

# Outcomes and Indicators for Community Schools: A Guide for Implementers and Evaluators

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## Acknowledgments

This resource was published as part of the Community Schools Forward project. This project is a collaboration between the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution (CUE), the Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools (NCCS), the Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI). Funding for this project was provided by the Ballmer Group. We are grateful to them for their generous support.

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Core operating support for LPI is provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Raikes Foundation, Sandler Foundation, and MacKenzie Scott. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

Suggested citation: Oakes, J., Germain, E., & Maier, A. (2023). *Outcomes and indicators for community schools: A guide for implementers and evaluators*. Community Schools Forward Project Series. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>

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## Implementing Community Schools: Assessing and Informing Progress Toward Goals

Educators and local communities, including policymakers, system leaders, and funders, expect community schools to transform themselves in ways that increase young people’s engagement at school, boost their learning, improve their overall well-being, and prepare them for productive lives as adults. They also expect community schools to enhance the well-being of engaged families and communities.<sup>1</sup> This tool is designed to support implementers and evaluators in assessing and informing progress toward these goals. It offers a set of specific outcomes to be achieved and measurable indicators of these outcomes. These outcomes and indicators can be used to monitor short- and medium-term progress toward locally determined goals. They also can provide data to guide continuous improvement of the local community school strategy.<sup>2</sup>


Companion tools to this guide include *Framework: Essential for Community School Transformation* (Framework), which specifies the essential elements of community school transformation, and the *Theory of Action for Community School Transformation* (Theory of Action), which shows the activities community schools undertake as they move from their initial commitment to the strategy to full implementation. The Theory of Action also includes a broad set of outcomes that can be used to monitor the progress of all community schools. Those broad outcomes focus on the overall impact that community schools are having in four key areas (see Figure 2), rather than on the specific effects of implementation designed by local educators, communities, families, and students. The elaborated list of outcomes included in this guide is meant to supplement the broad outcomes and show how locally developed outcomes can complement them.

In what follows, we review the logic behind community schools, depict the standard impact areas and outcome goals identified in the Theory of Action, and specify short- and medium-term outcomes and measures that, using multiple sources of data, can be used to monitor progress and inform continuous improvement of the local strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> The Community Schools Theory of Action is grounded in evidence that children—regardless of their race, ethnicity, zip code, or circumstances—thrive in “whole child” environments in which their physical, cognitive, academic, social-emotional, and developmental needs are met and that a community of collaboration and support among families, educators, and community can create such environments for children and, at the same time, lift up those families and communities.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a fuller discussion of the principles that should be followed in the trustworthy assessment of community schools.



Community schools follow an evidence-based logic that grounds the strategy in bringing communities, families, and students together with educators to transform schools into community hubs. That approach will lead to students and their family members being positively and powerfully engaged in the school. That engagement then will support students to learn and thrive both in and out of school. That, in turn, will enable students to enter their postsecondary lives already on a trajectory that will lead to successful lives as adults. (See Figure 1.) Each of these steps has an impact that is important in itself, but each one also paves the way for other important areas.

## Figure 1. How Community Schools Work

### We implement the COMMUNITY SCHOOL STRATEGY to:

Transform schools into thriving community hubs built by and for educators, families, students, and community partners...

*So that*

Students and families are engaged, healthy, and empowered members of their school and community [impact]

*So that*

Students excel academically and confidently navigate their in- and out-of-school pursuits [impact]

