leaders in turn support the principals and coordinators at participating sites.

**Linked Learning Alliance.** The Linked Learning Alliance is a nonprofit organization based in California that supports a certification process for Linked Learning pathways. The pathways—industry- and career-themed courses of study that integrate a college preparatory curriculum with career and technical education (e.g., business and science or engineering and architecture)—are found at both high schools and middle schools, and include integrated student supports (similar to New Mexico’s Innovation Zone schools). California is home to over 500 Linked Learning pathways (there are 659 Linked Learning pathways nationally). The Linked Learning Alliance has a research-based certification process to promote consistent implementation of best practices and measure growth in student and pathway outcomes. Schools can apply to certify a pathway at two levels.<sup>33</sup> The initial tier—Silver Certification—indicates that all core components of Linked Learning (i.e., equitable admissions policies, integrated program of study, work-based learning opportunities, and integrated student supports) are in place and that basic data about the pathway are used to inform program design.<sup>34</sup> After 2 years, schools can recertify their Silver designation or apply for Gold Certification. The advanced Gold Certification tier is achieved when schools can demonstrate high-quality implementation of program components and equitable opportunities for all students.<sup>35</sup> Schools seeking Gold status submit a range of data on students’ experiences and outcomes, as well as data for a comparison group of students. Applicant schools host a full-day site visit, which includes an opening presentation, multiple classroom visits, interviews, focus groups, and other meetings.

Our examination of these three certification and recognition systems—including interviews with the individuals developing and implementing these systems, as well as end users of these systems—suggests eight key considerations for constructing a certification system.

1. **Certifying entity.** There are benefits and drawbacks to whether the certifying body is a university, nonprofit, or state education agency. Universities and nonprofits are viewed as neutral sites well positioned to provide learning and support for development. State education agencies bring historical relationships with districts and schools that may or may not be positive. However, state education agencies have the authority to build supportive infrastructure from top to bottom, and they have easier access to data. That said, the most important factor in determining the certifying entity is staffing capacity in terms of time and expertise that is necessary to develop and run the system, which includes providing support to districts and schools.
2. **Standards.** Standards are beneficial to schools as they establish clear guardrails and guidelines for implementation and create a common language around the community schools strategy. However, it is important to create standards flexible enough to be met in multiple contexts (e.g., urban and rural). Interviewees also emphasized that standards and indicators should be manageable in terms of volume, have clearly identified non-negotiables, and avoid being overly prescriptive.
3. **Timeline.** The certification process took between 3 and 6 years on average in the three systems we examined. Timelines can be flexible or rigid, depending on the purpose and goals of certification. Even with a more rigid timeline, as in Florida, time and resources



are built into the system so that schools that do not meet all the standards during the initial review still have the opportunity to become certified.

4. **Continuous improvement and ongoing development.** In the systems we examined, continuous improvement drives the certification process and is core to implementation. Emphasis on the process as developmental allows for growth and moves certification away from a compliance-oriented system. Promising strategies currently in practice include general and targeted technical assistance, creating peer and mentor networks for coordinators, having an assigned coach, building in check-ins and feedback, including coordinators in the review process, and maintaining a resource library. In other words, while fundamental community schools values are non-negotiable, program implementation (and the certification that both guides and follows) is open to examination and adjustments. In this sense, certification may be seen as formative—allowing for growth rather than promoting a compliance-oriented (even punitive) system.
5. **Phases and tiering.** All of the systems we describe include phases and tiers as part of their process. This allows schools to celebrate growth, achieve baseline implementation, and strive for excellence. Further, structuring the process in this way validates the improvement efforts of each site and reiterates the centrality of learning and development in the process.
6. **Data collection.** The types and amount of data collected should be realistic, clearly defined, and easy to share. According to our interviews, data collection and reporting, as well as the number of standards and indicators, could be overwhelming and, in some cases, created an undue burden, particularly on community school coordinators.
7. **Continuity and sustainability.** Certification will be most impactful when built into a larger system of support for sustainability. Because certification is a multiyear intensive process, ensuring schools have adequate and sustained funding is important. Stable funding allows schools to focus on implementation and the needs of their students, instead of expending energy on locating resources to continue their work. Additionally, a well-designed certification system should be collaboratively developed and piloted so that changes are not frequent or ongoing and the process can capture the progress of community schools in ways that are not overly burdensome. Continuity, stability, and sustainability make it more likely for educators and staff on the ground to embrace the strategy and be willing to take on the change work.
8. **Supportive district infrastructure.** The community schools strategy may require revising existing organizational structures to ensure that schools are not being pulled in different or even multiple directions.<sup>36</sup> As an example, Georgia devised a multi-level system of support and professional learning that flows from the state level all the way to the coordinator position. Both district managers and school leaders are deeply involved in all stages of the process, including onboarding, strategic planning and goal setting, observation and data collection, and participation in professional development and learning communities.<sup>37</sup>

Certification, combined with sustainable funding, technical assistance, and a well-developed system of data and indicators, could help lay the foundation for schools to engage deeply with the community schools strategy.

