

The 2021-22 Budget: Community Schools

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Background

Community Schools Model Has Been One Approach to Improve Outcomes for Low-Income Students. To address factors outside of school that can affect student success, a growing number of school districts across the country have implemented the community schools model. Researchers have identified four key features of a fully implemented community schools model: (1) integrated student support, such as on-site mental and physical health care; (2) family and community engagement; (3) collaborative leadership and practice; and (4) extended learning time and opportunities, such as after school care and summer programs. Though many traditional schools may incorporate one or two of these elements—such as by offering some wraparound services—a fully implemented community schools model treats all of these elements as core functions.

The 2020-21 Budget Provided \$45 Million One-Time Federal Funding to Expand Existing Community Schools. The funding was provided to create the California Community Schools Partnership Program. Trailer legislation directed the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to develop an application, with the approval of the executive director of the State Board of Education, by November 1, 2020. Grants are to be awarded on a competitive basis to selected local education agencies (LEAs)—school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools—to support and expand existing community schools. Grants must be prioritized for applicants based on the following criteria:

- Serve high-poverty schools where at least 80 percent of students are low income.
- Demonstrate need for expanded access to integrated services.

- Commit to partner in a consortium with other schools or county agencies.
- Have committed matching funds for pupil services.
- Have a plan for sustaining community school services after grant expiration.
- Have cosignatories from partner government agencies, such as county public health, county health, and county mental health agencies.

Grantees can use the funding to coordinate and provide wraparound services (such as physical and mental health) on school sites, and train community school staff to provide student supports. The grant funds must be spent by September 30, 2022. The SPI is required to provide a comprehensive evaluation report to the Governor and the Legislature by December 31, 2025 on the impact and effectiveness of the grant program. Grantees must commit to providing program data to the California Department of Education (CDE), and to participating in the overall program evaluation.

One Percent of Community Schools Funding Set Aside for Technical Assistance. Trailer legislation adopted as part of the 2020-21 budget package allows the SPI to set aside 1 percent of the funding (\$450,000) to provide technical assistance to potential applicants, as well as provide program oversight and technical assistance to grantees. As part of the oversight, this funding can also be used toward the comprehensive report that the SPI must provide to the Governor and the Legislature by 2025.

CDE in Process of Granting Awards. This past fall, CDE released a request for applications on October 30, 2020 and asked LEAs to submit applications by December 4, 2020. As part of its technical assistance, CDE hosted two webinars in November that provided an overview of the grant

program and answered applicants' questions. At the time of this publication, CDE is in the process of reviewing applications, with selected grantees expected to be announced some time in February 2021. CDE indicated that applicants requested a combined \$168 million—significantly more than the amount of funding available. Grants will be provided to awardees by April 2021. Schools that applied individually can receive up to \$1 million. Those who applied as part of a consortium of schools can receive up to \$500,000 per school, but no more than \$3 million combined per consortium. Grantees are required to spend the funds by September 30, 2022, and report to CDE annually through 2023.

Governor's Proposal

Provides \$265 Million One-Time Proposition 98 Funding to Establish and Expand Existing Community Schools. The Governor's budget includes \$265 million one-time Proposition 98 funding to provide additional grants for community schools. The Governor's proposal is nearly identical to the community schools grant established in the 2020-21 budget, with a few exceptions. Most notably, in addition to providing funding for existing community schools, this funding can be awarded to those seeking to establish new community schools. However, applicants would be prioritized using the same criteria as in the first round. The length of time available for spending grant funds also differs. Under the Governor's proposal, the new round of grants would be available until June 30, 2026—providing grantees about four years to spend the funding. In contrast, grantees receiving awards in the current year have about a year and a half to spend the funds. As with the first round of funding, the SPI can set aside up to 1 percent of the total funding proposed (\$2.7 million) to provide technical assistance to potential applicants and oversight and technical assistance to grantees. Grantees awarded funding under this second round of grants would also be evaluated as part of the SPI's comprehensive report required in the first round of grants.

Assessment

Community Schools Are Associated With Improved Outcomes... Formal evaluations of

community schools tend to find positive results for student and school outcomes, such as higher attendance and graduation rates, narrower academic achievement gaps as measured by standardized tests, and decreases in instances of disciplinary incidents. By prioritizing grants for high-poverty schools, the proposal prioritizes the grants for LEAs that would most benefit from implementing such a model. In turn, these LEAs would be able to provide comprehensive services and supports for their high-needs students.

...But Implementation Can Be Challenging.

