



“Community Schools,” although becoming a more frequent term within education reform conversations, is still a regularly misunderstood concept. In SFUSD, “community schools” has been used in reference to School Improvement Grant funds, Community School Coordinator positions, various types of school enrichment and afterschool partnerships with community based organizations, or even more broadly, about efforts to engage local community interests, businesses, organizations and families.

The challenge remains of having a shared understanding of exactly **WHAT** a community school is, **HOW** it is different from a “regular” school, and **WHO** needs to be a part of it in order for it to work.

## A Basic Definition:

A community school is a **strategy** to organize the resources of the school district and the community so that students succeed in school.

A community school **IS NOT** short hand for a department, family engagement or health program, staff, fund source, or a zone affiliation. When Superintendent Carranza states “every school should be a community school,” he is not talking about a new model, nor is it a strategy just for low-performing schools or lower-resourced communities. What Superintendent Carranza is referencing is the expectation that this is how “school should be done” in SFUSD – in partnership with educators, students, families and community.

A community school:

- **IS about consistently great instruction**, where multiple people and efforts support formal and informal learning – *i.e. high quality and engaging academic, enrichment, and leadership experiences;*
- **IS about a safe, welcoming, and restorative learning environments**, where engaged and motivated teachers and learners share responsibility, in partnership with families and community, for student success – *i.e. family engagement isn’t about an open house or volunteer hours, it is about feeling valued;*
- **IS about creating and supporting collaborative professional habits of mind and practice** so that various adults can work together and across program areas to support the healthy development of the WHOLE student – *i.e. attending to learning across cognitive, social, emotional, physical, moral, civic development, not allocating responsibility according to program area;*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Commitment to student success:** Teaching and learning do not happen in a vacuum. In order for schools to be successful, both teachers and learners must be supported to be ready to learn, and ready to teach.
- **Strong relationships and partnerships:** SFUSD and community partners (like community-based organizations, District and City departments, families and students) work together to share resources and expertise in designing and implementing comprehensive programs and strategies that ultimately support student learning.
- **Shared accountability for results:** Clear, mutually agreed-upon results drive the work of community schools. Multiple measures and data sources allow stakeholders – including school leadership and staff – to regularly assess their programs, talk about their collective impact, and gauge progress toward results;
- **High expectations for all:** Community schools are organized to support learning. Children, youth, and adults are expected to teach and learn at high standards;
- **Build on the community’s strengths:** Community schools know their communities and marshal the assets of the entire school and community— including the people who live and work there, local organizations, and the school.

- **IS about having clear processes and structures** so the right people, are working with the right kids, to get the right results – *i.e. the operational practices that brings a “Response to Intervention” framework to life.*

**In many ways**, these ideas are not new or revolutionary – but given the significant challenges facing public schools, they are hard to do well. Consider the following, from *Whole Child, Whole School: Applying Theory to Practice in a Community School*:

**Designing a community school requires substantive changes in the how schools are typically organized and the ways in which they operate.** *In planning for successful implementation, one should always bear in mind that often failures in school reform have resulted from a lack of fidelity to the conceptual, philosophical, and pedagogical underpinnings intended to fundamentally change the way schools operate and the behaviors of the professionals who work in them (Fullan, 2007)*

**The specific goals and ingredients of a community school strategy:**

Short Term Goals

- All students are ready to learn; teachers are ready to teach all students;
- Students and teachers feel safe and supported, and attend school consistently;
- Students are actively engaged in high-quality learning opportunities that include cognitive (core academic), social, emotional, moral and civic learning;
- Families are actively involved in their children’s education;
- Shared goals and vision across all school stakeholders, and clarity about how all programs and staff contribute to achieving those goals.



Long Term Goals

- Students succeed academically;
- Students are healthy: physically, socially and emotionally;
- Students live and learn in a safe, supportive, & stable environment.

SFUSD’s ultimate goal is that all students graduate from high school, ready for college, career and community. Given that, a community school strategy is fundamentally about **creating the conditions within the school community** to optimally support this goal.

The strategy recognizes that there are multiple factors that contribute to students’ readiness to learn, and teachers’ readiness to teach. A successful community school approach articulates a results-based vision, and maps out the short-term and long-term goals that all members of the school community share responsibility for.

In order to achieve these short and long-term goals, there are **programmatic commitments** that are central to a successful community school strategy:

- **High Quality Instruction:** The school has a core instructional program with qualified and supported teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for teachers and learners.
- **Expanded Learning Opportunities:** Students are motivated and engaged in learning both in school and in community settings, during and after school and in the summer.
- **Wellness:** The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- **Family Engagement:** There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff. Families are invited and supported to actively engage in their student’s education.
- **Culture and Climate:** The entire school community shares responsibility to promote a safe, supportive and respectful climate for learning, so students can develop their assets and talents, form positive relationships with peers and adults, and serve as resources to their community.
- **Alignment, Coordination, and Integration:** Beyond just co-location, thinking through how school and community resources can enhance and integrate each other’s work – not just a coordinated hand-off of responsibility.