## Coordination Among PED Activities

The PED operates a range of initiatives with shared goals that are particularly well aligned with community schools. This section emphasizes the importance of fostering this alignment at the state level and highlights steps PED staff have taken toward increased collaboration and coordination.

New Mexico’s legislature has made sizable investments in education in recent years, including funding for Innovation Zones, attendance improvement, Indian education, behavioral health, expanded and out-of-school learning, and educator preparation, to name a few. These investments and the state’s long-standing commitment to community schools hold the potential to be mutually reinforcing because of their synergistic goals. Additionally, New Mexico’s community schools policy aligns with many PED initiatives, including K–12 Plus, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, new social studies standards, NextGen career technical education, and the Native Language Teacher Pipeline, presenting a unique opportunity for comprehensive school transformation.

Despite these opportunities, challenges to coordination exist. The way state departments of education are typically organized, particularly their substantial focus on the flow of grant dollars, can create challenges for increased coordination and collaboration. Although PED faces many of these barriers, our interviews highlighted that PED staff are actively seeking opportunities to promote productive collaboration across programs. A PED employee shared, “One of the things that I’ve noticed is that as new people have transitioned into positions, there’s not that sense of ownership. There’s more of a, ‘Let’s work together to figure this out’ [attitude]. I think there’s a culture shift happening from siloing to desiloing.” As one example, staff recognize the potential of coordinating technical assistance to better serve schools and educators. Current efforts to align coaching support between the Multi-Layered System of Supports and community schools showcase a commitment to facilitating continuous improvement and can help site-based leaders see alignment across initiatives at their school. Because a significant number of community schools were identified as in need of “more rigorous intervention” or “comprehensive support and improvement,” there are also possibilities for collaboration between Priority Schools and Community Schools Bureaus.<sup>38</sup>

Because resources and programs to support community schools come from inside PED and beyond it (e.g., Medicaid funding), interagency collaboration can also play an important role in supporting implementation of community schools. Members of the Coalition for Community Schools could serve as valuable connectors to other state agencies, such as the New Mexico Department of Health and Department of Human Services, given their existing work, relationships, and grant funding beyond the PED. Another avenue for interagency collaboration is the Children’s Cabinet, which is composed of representatives from many departments, including Early Childhood Education and Care, Human Services, Health, Workforce Solutions,

and Education. By statute, the Cabinet shall study the design of a coordinated system to maximize outcomes for children and youth in areas such as physical and mental health and fitness, family and community safety, and preparedness for and success in school.<sup>39</sup>

By embracing alignment inherent within the PED's work and addressing traditional obstacles to coordination (e.g., siloes that can emerge from grant specialization), New Mexico can nurture collaboration and knowledge sharing. This, in turn, will not only optimize program effectiveness but also lead to a more cohesive approach to school transformation.

## **Local Considerations for Sustainability and Impact**

New Mexico's commitment to implementing community schools holds great promise for transforming education and fostering students' healthy development and academic success. However, to enable the long-term sustainability and positive impact of this approach, the state will likely need to take additional action to support strong implementation of its community schools policy and investments. Our research points to five potential next steps that the state might pursue:

### **Provide Sustainable Funding for Community Schools**

The state could consider options to provide long-term, sustainable funding for community schools. While the existing grant program has been instrumental in growing the number of community schools around the state, additional funding for existing and new schools, as well as a technical assistance infrastructure, can improve both implementation and sustainability. Maryland's Concentration of Poverty approach could serve as a model for New Mexico. As an entitlement included in the state's funding formula, schools can make long-term budgeting decisions that rely on this funding source. Further, dollars are distributed with equity in mind due to the funding thresholds that direct resources to schools serving the highest concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds. A phased-in funding strategy can steadily grow the number of community schools while prioritizing equity and ensuring sufficient resources for their successful operation.

Including state funding for technical assistance (as California and New York have done) could help to build capacity at the district and school levels and support strong community schools implementation.<sup>40</sup> These state investments recognize the complex nature of community schools implementation and are especially important for school- and local educational agency-level staff who are brought on as coordinators to support students, families, school staff, and community partners.