Although adopting a community schools model can lead to improved outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students with the greatest needs, successful adoption requires fundamental changes that can be a complicated for LEAs to implement. Experts say the following elements are critical for successful implementation:

- ***Community Partnerships.*** The lead educational agency behind the implementation of a successful community school may spend a year or more developing its implementation strategy before putting it into action, as well as establishing strong relationships with potential service providers and community partners.
- ***Funding.*** Community schools typically require a variety of long-term funding streams. This can include public funding sources, such as reimbursement for health care services from Medi-Cal, as well as private philanthropic support. Because community schools frequently rely on philanthropic support, establishing a sustainable community school in a region where relatively few nonprofits or private foundations operate may be more difficult.
- ***Support.*** Researchers emphasize that successfully implementing the community school model requires a substantial amount of technical assistance—sometimes over the course of several years. LEAs without prior experience operating community schools may need help learning how to develop external partnerships, collaborate with other public agencies, identify ongoing funding streams,

and rebuild existing governance structures to align with the community schools model.

Technical Assistance for First Round Still Being Developed. With the exception of hosting webinars to inform potential applicants about the grant, CDE has not yet provided technical assistance to applicants or grantees. Rather, CDE has indicated they are in conversation with one of their existing technical assistance contractors to begin providing assistance to the first round of community school grantees, as well as to complete the required report to the Legislature. As part of these conversations, CDE expects to come to an agreement on the specific technical assistance the partner will conduct.

Second Round of Grantees Will Likely Need Greater Support. Given CDE does not yet have a plan for providing technical assistance to the first round of grantees, it is not possible to determine whether the level of technical assistance is sufficient to help grantees successfully expand their community schools programs. The first round of grantees, however, were LEAs with existing community schools that were likely to have already conducted some of the more challenging aspects of implementing a community schools model, such as developing partnerships and conducting a community needs assessment. By contrast, the second round of grantees will include LEAs that are new to the community schools model. They are likely to need more support during the application process and after receiving a grant award. Since existing community schools already provide some level of services and supports to their students, we think the proposed grant program would have the greatest statewide benefit if it provided sufficient support to address the needs of LEAs that do not currently have a community schools model.

Prioritization Favors Applicants With Existing Community Schools. The Governor's proposal would create one application process that would include LEAs interested in establishing new community schools, as well as those interested in expanding their existing community schools. In addition, the proposal requires the SPI to prioritize applicants that have taken initial steps to implement a community schools model, such as partnering

with other agencies and creating a long-term plan for financially sustaining their community schools when grant funds expire. This prioritization criteria would likely work against new programs and result in existing programs receiving the bulk of new grant funds. This would limit the effectiveness of the grant program in expanding the community schools model to benefit a greater number of students across state.

Recommendations

Set Specific Expectations for Technical Assistance. Given the need for technical assistance in developing a successful community schools model—particularly for those establishing new community schools—we recommend the Legislature modify the proposal to set clear and specific expectations for the type of technical assistance that prospective applicants and grantees will receive. At a minimum, we recommend the state technical assistance be available to assist schools with (1) conducting a community needs assessment, (2) improving community engagement, (3) creating community partnerships, and (4) developing sustainable funding sources. We recommend the assistance be available for prospective applicants and grant recipients. CDE could contract with one or more entities with expertise in these areas to ensure sufficient capacity to support all interested LEAs. Clear expectations for technical assistance would particularly be beneficial for interested applicants that have less experience with implementing the community schools model.

Consider Increasing Set-Aside for Technical Assistance. To the extent the specific technical assistance requirements listed above would require spending more than 1 percent of the total grant, the Legislature could consider increasing the amount that can be set aside for technical assistance. The proposed new grant would provide about \$2.7 million for technical assistance that could be spent over four years—\$662,000 per year. This is somewhat higher than the \$450,000 available over one year under the first round of grants. To assess whether that amount is sufficient, the Legislature could ask CDE to report in the spring on whether the amount of technical assistance available in the

current year has been sufficient to address the needs of the first round of grantees.

Modify Grant Process to Benefit New Programs. To ensure grants are awarded to applicants interested in establishing new community schools, we recommend the Legislature modify the proposal to split funding into two separate grants—one for those seeking to expand existing community schools and one for applicants seeking to establish new community schools. This approach would expand the model more equitably

across the state and ensure funding can benefit communities that do not currently have the capacity to provide more comprehensive services to their students. To provide additional support for LEAs interested in establishing new community schools, the Legislature also could consider pushing back the application deadline for those seeking to establish new programs to later in the fiscal year. This would give LEAs more time to seek technical assistance and develop partnerships prior to the applications deadline.

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