American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Aligning Systems with Communities to Advance Equity through Shared Measurement:

The Community Schools Initiative

Lead organization:	Coalition for Community Schools
Lead system:	Education
Partner systems:	Health, government, philanthropy, commerce, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, social services, occupational development, sports and recreation
Location:	National with local adaptations
Population	Students (from kindergarten to high school), families, community members
Year founded:	1992
Measurement:	Specific to local context. Examples include school readiness, academic success, student engagement in learning and the community, student physical and emotional health, and family involvement in children's education.

How did the initiative get started?

The Coalition for Community Schools is a national alliance of more than 170 organizations that advocate for community schools. A founding member of the Coalition, Children's Aid, started its first community school in New York City in 1992. Widespread interest in the initiative has led to more than 7,500 community schools nationwide.

A Community Schools Initiative (CSI) supports student success by improving student learning, supporting families, and creating healthier communities. This initiative uses cross-systems partnerships to align school, family, and community resources under a network of "community schools." Instead of implementing a prescribed set of programs, each community school determines the programs relevant to stakeholders' collective goals and adapts a national model to the local context. For example, schools, state agencies (e.g., health, education, commerce), families, and community-based organizations work to identify goals that address the concerns of local communities and then mobilize resources to address them. Most community schools include four features: a strong instructional curriculum with learning opportunities, integrated student supports, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership.

How do systems work together?

Multiple systems, including health, social services, academics, and occupational development, form partnerships to help plan, implement, and maintain CSIs. Partners establish shared vision, goals, and processes for decision making and accountability. CSIs can differ in governance structures, but coordination between collaborative entities is critical for community schools to align their efforts.

Systems share governance under a "collaborative leadership structure." CSI leadership structures represent collaborating partners. For example, the United Way of Salt Lake's CSI in Utah is guided by a Promise Partnership Regional Council made up of education, business, government, and nonprofit leaders. The council aligns the initiative's activities and creates positive peer pressure to maintain commitment from partners. Rather than organizing themselves around a specific program implementation or funding, they instead organize themselves in "collaborative action networks" around specific goals, such as improving third-grade reading scores. *"The 'who' [of the collaborative structure] can vary, and 'how many' can vary,"* explains Jose Muñoz, director of the Coalition for Community Schools. *"The form of it can develop into advisory groups and councils, and it can be more prescriptive."* CSIs intentionally work to ensure that the people most affected by the change the initiative seeks to create have defined roles and opportunities for leadership and participation within the collaborative action networks.

CSI partners generally organize themselves through three distinct structures to share leadership:

- *School-site leadership* includes the school principals, teachers, resource coordinators, and a community school director, who plan and implement the community schools' goals. The director serves as a bridge between the schools and the community, manages daily activities at each school site, and coordinates between partners.
- *Community-wide leadership* includes external partners and agencies that work with community schools, such as school districts, local government, businesses, faith-based organizations, and United Way chapters. Community leadership helps partners build a network and aligns resources with community school goals.
- *An intermediary agency, working group, or advisory council* has representation from all system partners and serves as an executive body with oversight, management, and coordination of a CSI. It facilitates a continuous flow of information among partners and keeps the initiative on track toward achieving shared goals.

Systems build capacity in key functional areas. All CSI leadership entities work together to build capacity around finance and resource development, alignment and integration, supportive policy and practice, and professional development and technical assistance. For example, the Family League of Baltimore, a partner to Baltimore City Community Schools, launched a summer institute, and in 2014 provided 113 professional development opportunities to train community partners new to community school partnerships. Training included information on youth development best practices and providing trauma-informed care for students.

How does the initiative use shared measurement?

Measurement galvanizes partners to align. Abe Fernandez, director of the National Center for Community Schools, describes how measurement uncovers important issues and encourages partners to collaborate: *"I've seen examples of schools where they've had a partner in a building for years and years and have never collaborated until they've seen a number [a measure], and they are like, 'Wait a minute, you're telling me that 32% of our kids are chronically absent? How could this be?' And suddenly it stirs up a desire to do things differently."* Community school directors meet regularly and examine data with partners at their school sites. They analyze and present data to teachers, parents, or community partners to support data-driven solutions.

Measurement is also important in sustaining partnerships. Mr. Fernandez explains, *"[Progress on measures] gets people to be motivated to continue and to want to partner. They feel like there are actually things we can do, and that we are chipping away at what seemed to be these intractable issues that we*

could never do anything about. Before, I could only do anything individually and alone, or only within my lane. Now we have multiple partners working on this and figuring it out together. It [shared measurement] kind of generates some momentum that's harder to produce without those numbers to look at."