### **Collect and Use Data to Support Implementation and Assessment of Impact**

High-quality data is vital for assessing progress, impact, and possible certification of community schools. Several strategies can be considered to improve data reliability and usefulness at both the state and local levels:

- **Construct an identifier of a community school:** To reliably assess the impact of the strategy, practitioners and state officials need an identifier of a community school. Such an identifier could be developed by tracking data on schools' progress in implementing key elements of the strategy, such as integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership. These data can be used to identify and better understand which schools are using the community schools strategy fully. This data-based indicator may be an element of a formalized definition and standard of a community school, and it also can be useful within a standards-based continuous improvement system like certification.
- **Develop a cohesive framework of indicators:** Collaborating with the New Mexico Coalition for Community Schools, the state can create a comprehensive framework of measures and indicators to evaluate both progress toward full community school implementation and impact on students' healthy development and academic success. This framework may include a balance of state-determined indicators and opportunities for locally determined indicators. The former may be displayed on NMVISTAS, the state's online school dashboard, while the latter would be suitable in technical assistance support for continuous improvement. Further, the state may consider providing professional development and organizing learning communities to help local leaders select indicators and collect, analyze, and interpret data in a way that helps them make meaningful change.

As part of developing a framework of indicators, the state could consider developing additional indicators to better capture a school's implementation of a whole child approach, while balancing maintaining a reasonable reporting burden. Expanding the Opportunity to Learn survey to include measures of school climate and student well-being can provide valuable insights to guide school goals and action. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, a unit of the U.S. Department of Education, has compiled a list of valid and reliable school climate survey batteries the state could draw on.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the state could consider adding a staff survey to its portfolio of data collection measures.

- **Set realistic expectations for progress and outcomes:** Recognizing that community schools are a transformative strategy, policymakers could establish a time-based sequence of indicators to measure implementation progress. In the initial years, the emphasis should be on relationship-building, trust establishment, and community engagement. Also important to assess in early years are availability of services and student participation in expanded learning opportunities. Over time, the evaluation should shift toward indicators that assess opportunities for learning and healthy development, such as attendance, school climate, and, ultimately, academic achievement.
- **Leverage existing data and accountability processes:** As the state works to construct an identifier of whether a school is a community school, as well a framework of measures and indicators to evaluate both implementation progress and impact on student outcomes, state leaders should build on existing data systems and accountability processes. For example, the state's NMVISTAS dashboard provides data on attendance, disciplinary

actions, student achievement, college and career readiness, graduation, school climate, and teacher qualifications and experience. The NM DASH system, wherein schools develop 90-day plans in response to NM DASH data using a process of school-level reflection on data to guide improvements, could also be leveraged to support local continuous improvement processes. A data audit could identify gaps, remove redundancies, and promote timely availability of data to support community schools' implementation.

## Expand the Capacity-Building Infrastructure

To promote successful implementation, state leaders could provide dedicated state funding to expand a statewide and regional capacity-building infrastructure for community schools. The Coalition for Community Schools could be a key partner in this work, and the existing support from New Mexico ECHO for Community Schools provides a strong foundation from which to build. While detailing the specific content and shape of this infrastructure is beyond the scope of this paper, we highlight a couple of considerations and lessons learned from New Mexico's context, as well as that of other states that can inform the process.

- **Create a formalized definition and standards for community schools:** To ensure consistent implementation and flexibility, the state could develop resources, rubrics, and scaffolds that articulate a formalized definition and standards for community schools. These resources should outline foundational concepts and elements that all community schools should adopt—helping to advance a shared understanding—while allowing room for tailoring strategies to specific communities. Input from community school practitioners, especially from rural and tribal communities, is crucial to develop a comprehensive and adaptable set of standards. Developing a common definition and standards for community schools may naturally occur as part of developing a certification process (described below), if New Mexico decides to do so. Regardless, there will be a need for a formalized definition and standards that can facilitate a shared understanding of community schools as the strategy scales up in the state.
- **Offer differentiated learning opportunities for various stakeholders:** Different roles in community schools require specific knowledge and skills. To support educators, community school coordinators, district leaders, school boards, families, and students, the legislature could fund technical assistance that provides a range of learning opportunities. This could include training for families and community members to engage effectively in their school's assets and needs assessment, capacity-building for collaborative leadership among principals and coordinators, and supporting school boards in aligning resources and removing policy barriers. Cohort opportunities for practitioners in similar phases of implementation could also be beneficial. Partners like the State Coalition, local government, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and universities can help provide this support in ways that are tailored toward regional and cultural differences.

