



Charting the Course for Successful Community Schools Using Data & Human Capital to Advance Implementation in WCCUSD

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ISSUE

In 2012, the West Contra Costa Unified (WCCUSD) Board of Education adopted a resolution in support of districtwide Full Service Community Schools. A community school educates the “whole child” by providing integrated services to support academic achievement and successful life outcomes. This project addresses two key questions:

- 1) What is the current **implementation status** of the WCCUSD community schools initiative?
- 2) How can **data** and **human capital** advance implementation of community schools programming at the **school site** and **district** level?



METHODS Promising Practices Research. I conducted 6 *interviews* with community school experts, and reviewed *community schools research* and *case studies* for evidence of promising practices.

School-Level: Needs Assessment. I developed and piloted a prototype needs assessment at two high school sites, Richmond and Kennedy, and gathered information on strengths and weaknesses through: 10 *interviews* with school staff, 5 *focus groups* with students and parents and 15 *teacher surveys*.

District-Level: Data Sharing & Indicators. I conducted 9 *interviews* with district partners, including nonprofit service providers and city government officials.

FINDINGS Promising Practices Research. Successful community school initiatives have *community school coordinators* at each site to manage an ongoing needs assessment process, oversee service providers and refer students and families to appropriate services. This is a key role, with real decision-making power, and in most cases cannot be fully filled by existing site staff.



There are *four stages of community schools implementation* and currently WCCUSD as a whole is in between the first two stages. In order to advance implementation, the district and its partners will need to adopt an ongoing needs assessment process and use data in a systematic manner. National research indicates that the community schools approach is associated with improved academic achievement, but *only for fully implemented initiatives!*



FINDINGS

School-Level: Needs Assessment. Members of the Richmond High and Kennedy High communities reported the following:

- **Strengths.** Both schools have *strong, collaborative and caring staff* and a *Health Center* and *College & Career Center* that provide a variety of valuable services and supports to students.
- **Needs.** Teachers and students at both schools desire more *authentic, real world learning opportunities* such as mentor programs and project-based learning, as well as comprehensive *afterschool programming*.
- **Lessons Learned.** The needs assessment process is *complex and time consuming*. Moving forward, a *school site coordinator* should oversee the process with significant central office support.

“Our school feels like a family. Our teachers are not just a teacher, they are part of the family.”

“It can be scary to work in a shared accountability manner. But it’s important because if we’re truly about the practice of the whole child, we need to look at ourselves first.”

District-Level: Data Sharing. District partners (primarily nonprofit service providers and city government officials) reported the following:

- **Willingness to collaborate.** Partners discussed the importance of *interagency collaboration* and many indicated that they are open to *sharing data* with WCCUSD.
- **Need for localized data.** Partners repeatedly brought up the need for better access to data at the *school site or student level* (rather than the district level) to help inform program planning and impact.
- **Capacity Concerns.** There were concerns about *capacity* of both WCCUSD and its partners to collect and analyze data, which raised the question of whether *expert help* would be needed moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

West Contra Costa Unified School District

1. **Community School Coordinators.** Invest in school site coordinators to ensure that community schools programming is happening at all sites. Prioritize high-needs sites first, and consider interim options such as compensating teachers for help with coordination or recruiting AmeriCorps volunteers.
2. **Data Transparency.** Provide better access to school-site level data through the district website or fact sheets for each school site.
3. **Shared Performance Measures.** Identify shared performance measures (e.g., attendance) through a collaborative process with district partners serving on the community schools advisory committee.

Joint: West Contra Costa Unified School District, City of Richmond, & Healthy Richmond HUB

1. **Collectively invest financial and staff resources to support planning, collaboration and data usage.** Effective community schools work is a true community undertaking. The impact of these agencies together will be greater than that of any one agency working alone.
2. **Data Support.** Investigate options for shared data platforms and analytic support from UC Berkeley or other partners. There may be opportunities with the Richmond Bay campus.
3. **Community Engagement.** Collectively attend trainings and share engagement strategies among partner agencies. All three stakeholders would benefit from sharing resources.