Shared measurement builds a results-based vision that defines goals and drives strategy. Community school partners examine needs assessment data to identify key issues and then develop goals to address those issues. Then partners develop indicators to measure progress toward those goals. The Coalition for Community Schools' results framework describes several broad results linked to learning, such as children's active involvement in learning and their physical, social, and emotional health. The framework also offers a set of indicators that community schools can use. Not all partners have the capacity or the infrastructure to collect data for all of the measures; therefore, interagency data-sharing agreements can help partners collaborate on outcomes such as immunization rates, test scores, attendance, or program delivery. To avoid collecting too much data, local partners define goals related to their shared vision and focus on measures related to those goals.

Once partners have defined their goals, shared measurement guides CSIs toward building the right approach for achieving those goals. For example, the United Way COMPASS CSI in Pennsylvania uses Results-Based Accountability™ planning to start with the results in mind and then map backwards to determine the services and programs needed to achieve those results. Shared measurement helps reveal the connections between factors like housing, food, health, and educational achievement, which partners otherwise might overlook when developing their action plans. Mr. Fernandez says, *"What's missing sometimes is seeing the relationship between why the kids aren't reading … it's because they have asthma and they're missing tons of school. So that's why we have to look at the relationship of all these data points and how they're telling a story about what's going on here."*

Shared measurement helps achieve accountability internally among partners and externally to funders. Community schools use the measures they collect to self-evaluate, learn, and hold their collaborative leadership accountable. Mr. Muñoz explains, *"The accountability on the partnership and the collaborative leadership itself are within the performance measures. Are we going to deliver these things? Are the numbers going in the direction we'd like it to go in? Are the percentages going in the direction we would like it to go in? And so together, they hold themselves accountable. So, governed by qualitative and quantitative evaluation, consistent evaluation, those types of performance measures help guide the continuous improvement portion of a community school.* Measurement is also important for reporting results to funders. Positive results show funders the impact of CSIs on key outcomes such as increased attendance, improved reading proficiency, and graduation rates. This supports additional funding streams and encourages private donors to contribute.
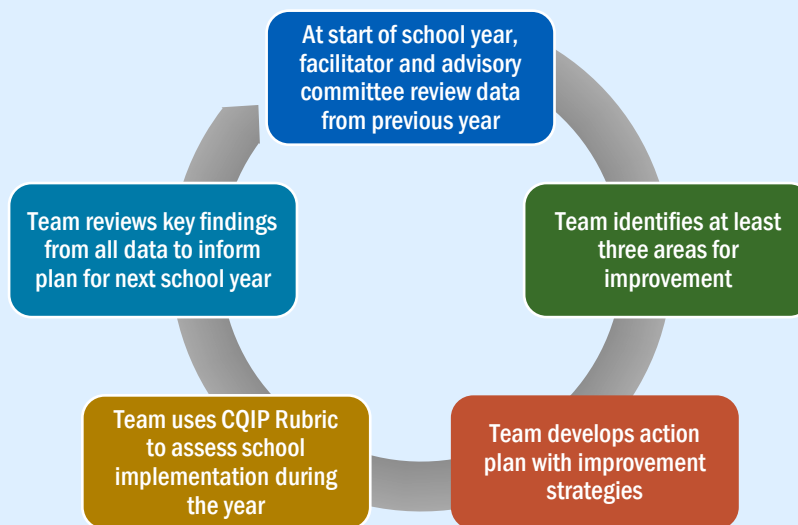
The Chicago Public Schools Community Schools Initiative (CSI) began in 2002. Today, it includes more than 200 community schools and nearly 50 lead partners. Funded by braiding federal, state, and private funds, Chicago's CSI is the third largest community school hub in the country. To offer sustained funding, in 2018, the Chicago Board of Education invested $10 million to fund 20 new community schools under the Sustainable Community Schools Initiative.

Chicago Public Schools CSI uses a Continuous Quality Improvement Process (CQIP) to streamline measurement for shared goals, strategy, implementation, and accountability. The CQIP implementation team includes a lead partner, community school advisory committee, CSI program coordinator, resource coordinator, school administrator, and CQIP facilitator. The CQIP streamlines key milestones and integrates several community school assessment measures, such as each school site's self-assessment quality improvement rubrics, Youth Program Quality Assessments, and ongoing internal and external evaluations.