Another opportunity to build capacity the state could consider is through certification, which will be discussed next.

## Develop a Community Schools Certification or Recognition Process

A well-constructed certification process can be a vehicle for supporting standards, providing technical assistance, tracking schools' progress, and supporting continuous improvement. Certification involves an external review process grounded in established standards, with the achievement of certification signaling that the entity has met those standards. Schools may receive support and technical assistance to help them better implement strategies and collect data. When a school is ready or at an established deadline, the school applies for certification and goes through an assessment process that includes self-collected and externally collected data. Along with a certification determination, feedback is provided to the school to help continued development. The process, or an abbreviated process, is repeated periodically, so a school is able to maintain certification.

This paper presents several examples of certification processes that could inform the state's approach. Whatever approach New Mexico takes, it will be important to meaningfully involve practitioners (e.g., school and district leaders), especially those from rural and tribal communities, in designing, piloting, and refining the certification process. Developing practical strategies to support continuous improvement, such as Linked Learning's tiered certification or Georgia's recognition system with a rubric measuring implementation fidelity, can help emphasize the developmental process of certification. Florida's community school certification process, in place since 2019, includes clearly defined standards that may provide a useful starting point for New Mexico. While some have suggested that certification could play a role in determining ongoing funding for community schools, our research points to cautions about tying certification to eligibility for or receipt of funding. A high-stakes funding decision would run counter to the goal of designing a certification system that prioritizes continuous improvement. Further, tying funding to certification would have major equity implications. It might inadvertently benefit those schools that are already better positioned to implement the strategy and underinvest in communities where the students and community would most benefit. State leaders could instead view these two as complementary. That is, both certification and sustainable funding could play a vital role in supporting full implementation.

## Align State Resources to Support Community Schools

The PED could take advantage of the various programs and initiatives with shared goals by aligning programs and resources and promoting greater collaboration across programs. For example, PED staff could establish working groups of staff with overlapping priorities to share about existing work and develop work plans on areas of mutually beneficial collaboration. To coordinate and amplify their work across different teams, a working group might be composed of whole child-oriented bureaus such as Community Schools; Safe and Healthy Schools; Student Success and Wellness; Identity, Equity, and Transformation; College and Career Readiness; and Curriculum and Instruction. Such a working group could create a centralized library of resources related to community school key practices. This library might include new resources, such as a financing guide that helps community school practitioners easily navigate the range of available federal and state funding streams that can be blended and braided to support community school

initiatives. Additionally, the state can leverage the expertise of the Coalition for Community Schools to collect valuable resources from the field that can benefit community school practitioners. Other possibilities are to pursue opportunities to coordinate technical assistance and coaching—as is underway between Multi-Layered System of Supports and community schools—to expand access to support while also providing more comprehensive, integrated assistance or to explore streamlining program monitoring and data collection requirements to avoid duplication.

Beyond the PED, the Coalition for Community Schools can play an important role in helping to strengthen interagency coordination. The PED could leverage the expertise of current members and consider expanding representation to others whose work supports the key practices of community schools and involves engagement with other state agencies (e.g., Department of Workforce Solutions, Department of Health).

As New Mexico continues its journey toward implementing community schools, attention to these policy considerations can help to ensure community schools' long-term sustainability and positive impact on students and communities. By providing sustainable funding, strengthening the collection and use of data, expanding the capacity-building infrastructure, developing a certification or similar standards-based system for continuous improvement, and better aligning state resources to support community schools, policymakers can build a comprehensive and effective strategy for educational transformation and support all students in New Mexico's community schools to flourish.

## Appendix A: Tables

**Table A1: State Support for Community Schools**

State	Funding type	Sites served	Award (range or average)
California	Competitive grant	419 LEAs received planning grants and 1,028 schools received implementation grants  Subsequent rounds of funding will increase these totals	Planning grants: up to \$200,000 for up to 2 years Implementation grants: between \$150,000 and \$500,000 annually for up to 5 years  Extension grants (starting in 2025–26): will offer up to \$100,000 annually for 2 years after implementation grant ends  Coordination grants for county offices of education with two or more LEAs receiving funding, allocation amount determined by number of grantees in a county
Florida	Competitive grant linked to certification	36	Implementation grants: between \$150,00 and \$200,000 per year for the first 5 years  After community school certification (which takes 3–5 years), there is a gradual step-down in grant money as schools are expected to have sustainability plans in place
Illinois	Competitive grant	136 grants representing more than 684 school sites	\$323,529 per grantee during the first year; \$311,471 in second year
Maryland	School funding formula (entitlement grants)	300	\$248,833 per school in community school personnel grants, plus an average of \$539.81 (on a sliding scale) in per-pupil grant funding  Funding prioritized to schools with greater concentration of poverty
New Mexico	Competitive Grant	69	Planning grants: up to \$50,000 for 1 year Implementation grants: \$150,000 per year for 3 years  Renewal grants: amounts are determined by the department; in 2023, grants ranged between \$58,000 and \$83,600 for a fourth year
New York	School funding formula (set-aside)	240 districts statewide; over 420 schools in New York City alone, drawing on both state and local funding	Set-aside amount has increased over time; in 2022, funding per school averaged \$467,048*
Vermont	Competitive grant	16	Between \$50,000 and \$250,000 annually for 3 years (contingent on continuation applications) to each of five school districts

