

## Is it a Community School *OR* is it a School with a Community School Initiative?

Our Center has long supported the concept of Community Schools.\*

At the same time, we have cautioned that the prevailing trend is to establish “Community Schools” as *initiatives at a school*. Such initiatives rarely evolve into the type of transformed school we have described and that is highlighted in documents such as the *Community Schools Playbook* \*\* and in the current webinar series provided by the Coalition for Community Schools and the U.S. Department of Education.\*\*\*

As initiatives, Community Schools usually are designed in ways that pursue some of a school’s priorities but do not end the *marginalization* of student/learning supports in school improvement policy and practice. And in some instances, they contribute to increasing the *fragmentation* of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. And the emphasis on collaboration often goes astray producing *counterproductive competition* between Community School “directors/coordinators” and principals and between community professionals and a school’s student/learning support staff.

We worry that the funding for the current push will mainly reify the trend to define the initiative as primarily a “community-based effort to coordinate and integrate ... services” which will limit their evolution.

To facilitate the evolution of the Community School movement, we stress focusing on system building that is pursued by (a) expanding school improvement policy from a two to a three component framework, (b) framing efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching as a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports that coalesces school and community resources, (c) reworking the operational infrastructure at schools, and (d) facilitating systemic change with a process that emphasizes sustainability.\*\*\*\*

In addition, we emphasize that key challenges related to any effort to develop productive school-home-community collaboration include (1) outreaching to a wide range of community resources, (2) adopting shared governance and functions, (3) establishing an effective and sustainable collaborative infrastructure, and (4) connecting “families” of schools to address common concerns and achieve economies of scale.

### Notes:

\*See, for example. *Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolvecomm.pdf> and *Understanding Community Schools as Collaboratives for System Building to Address Barriers and Promote Well-Being* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/communitycollab.pdf>

\*\* <https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/>

\*\*\* <https://ems8.intellor.com/?do=register&t=1&p=844077>

\*\*\*\*Overviews and in-depth details of major ideas related school improvement are provided in:

- > *Improving School Improvement*
- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
- > *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

all three books can be freely accessed at [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

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**A note about a national online summit focused on unifying student/learning supports with mental health concerns fully embedded. *We are seeking your input as we plan the summit .***

Click on the URL for the brief article indicated below.

On p. 3 you will find the first set of input we are seeking.

**Reversing the Fragmentation of Student/Learning Supports:  
*Are You Part of the Problem?***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summer2022.pdf>

Please feel free to share with other leaders.

We look forward to your input.