A CQIP implementation guide outlines the process, key activities, and best practices for quality improvement.

At start of school year, facilitator and advisory committee review data from previous year

Team identifies at least three areas for improvement

Team develops action plan with improvement strategies

Team uses CQIP Rubric to assess school implementation during the year

Team reviews key findings from all data to inform plan for next school year

How does the initiative address equity?

Equity is a core principle of CSIs. By design, community schools are inclusive and offer all students and their families a fair chance to close gaps in learning, development, health, career readiness, and employment. By investing in addressing resource scarcity, increasing educational achievement, and improving prospects for economic mobility, the initiative purposefully addresses root causes of socio-economic inequities. Since CSIs typically are located in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, they prioritize creating opportunities for training and job placement, for both high school students and community residents.

Community schools disaggregate data to identify inequities by gender, race, and ethnicity on key outcome measures. Disaggregation makes inequities visible so that leaders can strategize policies and programs to address them. For example, data showed that Black boys in the Oakland Unified School District community schools were more likely to be suspended than their White peers. In response, leaders used

an equity-centered approach to adopt restorative policies and practices. The approach successfully reduced the district's suspension rate by 48% for Black boys from 2010 to 2019.[1] [2]

The CSI's collaborative leadership structure encourages equitable representation of system partners and leverages relationships between them. Advisory councils form a platform for diverse system partners to voice their opinions and lead solutions. For instance, the John Hancock College Prep High School in Chicago offers a Parent University that includes workshops to build skills and encourage parent leadership and engagement. Parents serve on the Parent Advisory Council and are responsible for designing and implementing the school's Title I program. Mr. Muñoz of the Coalition for Community Schools explains, *"Since equity is a value, you want to first include the people most affected by whatever data changes you want to make. Those people who are most affected or could affect [the data], they are involved in the decision-making process. Then you want to include others who are in a position to remove barriers or create opportunities for people to be better off. That happens at a neighborhood level and at a systems level."*

Community schools also offer capacity-building opportunities for community members. Mr. Fernandez explains, *"I think increasingly, we're seeing this [community schools] strategy as an equity strategy, as a social justice strategy. We are adding more and more offerings around [diversity, equity, and inclusion] for community members, for partners, for school leaders, and school staff, to begin to reflect on the fact that the kids aren't broken. So often, this idea that the kids are the problem ends up creating layers and layers of injustice that are so hard to navigate. We have to dismantle that and build systems that actually work a lot better and do not put kids in a position where they are seen sort of as the pathology of what's wrong with our school environment."*

How does the initiative engage community members?

Community engagement is integral to a community school's success and sustainability. Community members participate in planning, developing, and implementing the initiative. Mr. Muñoz says, *"So, if you really want to get down to the nuts and bolts to achieve equity, you're going to have to engage that population, not just engage them and find out what's wrong, but engage them and encourage them to participate in the design, implementation, and accountability. But also, everybody agrees that in order to dismantle any kind of oppression, you have to ask those who are oppressed within that number. Then you have to flip the power dynamic from them being considered oppressed to them being considered leaders. And the only way you can do that is through consistent communication and intentional engagement."*

Community members contribute to designing needs and asset assessments, and they help determine shared goals and measurement indicators. Community members are represented at both the school-site and community-wide leadership levels, and also as the direct beneficiaries of CSI programs and services.

Engagement with community members helps system partners assimilate in an ecosystem of change within the community school to meaningfully implement changes that are acceptable to community members. This serves to balance power among funders, CSI implementers, and the communities served.

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[1] https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/OUSD-RJ%20Report%20revised%20Final.pdf

[2] https://edutransformationcenter.withgoogle.com/resource/5643905261371392

Lessons Learned

- Keys to CSI success include formalizing relationships between partners, designing organizational structures in the initiative, and developing collaborative roles for partners to have open dialogue and share goals, governance, accountability, financing, and data.

- Partnership alignment and integration at all stages of the initiative are weaved into other key functions of the CSI leadership: result-based vision, strategic financing, technical assistance, community engagement, and accountability.

- Streamlining measures among partners supports alignment and data-driven decision making in which each stage of the initiative's development builds on data from the previous stage.

- Technical assistance supports capacity building within the community, which strengthens community engagement. Moreover, it helps sustain the initiative by empowering partners to expand their skills and continue their efforts in the CSI.

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