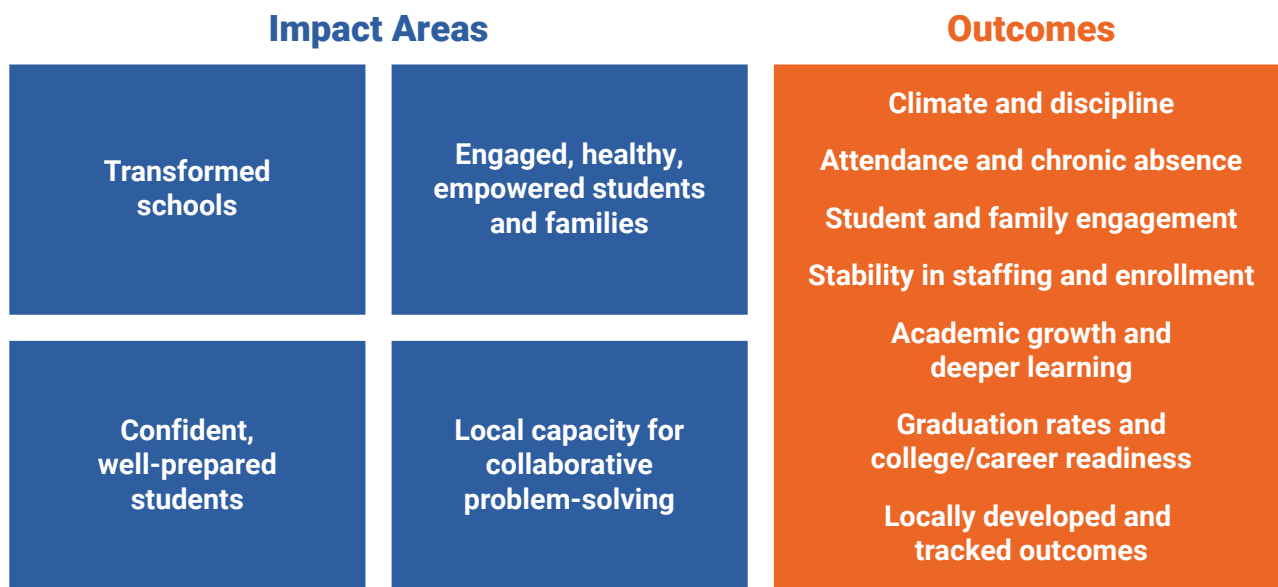
*So that*

Students have lives filled with meaningful opportunities [ultimate goal]

Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).

Each of these areas of impact leads to specific outcomes that can be measured to monitor progress toward the ultimate goal. (See Figure 2.) Additionally, a unique feature of community schools is the work done to collaboratively identify, track, and make progress toward local outcomes for both the school and larger community. This process builds capacity among all involved, creates the opportunity for collective efficacy and action, and strengthens the community.

**Figure 2. Community School Impact Areas and Outcomes**




Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).

## Impact Areas

As communities and educators work toward desired impact and outcomes, they are encouraged to think in terms of key areas of impact. (See Figure 2.) Implementing a community schools strategy with fidelity impacts the four key areas below.

1. **Transformed schools:** Schools transform into community hubs—developed by and for students, educators, families, and neighbors—that provide “whole child” learning environments, spaces for civic engagement, and access to resources and services.
  - Students, families, educators, and community members feel welcomed at the school, want to be there, and hold a shared responsibility for student success.
  - Students, families, educators, and community members are involved in meaningful decision-making processes at the school.
  - Resources, services, and instruction align around a comprehensive whole child vision of learning and support for students and families.
  - Educators and staff are committed to the strategy, are experienced, are well supported, and plan to remain at the school.

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2. **Engaged, healthy, empowered students and families:** Avenues for shared decision-making, a supportive school community, and access to resources, such as physical and mental health care, all prioritize the well-being of students and families.
    - Students' and families' physical, mental, and emotional needs are met.
    - Students and families feel that they are safe and valued and that their cultures and languages are respected.
    - Students, families, and caregivers are engaged as equals in important decision-making.
    - Students, families, and educators experience joy and report making strong relationships.
  3. **Confident, well-prepared students:** All students excel academically, confidently navigate their in- and out-of-school pursuits, and have the resources and skills to pursue their postsecondary goals.
    - Students demonstrate content mastery and develop 21st-century skills, habits, and mindsets.
    - Students take increased ownership over their learning and enrichment and develop a sense of agency in their school and community.
    - Students express a love of learning, pursue their passions and interests, and find a sense of purpose.
    - Students graduate high school career, college, and community ready.
  4. **Local capacity for collaborative problem-solving:** Members of the school community collaboratively identify, track, and make progress toward local goals and outcomes for both the school and larger community.
    - Quality, actionable data is collected and easily accessible to all members of the school community.
    - Communities' capacity to organize and take action grows and becomes more organic.
    - The community sees the results of its efforts and feels a sense of collective efficacy.
    - Continuous improvement cycles show progress on locally determined outcomes.



## Long-Term Outcomes

A community school seeks to advance student thriving, meaning that throughout their time in school and into adulthood, each student will have a life filled with opportunities, joy, and strong relationships. Progress toward this ultimate goal can be assessed by tracking the following broad outcomes (also see Figure 2):