Source: Maier, A., & Rivera-Rodriguez, A. (2023). *State strategies for investing in community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/612.402>; California State Board of Education.

\*Data provided for New York City.



Collectively, the implementation elements in Table A2 lead to the student outcomes in Table A3. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between any single implementation indicator and an outcome. Rather, the outcome is fostered by the synergy among the various key practices that are the focus of implementation.

**Table A2: Examples of Staged Implementation Indicators of Six Key Practices**

Key Practices	Planning (Year 0)	Emerging (Years 1–2)	Maturing (Years 3–4)	Transforming (Years 5–7)	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
Powerful student and family engagement	Student and family voices are brought into the needs and assets assessment process and contribute to the shared vision and goals; assets and needs assessments include documentation of a variety of voices and perspectives.	School staff are trained in and initiate outreach to build relationships with families and students (e.g., home visits and transparent, accessible, frequent school–home communication).	Students and families frequently participate in and volunteer for school-based events, activities, classes, and programs.	Students and families initiate school and community projects, clubs, and events and work together with educators on school- and community-related issues.	
Collaborative leadership, shared power and voice	A representative leadership team is established and school community members are oriented to the community schools strategy; a strategic plan is co-developed by students, families, school staff, and community members.	Youth, family, and teacher leadership structures are developed as venues to cultivate power and voice.	Formal and informal opportunities for shared power and decision-making occur regularly and serve as spaces for students, educators, families, and community partners to work together.	Students, families, educators, and community partners are co-leaders in planning, continuous improvement, developing initiatives, governance, and decision-making.	
Expanded, culturally enriched learning opportunities	Baseline data are collected on the number and type of expanded learning opportunities available, including attendance.	Expanded learning opportunities are added or improved according to the strategic plan.	The school offers robust expanded and culturally enriched learning opportunities that match the needs and desires of students and families.	Students and families are involved in designing and leading expanded, culturally enriched learning opportunities.	
Rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction	Baseline data identifying strengths, barriers, and opportunities for growth informs areas of focus and benchmarks to track rigorous, community-connected instruction throughout the school.	Teachers are offered multiple opportunities for professional development focused on culturally responsive and community-connected instruction.	Teachers incorporate inquiry-based learning, peer-to-peer collaboration, and community-connected, culturally responsive instruction into their regular classroom practice.	Students, teachers, families, community members, and community partners regularly collaborate on and co-plan community-based learning opportunities in and out of the classroom.	

Culture of belonging, safety, and care	Baseline data related to school climate and culture are collected and analyzed, then used to inform the strategic plan.	Policies and structures for whole-school restorative practices are established and paired with professional learning opportunities for teachers and staff.	Restorative circles are a common practice across classrooms and advisories, and students, teachers, and administrators have a shared vocabulary to use when discussing harm and repairing relationships.	Deep relationships and shared responsibility between and among students, teachers, and administrators allow for addressing root causes of conflict and drive non-exclusionary resolutions.
Integrated systems of support	A needs and assets assessment is conducted related to community health, well-being, and basic needs.	Students and families are referred to, scheduling, and attending appointments and have access to basic needs, including food and medical care.	Systems for referring and tracking family uptake of services and opportunities are in place, and that data is used to maintain and/or adapt partnerships that best serve the school community.	Quality services are streamlined, accessible, and meet the well-being and academic needs of students and families.
<b>STAGED STUDENT INDICATORS</b>				

Source: Adapted from Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Outcomes and indicators for community schools: A guide for implementers and evaluators*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>

