



# State Strategies for Investing in Community Schools

Anna Maier and Adrian Rivera-Rodriguez

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## Executive Summary

The community schools strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development. As partners, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive. A growing number of states are investing in community schools as a strategy to address long-standing social inequities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a review of state American Rescue Plan Act plans, as well as state legislative and state education agency websites and other online resources, this report describes community school initiatives in eight states. The report highlights three potential approaches to state support for community schools: (1) ongoing support through school funding formulas, (2) competitive grant funding, and (3) capacity-building supports (such as certification processes).

### Ongoing Support Through School Funding Formulas

Maryland and New York have provided ongoing investments in community schools through school funding formula allocations. Maryland has adopted an entitlement grant approach for high-poverty schools, while New York has created a set-aside in its school funding formula. These funds can be used to support community schools staff, as well as programmatic supports for students and families.

- **Maryland** established the Concentration of Poverty grant program to provide annual community school personnel grants to eligible schools, along with additional per-pupil grant funding for each eligible student.
- **New York** created a community schools set-aside in its school funding formula for high-need districts and funded three regional technical assistance centers for community schools.

### Competitive Grant Funding

Other states have invested in community schools through competitive grant programs supported by general state funding, federal emergency relief funds, or a combination of federal and state resources. These grant programs address both the planning and implementation of community schools. Funds can be used to cover various costs, including assets and needs assessments, staffing, programs and services, and data collection and evaluation efforts.

- **California** made a historic \$4.1 billion investment in planning, implementation, and coordination grants—as well as technical assistance—for the state-funded California Community Schools Partnership Program. This investment is intended to provide sufficient resources for every high-poverty school in California to become a community school within the next 5 to 7 years.

- **Illinois** used federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to establish the Community Partnership Grant program and help address pandemic recovery efforts.
- **New Mexico** provided state funding for community school grants administered by the New Mexico Public Education Department, including both planning and implementation.
- **Vermont** passed Act 67 (the Community Schools Act) as a recovery strategy for small and rural communities across the state impacted by COVID-19, using federal ESSER funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to develop a competitive pilot grant program.

## Capacity-Building Supports

Some states support community schools through capacity-building approaches such as school certification programs. This includes coaching and support for participating sites.

- **Florida** has provided funding to support a community schools certification process developed and administered by the University of Central Florida's Center for Community Schools through the provision of planning and implementation grants for participating sites.
- **Georgia**, through the Georgia Department of Education, created a Whole Child Model School certification process for community schools, with a goal to help community schools develop and independently sustain a whole child education model.

## Trends in State Support for Community Schools

Across the examples featured in this report, five trends have emerged that can help to inform states that are interested in supporting the development of community schools.

1. **A growing number of states are investing in community schools, using both discretionary federal funds and state funds.** The state investments featured in this report range from \$3.4 million to \$4.1 billion, mostly occurring within the past 3 years. Most states are primarily or exclusively drawing on state funding sources, while some states are exclusively drawing on discretionary federal recovery funds (i.e., ESSER) and others are blending and braiding federal and state resources.
2. **States are adopting a range of approaches to supporting community schools—from capacity-building assistance to grant programs to ongoing school funding formula allocations—and many have increased the level of support offered over time.** Some states have provided capacity-building supports, including certification processes and turnaround or innovation strategies. Others have invested in community school grants that are competitive

and time-limited in nature. A third category of states has made ongoing investments in community schools through their school funding formulas with a set-aside or an entitlement grant program. Ongoing funding is a more predictable and sustainable source of support for districts and schools than grant programs that might be discontinued—an especially important consideration for the additional coordinative staffing required to implement community schools at the school and local education agency (LEA) level. However, grant funding can be increased over time and can serve as a precursor to establishing an ongoing funding stream.

3. **States typically prioritize community schools funding for the highest-need schools and districts.** The featured states targeted schools and districts serving high-need student populations, defined in different ways. The threshold for defining high-need ranged from 40% of a student population (consistent with Title I) to 80% or more of a student population, often (but not exclusively) based on free or reduced-price meal eligibility.
4. **States are investing in evidence-based strategies to support community schools implementation.** This includes evidence-based pillars, or features, of community schools: (1) integrated student supports, (2) expanded learning time, (3) family and community engagement, and (4) collaborative leadership. States are also investing in practices grounded in the science of learning and development, including trauma-informed supports and safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments. Several states are including program evaluations in their grant investments to gain a better understanding of how these funds are implemented and what outcomes may result.
5. **State support often includes investments in technical assistance and other forms of capacity-building.** Several states have invested in technical assistance to build the capacity of community school practitioners and grantees, either through the state education agency or in partnership with intermediary organizations. These state investments recognize the complex nature of community schools implementation and are especially important for school- and LEA-level staff who are brought on as coordinators to support students, families, school staff, and community partners.