- **Climate and discipline:** Community schools strive to offer a safe and welcoming climate for students, families, and educators that promotes collective well-being and often replaces exclusionary discipline policies with restorative approaches. In doing so, the school creates the conditions for students to feel safe and empowered and become confident and engaged learners and peers. Examples of outcomes to track include trusting relationships, reductions in discipline referrals, and perceptions of safety and belonging.
- **Attendance and chronic absence:** For students to take advantage of what is offered at school, they need to be present. Community schools foster a sense of belonging and increase engagement, identify barriers to attendance, and develop systems of support to attend to the varied needs of students and families. As a result, these schools should see average daily attendance stabilize and/or increase and rates of chronic absence decrease.
- **Stability in enrollment and staffing:** To build a strong and supportive community and create an optimal learning environment, a school needs to retain both its teachers and students. Community schools' focus on climate and student attendance, as well as engaging and supporting the entire school community, should make the school a place where students, families, and educators want to be. This can be assessed by tracking enrollment patterns and rates of teacher turnover and retention.
- **Student and family engagement:** When community schools enlist families and students as key partners in shaping the environment, priorities, and programs, the school becomes a place of learning, sharing, leadership, and participatory dialogue and decision-making for both adults and students. Such engagement can be captured by looking at participation rates; opportunities for youth and family voice; and perceptions and experiences of connectedness, trusting relationships, and a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Academic growth and deeper learning:** Alongside attending to students' well-being and creating a positive school climate, community schools provide curriculum and instruction that is rigorous, community connected, and meaningful to students. Students are expected to show growth in their

academics and develop the habits and skills that will enable them to navigate different learning contexts. This growth can be assessed through test scores, work portfolios, grades, and students' enthusiasm for learning, among other measures.

- **Graduation rates and college and career readiness:** Students in a community school are expected to graduate on time and be prepared for whatever postsecondary path they choose. Increased graduation rates; participation in advanced and/or career and technical education courses and dual enrollment courses; and AP and IB exam scores are among the ways these outcomes can be assessed.
- **Locally developed and tracked outcomes:** A community school brings together members of the school community to consider the needs, strengths, and resources of the community and establish local goals. This process of data gathering and shared decision-making results in services and goals that are unique and responsive to the school. A continuous improvement approach will result in ongoing adaptations and updated goals for the school.

## Short- and Medium-Term Outcomes and Measures: Using Multiple Sources of Data

Positive change in the four key areas can be assessed locally by tracking short- and medium-term outcomes. These outcomes can be measured using multiple types of data, such as focus groups, surveys, administrative data, and observations. These data can and should be collected from educators, students, families, and community partners. Tables 1–4 below describe how various short- and medium-term outcomes can be measured.

**Table 1. Transformed Schools [Impact Area]**

Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
Schools are hubs in the community providing learning opportunities; spaces for civic engagement and organizing; services; and access to resources for students, families, and neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of families and neighbors who take courses, volunteer, and use the school space for community needs</li> <li>• Increased family and educator reports of making connections and working together on both school- and community-related issues</li> <li>• Increased number of families who come to the school building first when seeking services or resources</li> <li>• Increased family and community member reports of an improved sense of well-being</li> </ul>



Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
<p>Students, families, educators, and community members feel welcomed at the school, want to be there, and hold a shared responsibility for student success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Steady or stabilized enrollment</li><li>• Increased number of students choosing to enroll in the school</li><li>• Reduced early exit and transfer and increased nontraditional grade transfers</li><li>• Increased attendance rates</li><li>• Improved results on school climate and culture surveys</li><li>• Increased percentage of families who report feeling welcomed, valued, and connected to the school</li><li>• School growth on academic assessments</li><li>• Observational data and community school coordinator reports of increased cooperation across school, community, and families</li><li>• Establishment of memoranda of understanding with partners that clarify roles and responsibilities</li><li>• Increased percentage of students who report that their families support their learning at home</li><li>• Increased family reports of feeling confident in supporting their children's learning</li></ul>
<p>Students, families, educators, and community members are involved in meaningful decision-making processes at the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishment of formal structures, such as steering committees and student advisory councils that meet regularly and have active student, family, educator, and community member participation</li><li>• Asset and needs assessments that include documentation of a variety of voices and perspectives, including subgroups of students and families with particular needs (e.g., learning English as a second language, experiencing housing instability, etc.)</li><li>• The existence of goals and a vision that have been developed with broad-based input</li><li>• Use of town hall meetings and/or other informal structures to allow for broader input beyond specific working groups</li><li>• Clear processes in place for transparent, accessible, and frequent multidirectional communication</li><li>• Increase in students, families, educators, and community partners who report that they feel involved and are actively engaged in school decisions</li></ul>





Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
Educators and staff are committed to the strategy, are experienced, are well supported, and plan to remain at the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased percentage of high-quality teachers in the building</li><li>• Stable or increased teacher and school leader retention rates</li><li>• Increased participation rate in community school technical assistance and professional development</li><li>• Increased rate of teachers and staff who are able to articulate their roles in the community school and understand the goals of the larger strategy</li><li>• Increased rate of teachers and staff who report an increased sense of well-being, agency, and efficacy</li></ul>
Resources, services, and instruction align around a comprehensive whole child vision of learning and support for students and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase in teachers' use of inquiry-based learning structures, such as projects and performance tasks</li><li>• Increase in teachers' use of meaningful tasks that build on students' prior knowledge and that are individually and culturally responsive</li><li>• Increase in teachers' use of activities that engage students in working collaboratively with peers to deepen their understanding</li><li>• Increase in percentage of students who have opportunities to practice and apply learning to different contexts and new problems</li><li>• Student progress and achievement assessments in multiple domains of development (e.g., academic, physical, social, emotional, cognitive)</li></ul>

<sup>a</sup> These measures include multiple ways to track progress toward these outcomes. Each school may have access to different data and is encouraged to triangulate using both quantitative and qualitative data when possible.

Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).

**Table 2. Engaged, Healthy, Empowered Students and Families [Impact Area]**

Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
Students' and families' physical, mental, and emotional needs are met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decreased chronic absence</li><li>• Increased percentage of students with high attendance rates</li><li>• Increased use of services and supports</li><li>• Increased referrals to services and supports</li><li>• Fewer students with vision, hearing, and dental problems</li><li>• Increased percentage of students who report access to timely mental health services</li><li>• Increased reports of physical and mental well-being</li></ul>



Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
Students and families feel that they are safe and valued and that their cultures and languages are respected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased percentage of families engaged in the school and neighborhood in some capacity (volunteering, leadership, teaching, mentoring, neighborhood watch, etc.)</li><li>• Decreased rates of fights, vandalism, bullying, exclusionary discipline, and school-based arrests</li><li>• Growth in the number of student-initiated learning opportunities, school and community projects, events, and campaigns</li><li>• Improvement to the physical environment inside and outside of the school (including murals, community gardens, etc.)</li><li>• Increased percentage of students who report the following on school climate and culture surveys: a welcoming atmosphere, caring relationships, respect for their voice, a sense of trust, and fairness</li><li>• Increased attendance at events, performances, and meetings held at the school</li></ul>
Students, families, and caregivers are engaged as equals in important decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased participation rates in shared decision-making opportunities</li><li>• Increased number of students and families engaged in leadership roles that help shape the school's practices and policies</li></ul>
Students, families, and educators experience joy and report making strong relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased percentage of students, families, and teachers who report the following on school climate and culture surveys: happiness at school and experiencing trusting relationships</li><li>• Increased instances of celebrations and affirmations—planned and spontaneous</li><li>• Increased teacher satisfaction and retention</li></ul>

<sup>a</sup> These measures include multiple ways to track progress toward these outcomes. Each school may have access to different data and is encouraged to triangulate using both quantitative and qualitative data when possible.

Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).

**Table 3. Confident, Well-Prepared Students [Impact Area]**

Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
Students learn and master content and 21st -century skills, habits, and mindsets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved course grades</li> <li>• Increased rates of credit accumulation and being on track for on-time grade progression</li> <li>• Improved scores and performance on traditional and alternative assessments (e.g., portfolios of student work)</li> <li>• Increased student reports of opportunities to engage with teachers on learning goals and performance</li> <li>• Increased opportunities for students to provide feedback to teachers about what is working and not working to optimize their learning</li> <li>• Increased opportunities for students to take on increasingly complex or challenging tasks with enthusiasm and confidence</li> </ul>
Students take increased ownership over their learning and enrichment and develop a sense of agency in their school and community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased percentage of students who participate in expanded learning opportunities beyond the regular school day</li> <li>• Increased number of graduates who report academic and real-world confidence and agency, including plans for the future, on graduate surveys</li> <li>• Increased number of students who report the following on climate surveys: respect for their voice, a sense of trust, and fairness</li> <li>• Increased number of activities, clubs, community projects, and campaigns initiated and/or led by students</li> </ul>
Students express a love of learning, pursue their passions and interests, and find a sense of purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation in school- and non-school-related extracurriculars</li> <li>• Increased student reports of being excited about school and learning opportunities</li> <li>• Increased student reports of participating in designing courses and projects</li> <li>• Increased student reports of positive feelings about their future and ability to attain their goals</li> <li>• Evidence of inquiry-based teaching and learning that incorporates community concerns</li> </ul>
Students graduate career, college, and community ready.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased 4- and 5-year graduation rates</li> <li>• Increased postsecondary acceptance and enrollment</li> <li>• Increased student and family engagement in leadership roles that help shape the schools' practices and policies</li> <li>• Increased participation in AP, IB, dual credit, and other advanced courses</li> <li>• Increased student participation and/or leadership in community organizations, campaigns, and other community projects</li> <li>• Increased participation in career and technical education courses and work-based learning and apprenticeships</li> <li>• Increased completion rates of industry credentials</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> These measures include multiple ways to track progress toward these outcomes. Each school may have access to different data and is encouraged to triangulate using both quantitative and qualitative data when possible.

Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).

**Table 4. Local Capacity for Collaborative Problem-Solving [Impact Area]**

Descriptors [Examples]	Measures <sup>a</sup>
Members of the school community collaboratively identify, track, and make progress toward local goals and priorities for both the school and larger community.	Increased local capacity is evident when the school community sets priorities and takes concrete, collective actions to address those priorities. Although there is not one standard way to measure this, members of the school community are likely to report greater feelings of efficacy, agency, and civic connectedness. As they do this work and the fruits of their labor materialize, they can also become more effective advocates, communicators, and organizers. (The next section in the table gives examples of priorities a community might address.)
Quality, actionable data is collected and easily accessible to all members of the school community.	
Community members' capacity to organize and take action grows and becomes more organic.	
The community sees the results of its efforts and reports a sense of collective efficacy.	
Continuous improvement cycles show progress on locally determined outcomes.	
Descriptors	Measures <sup>a</sup>
All families have access to housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased number of affordable housing units</li> <li>Increased number of unhoused families are connected with services that can provide shelter and assistance</li> </ul>
All students enter school ready to learn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased number of quality child care and preschools available in the neighborhood</li> <li>Increased number of students who perform at developmentally appropriate levels</li> </ul>
All students have easily accessible and safe transportation to school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced chronic absence</li> <li>Increased student reports of feeling safe along their routes to school</li> <li>More students who walk or ride bikes to school</li> </ul>
Students have fewer interactions with the juvenile justice system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No on-school citations</li> <li>Fewer arrests</li> <li>Reduced recidivism rates</li> <li>Adoption of community policing</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> The examples are an illustration, as each community school will have unique needs, assets, and desires that will shape its outcome goals.

Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).



## Appendix A: Attributes of Trustworthy Community Schools Assessments

**Measure well-being, engagement, and learning.** Comprehensive community schools can meet a broad range of goals for students, families, educators, and communities. In the tables provided in this guide, we identified goals for all these groups in terms of engagement, learning, and well-being. For each goal, we suggested short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes that can be expected. We also suggested measurable indicators that can provide useful information about the extent to which various outcomes have been realized, show progress being made toward broad goals, and inform efforts to improve.

**Measure implementation as well as outcomes.** The impact of a community school cannot be assessed without examining core features of the school and the extent to which the community school strategy is implemented with high quality and fidelity. Systematic documentation of this context is required to understand all relevant outcomes for students.

**Supplement evidence-based common outcomes and indicators with locally relevant ones.** The outcomes and indicators suggested here are evidence based in that they have emerged from research and deep experience in the field. They are also generic in that they can be used across a broad range of communities. However, state or local initiatives should add outcomes and indicators that will inform them about progress toward other, locally determined priorities.

**Gather data from and about multiple stakeholders.** Community schools are about people, systems, structures, and practices. They cannot be assessed properly without the collection and consideration of multiple sources of information from different levels of stakeholders involved in community schools, including students, parents, teachers, leaders, coordinators, and partners. Data collected and assessed must reflect all these voices.

**Report equity and growth as well as current status.** Of critical importance is that these outcomes and indicators be used not simply to identify and report the current status of all students, families, communities, and schools. Rather, they should be reported for each important subgroup, such as race, language, and income status, to determine the extent to which outcomes are equitable. Outcomes should also be reported to show growth. Since the goal of community schools is to show improvement over the baseline conditions prior to becoming a community school, current scores on measures should be compared with those from the outset of the strategy and with those from prior administration of these assessments.



## About the Authors

**Jeannie Oakes** is Presidential Professor Emeritus in Educational Equity at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies and a Senior Policy Fellow at the Learning Policy Institute (LPI). Her more than 100 scholarly books and articles examine the impact of social policies on the educational opportunities and outcomes of low-income students of color. One book, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* has been honored as one of the 20th century's most influential books on education, and a second, *Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform* (with Karen Hunter Quartz, Steve Ryan, and Martin Lipton), won the American Educational Research Association's Outstanding Book Award. Oakes is a member of the National Academy of Education, a Fellow of AERA, and was AERA's president during its 2016 Centennial Year.

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