**Table A3: Examples of Staged Student Indicators**

Planning (Year 0)	Emerging (Years 1–2)	Maturing (Years 3–4)	Transforming (Years 5–7)
Baseline levels of key student outcomes are collected and/or analyzed.	Feeling welcome, safe, and happy at school; having trusting relationship with adults and peers; disciplinary incidents; chronic absence; physical health needs addressed (vision, dental, etc.)		
		Course enrollment and completion; grade advancement; grades; on track for graduation; attendance, basic needs addressed (hunger and housing insecurity, etc.); mental health needs addressed (trauma, interpersonal conflict)	
		Steady or stabilized enrollment, academic growth, test scores, graduation rates, postsecondary acceptance and enrollment; physical and mental well-being	

Source: Adapted from Community Schools Forward (2023). *Outcomes and indicators: A guide for implementers and evaluators*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>

**Table A4: Summary of Certification Features**

Features	Center for Community Schools, University of Central Florida	Georgia Department of Education	Linked Learning Alliance
Description	Certification process to recognize the Community Partnership Schools model: community schools designed around the four pillars, four core partners, and four dedicated staff.	Developmental process housed in the Office of Whole Child Supports (OWCS) to recognize Georgia’s Whole Child Model: community schools that are designed around the four pillars and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community model.	Certification process to recognize Linked Learning pathways: industry-themed pathways that integrate a college preparatory curriculum with career and technical education, with an emphasis on equity and comprehensive support services.
# of schools served	36 total (2–11 per year)	Piloted with 10 schools (2022).	~125 certified pathways
Costs and funding for schools	No costs to schools for participating in the certification process. Since 2019, UCF has received yearly appropriations in state funding to provide planning and implementation grants to schools participating in the certification process. In 2022, they received \$7.1 million.	No cost to participating schools; however, districts or schools expected to pay for a coordinator salary at each school. No state funding is provided to participating or certified schools.	Fees of \$749 (Silver) and \$2,395 (Gold) are paid by the school to the Linked Learning Alliance. Since 2013, state funding through competitive grants to LEAs has been available to support college and career pathways, including the Linked Learning approach.
Role of state department of education	The state department of education has no formal role in the certification process.	The state department of education piloted the process with designated staff within the OWCS.	While there has been some state competitive grant funding available to support Linked Learning schools, the state department of education has no formal role in the certification process.
Certifying agency	University	State agency	Nonprofit
Certification process/types	Single certification track that includes a planning year, readiness checks, and affirmations or re-certifications.	Developmental, with a benchmark-based rubric and a non-time-based progression. Schools recognized each time they move to the next phase.	Two tiered (Silver and Gold)
Certification timeline	5 years to initial certification, 1 planning year, readiness check at year 3	Developmental; however, initial stages expected to occur in the first 2 years	Unspecified, but typically happens in 3–4 years
Data and monitoring	Data and evidence are collected in support of self-ratings. These data are collected yearly, for progress monitoring, and officially in the third (readiness check) and fifth year (certification). Center assistance is available throughout. Observations and focus groups conducted by the UCF team of reviewers, along with the self-review, are the data evaluated for certification.	Schools collected data on benchmarks, impact, local goals, and eventually outcomes, via the rubric and associated tools. Data submitted first to the district manager, who then shared with the state. Observations conducted by the district manager to assess impact and quality of services using guidelines from the OWCS.	For both Silver Certification and Gold Certification, evidence is submitted through a virtual platform, and feedback is provided to promote learning and set goals. Gold certification requires a site visit that includes a presentation, observations, and focus groups from a Linked Learning lead evaluator and district staff.
Technical assistance/Continuous improvement	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sources: Linked Learning Alliance. <https://www.linkedlearning.org/>; University of Central Florida Center for Community Schools. <https://ccie.ucf.edu/communityschools/>; personal correspondence with Georgia Department of Education; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ((2023). Whole school, whole community, whole child (WSCC). <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscs/index.htm>

# Appendix B: University of Central Florida Center for Community Schools Standards



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### STANDARDS

To become a UCF-Certified Community Partnership School, schools must meet 12 standards which are listed below and explained in subsequent pages of this document.

- STANDARD 1 Partnership
- STANDARD 2 Collaborative Leadership, Governance, and Organizational Structure,
- STANDARD 3 Foundational Principles
- STANDARD 4 Staffing
- STANDARD 5 Integrated Community Partnership School Framework
- STANDARD 6 Expanded Learning Opportunities
- STANDARD 7 Comprehensive Wellness Supports
- STANDARD 8 Family and Community Engagement
- STANDARD 9 Volunteering
- STANDARD 10 University Assistance
- STANDARD 11 Evaluation
- STANDARD 12 Sustainability

### FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICES

The framework elements of the Community Partnership Schools™ model are expressed in specific standard indicators categorized as “Fundamental Practices”. These practices must be in place at an “Implementing” (2) level for a Community Partnership School to be considered eligible for certification.

