

Student Success Systems & Community Schools

Mutually Reinforcing Approaches to Supporting Students

Student success systems and community schools are two frameworks for supporting students that are closely aligned in their core components and essential practices. When paired together, they form a comprehensive approach to supporting the whole child through coordinated, inclusive, and continuously improving systems.

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Student success systems are grounded in four key components: holistic, real-time, actionable data; strong, supportive relationships; strategic action planning; and student-centered mindsets that guide how adults and systems operate. Similarly, the essentials for community schools transformation emphasize integrated systems of support; a culture of belonging and safety; collaborative leadership and shared power; authentic family and student engagement; community-connected learning; and continuous improvement.

Together, these frameworks reinforce and improve one another: Community schools define what a whole-child system should include, while student success systems define how school teams work together to bring that vision to life. While student success systems provide the structure for how school teams use data, build relationships, and take action, community schools expand the ecosystem in which this work takes place. They ensure that student success systems are not limited to the school building but are supported by a broader network focused on whole-child success.

Student success systems strengthen community schools by providing the structures and routines that make community schools work in practice.

» **STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS ORGANIZE HOLISTIC, REAL-TIME DATA ACROSS ATTENDANCE, BEHAVIOR, COURSE PERFORMANCE, AND WELL-BEING, WHICH SUPPORTS A CORE FEATURE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: THE INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND HEALTH SUPPORTS.**

While community schools focus on bringing together students, families, educators, and community partners to support the whole child, student success systems define how this work happens day to day in a school through clear processes, shared data, and coordinated action. In this way, student success systems operationalize the vision of community schools by ensuring that school and community collaboration leads to consistent, data-informed decisions and meaningful support for students.

Student support systems furthermore strengthen community schools' integration of academic, social, and health supports by organizing holistic, real-time data across attendance, behavior, course performance, and well-being – and by guiding school teams with the participation of students and care givers to use these data to identify needs and take action. Through structured protocols like root cause analysis and tiered intervention planning, student success systems ensure that community and school supports are coordinated, targeted appropriately, and aligned to student needs.

»» **STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS EMBED STRONG, SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND STUDENT-CENTERED MINDSETS INTO EVERYDAY PRACTICE, WHICH SUPPORTS COMMUNITY SCHOOLS' PRIORITY OF A CULTURE OF BELONGING, SAFETY, AND CARE.**

Student success systems reinforce community schools' prioritization of a culture of belonging, safety, and care by embedding relationship-building and student-centered mindsets into everyday practice. Teams intentionally examine belonging and connectedness data, map relationships between students and adults, and reflect on how practices demonstrate empathy, inclusion, and asset-based thinking. This ensures that schools do not leave student belonging to chance, but rather continuously strengthen positive school culture through intentional actions.

»» **STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS LEVERAGE TEAMS AND ROUTINES THAT INCLUDE STUDENT, FAMILY, AND STAFF VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING, WHICH SUPPORTS COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND SHARED POWER.**

Student success systems create the structures that make collaborative leadership possible by establishing student success teams and routines that include student, family, and staff voice in decision-making. Rather than relying on informal input, student success systems build consistent opportunities for shared leadership, ensuring that decisions are informed by those most impacted. This moves collaboration from an idea to a regular, expected practice within schools.

»» **STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS DEEPENS COMMUNITY SCHOOLS' FOCUS ON STUDENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BY EMBEDDING CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK AND CO-DESIGN INTO IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS.**

Through surveys, focus groups, and empathy interviews, student success teams gather lived experiences and use them to inform root cause analysis and action planning. This approach ensures that student and family perspectives are not only heard but actively shape the strategies schools implement.

»» **STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS SUPPORT PROGRESS THROUGH IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE PRACTICES SUCH AS PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT CYCLES.**

Student success systems provide the engine for community schools' continuous improvement through improvement science practices such as Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles. Student success teams regularly review data, test strategies, and refine their approaches based on evidence and shared learning. In this way, student success systems ensure that community school efforts are not static but evolve over time to better meet student needs.

Community schools strengthen student success systems by creating the conditions, partnerships, and resources that allow student success systems to function at their full potential.

»»» COMMUNITY SCHOOLS EXPAND THE STUDENT SUCCESS DATA ECOSYSTEM.

In addition to school-based data, community schools bring in insights from partners such as health providers, youth organizations, and community programs. This broader perspective helps teams better understand the root causes of student challenges and design more effective responses. As a result, student success systems become more holistic, capturing the full range of factors that influence student success.

»»» COMMUNITY SCHOOLS CREATE STRONGER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS, FAMILIES, EDUCATORS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

Community schools strengthen the network of relationships that student success systems depend on. By positioning schools as community hubs, they create stronger connections between students, families, educators, and community members. These expanded relationships provide additional layers of support for students and increase trust between schools and families. This allows student success systems to move beyond school-centered relationships and become part of a larger, more connected support system.



EXAMPLE FROM THE FIELD

At Manzano High School, in Albuquerque NM, the community school site coordinator and the school's student success teams tightly integrated their work during the 2022-23 school year. The student success team focused on attendance and course performance. The community schools coordinator organized a parents' night to coordinate services that addressed root causes the student success team identified through data analysis and dialogue with students and care-givers. The family resource night included employers, energy companies with discounts, school supplies and clothing for students, and opportunities for parents to sign up for aid if necessary.

»»» COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INCREASE ACCESS TO INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS.

By coordinating services such as tutoring, mental health supports, enrichment programs, and family resources, community schools provide student success teams with more options to address identified needs. This enhances the ability of student success teams to respond to root causes with targeted and appropriate strategies, rather than being limited to a narrower set of school-based interventions.

»» **COMMUNITY SCHOOLS DEEPEN STUDENT AND FAMILY AGENCY.**

Student and family agency are essential for effective high-quality student success system implementation. By emphasizing shared power and co-creation, community schools ensure that students and families play an active role in shaping decisions and solutions. This builds ownership, strengthens engagement, and leads to more relevant and effective actions. As a result, student success systems become a process done with students and families rather than for them.

»» **COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PROVIDE SEVERAL KEY ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS SYSTEMS.**

Enabling conditions like dedicated roles (e.g., community school coordinators), structured time for collaboration, and alignment across partners and initiatives are critical for developing and sustaining student success systems. Community schools also reinforce a strong focus on equity and whole-child development, ensuring that systems address not only academic outcomes but also the broader conditions that impact student success. With these foundational elements in place, students' success systems can operate as a cohesive, equity-driven system rather than a collection of disconnected efforts.

Student success systems provide the structure and processes for improving student outcomes, while community schools provide the environment and resources that make those processes effective and sustainable. Together, student success systems and community schools create a unified, equity-driven approach that ensures every student is known, supported, and positioned for success. When implemented in tandem, they move schools beyond isolated efforts toward a coherent system where data, relationships, and community partnerships work together to drive meaningful and sustained outcomes.