<b>STANDARD 1 PARTNERSHIP.</b> The Community Partnership School establishes and maintains a strong and committed partnership.	
1.1	We have developed and maintain core partnerships between a school district, a not-for-profit/community-based provider, a university/college, a healthcare provider (may include others).
1.2	We have a written agreement (MOU) outlining how we work together.
<b>STANDARD 2 COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND STRUCTURE.</b> The Community Partnership School operates effectively under a shared collaborative leadership,	
2.1	We have created a Community Partnership School cabinet with a shared governance model comprising of our core partners.
2.2	At least one community member, a Community Leadership Council participant/chair, provides the voice of the community on our cabinet.
2.3	A parent sits on our cabinet representing our parents’ voice.
2.4	A parent or student sits on the cabinet representing our students’ voice.
2.5	Our principal has veto-power.
2.6	Our Community Partnership School Community Leadership Council is active and meets consistently.



2.7	Our Community Partnership School Operations Team is active and meets consistently.
<b>STANDARD 4 STAFFING.</b> The Community Partnership School core staff works effectively by maintaining a high standard of service to the school.	
4.1	We have a core Community Partnership School staff including a director and members responsible for coordinating family and community engagement, expanded day learning opportunities, and comprehensive wellness supports.
4.2	Our Community Partnership School core staff (regardless of employing agency) are onboarded and oriented to the Community Partnership Schools™ model, foundational principles, and to the responsibilities and expectations of their role in the school.
4.3	Our Community Partnership Schools core staff (regardless of employing agency) align organizationally with the CPS director.
<b>STANDARD 5 INTEGRATED COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL FRAMEWORK.</b> Our Community Partnership School staff, programs and services are fully integrated into the school.	
5.1	In addition to informal communication, the principal and CPS director meet formally at least one time every two weeks, on average.
5.2	Administrators and teachers are oriented to relevant CPS efforts at a minimum of once per school quarter.
<b>STANDARD 6 EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES.</b> The Community Partnership School delivers high quality expanded learning opportunity programs and services that align with the collective vision of the Community Partnership School and to the needs of the students, families, and the community.	
6.1	We have staffing that reports to the CPS Director dedicated to coordinating and managing expanded learning opportunities.
6.2	We have written agreements with each of our expanded learning providers.
6.3	Our CPS collects and analyzes expanded learning outcome data and utilizes for evaluation purposes.
<b>STANDARD 7 COMPREHENSIVE WELLNESS SUPPORTS.</b> The Community Partnership School offers quality comprehensive wellness support services to students.	
7.1	All students, regardless of ability to pay, have timely access to appropriate medical treatment by a mid-level practitioner without substantial loss to instructional time (note: the actual time frames for treatment and/or what constitutes a reasonable loss of instructional time are directly related to the seriousness of the medical issue).
7.2	All students, regardless of ability to pay, have timely access to appropriate dental treatment by a dentist without substantial loss to instructional time (note: the actual time frames for treatment and/or what constitutes a reasonable loss of instructional time are directly related to the seriousness of the dental issue).



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7.3	All students, regardless of ability to pay, have timely access to appropriate behavioral health services by a clinically licensed practitioner without substantial loss to instructional time (note: the actual time frames for services and/or what constitutes a reasonable loss of instructional time are directly related to the nature of the presenting problem).
7.4	We have staffing that reports to the CPS director dedicated to coordinating and managing referrals for wellness support services.
7.5	Our CPS plan demonstrates that our wellness support services are embedded into the operations of the school to ensure students have school-based access to coordinated services.
7.6	We connect families to community wellness support resources not available within the school.
<b>STANDARD 8 FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.</b> Active family and community engagement is strong at our school	
8.1	We have staffing that reports to the Community Partnership School director dedicated to coordinating family and community involvement.
8.2	We have a family/parent resource room on the school campus.
<b>STANDARD 10 UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE ASSISTANCE.</b> The university/college partner activates and connects institutional assets to support and sustain the Community Partnership School.	
10.1	Our university/college representative consistently serves on the cabinet.
10.2	Our university/college representative consistently serves on our operations team.
<b>STANDARD 11 EVALUATION.</b> A comprehensive evaluation system is in place offering a range of data that is used to guide continuous improvement.	
11.1	Measurable goals are established by our Community Partnership School cabinet.
11.2	Formative and summative systems of evaluation are utilized to assess Community Partnership School efforts and outcomes.
11.3	Our evaluation processes drive continuous improvements in the delivery and/or quality of programs and/or services offered through the Community Partnership School.
<b>STANDARD 12 SUSTAINABILITY.</b> A strong continuing sustainability plan/process is evident which ensures the long-term continuance of key Community Partnership School programs, services and positions.	
12.1	Our Community Partnership School cabinet maintains at minimum a one-year-in-advance funding plan to ensure consistent programs throughout the school year.

Source: University of Central Florida Center for Community Schools. (n.d.). UCF Certification. <https://ccie.ucf.edu/communityschools/certification/>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Maier, A., & Rivera-Rodriguez, A. (2023). *State strategies for investing in community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/612.402>
- <sup>2</sup> Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools: An evidence-based school improvement strategy*. Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center. Kids count, 2022 shows that 79% of students in New Mexico come from homes with incomes low enough to qualify them for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program.
- <sup>3</sup> Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, O. (2017). *Community schools: An evidence-based school improvement strategy*. Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center. A cost-benefit analysis of a community school coordinator in New Mexico found a return on investment of about \$7. See Bloodworth, M. R., & Horner, A. C. (2019). *Return on investment of a community school coordinator*. Apex, ABC Community School Partnership.
- <sup>4</sup> *Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico* Decision & Order (No. D-101-CV-201400793; D-101-CV-2014-02224). (July 20, 2018).
- <sup>5</sup> ABC Community School Partnership, Communities in Schools of New Mexico, and National Education Association–New Mexico received congressionally directed spending secured by U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich to support community school implementation in the state. LPI’s research is conducted as part of this broader project.
- <sup>6</sup> Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools: An evidence-based school improvement strategy*. Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center.
- <sup>7</sup> NMSA 1978, § 22-32 (2019); Oakes, J., & Espinoza, D. (2020). *Community schools the New Mexico way*. Learning Policy Institute.
- <sup>8</sup> New Mexico Public Education Department. (2023). The 6 key practices of the community school strategy. <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/cs-and-elt/community-schools/key-practices/>
- <sup>9</sup> Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Framework: Essentials for community school transformation*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>
- <sup>10</sup> Germain, E., Oakes, J., & Maier, A. (2023). *Theory of action for community school transformation*. Learning Policy Institute.
- <sup>11</sup> LPI analysis of Legislative Education Study Committee post-session reviews. See [https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LESC/Session\\_Information](https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LESC/Session_Information).
- <sup>12</sup> New Mexico Public Education Department. (2023). *NMPED community schools award list*. <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/community-schools/grant/awards/>
- <sup>13</sup> H.B. 589. 54th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Nm. 2019). <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/19%20Regular/bills/house/HB0589.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> H.M. 44. 56th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Nm. 2023). <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/23%20Regular/final/HM044.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2023). *FSCS grant awards*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/school-choice-improvement-programs/full-service-community-schools-program-fscs/awards/>
- <sup>16</sup> This is the funding received by ABC Community School Partnership, Communities in Schools of New Mexico, and National Education Association–New Mexico to support community school implementation in the state, part of which is supporting LPI’s research.
- <sup>17</sup> Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools: An evidence-based school improvement strategy*. Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center. [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community\\_Schools\\_Evidence\\_Based\\_Strategy\\_BRIEF.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Evidence_Based_Strategy_BRIEF.pdf); Covelli, L., Engberg, J., & Opper, I. M. (2022). *Leading indicators of long-term success in community schools: Evidence from New York City*. (EdWorkingPaper: 22-669). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://doi.org/10.26300/59q2-ek65>
- <sup>18</sup> Maier, A., & Rivera-Rodriguez, A. (2023). *State strategies for investing in community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/612.402>
- <sup>19</sup> Maryland Out of School Time (MOST) Network. (n.d.). *Blueprint for Maryland’s future*. <https://www.mostnetwork.org/blueprint-for-marylands-future/>
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- <sup>22</sup> Deich, S., & Neary, M. (n.d.). *Financing community schools: A framework for growth and sustainability*. Partnership for the Future of Learning. <https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/assets/downloads/Financing-Community-Schools-Brief.pdf>; Kostyo, S., & Miller, T. (2023). *Federal funding sources for community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/federal-funding-sources-community-schools>
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- <sup>24</sup> SWIFT. (May 31, 2023). *A community learning exchange on collaborative leadership*.
- <sup>25</sup> NMSA 1978 § 22-32 (2019).
- <sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Outcomes and indicators for community schools: A guide for implementers and evaluators*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>
- <sup>27</sup> Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Outcomes and indicators for community schools: A guide for implementers and evaluators*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>
- <sup>28</sup> For more information, see the NM School DASH resource library. <https://dashlibrary.ped.state.nm.us/>
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