## Introduction

The community schools strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development.<sup>1</sup> As partners, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive. Community schools typically offer a wide range of integrated student supports in collaboration with local community organizations (e.g., health, mental health, social service supports), expanded learning time before and after school and in the summer, many opportunities for student and family engagement (often including adult education classes as well as engagement in school life), rigorous classroom instruction that connects to community topics and themes, a caring and inclusive climate, and democratic approaches to shared decision-making with the many contributors to a whole child education (see *What Does a Community School Look Like in Action?*).<sup>2</sup> This strategy takes time and resources to put into place and—when implemented well—is effective at helping students to thrive both inside and outside the classroom. Mounting evidence points to a range of improvements in student outcomes that are associated with these community school features, including attendance, academic achievement, and high school graduation rates.<sup>3</sup>

Across the United States, a number of states have invested in community schools as a strategy to address long-standing social inequities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, often drawing on federal emergency relief funds to establish grant programs.<sup>4</sup> Other states have

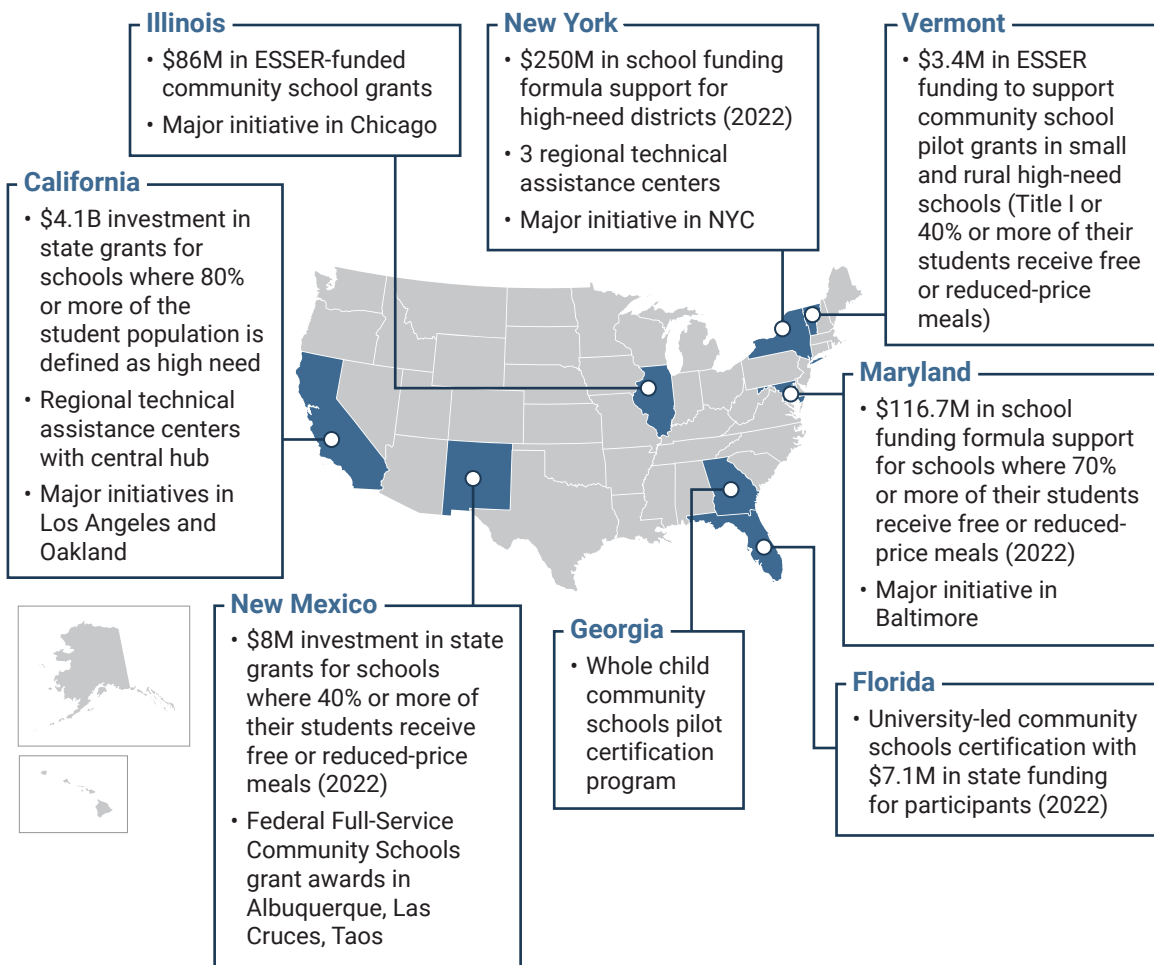
Across the United States, a number of states have invested in community schools as a strategy to address long-standing social inequities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

invested in community schools through school funding formula allocations, state-funded competitive grant programs, and other nonmonetary forms of support. (See Figure 1.) Federal support for the Full-Service Community Schools grant program, which provides funds to local education agencies (LEAs) and their partners to support community schools, is also at an all-time high, with \$150 million included in the fiscal year 2023 budget.<sup>5</sup> Many community schools weave together these federal and state investments with local funding, as well as other federal funds flowing directly to LEAs and schools (e.g., Title I, Medicaid).<sup>6</sup>

This report highlights three potential approaches to state support for community schools: (1) ongoing support through school funding formulas, (2) competitive grant funding, and (3) capacity-building supports (such as certification processes). Rather than each community school in a state operating independently with grant money that comes and goes, these approaches are beginning to create an infrastructure

for community schools, with sources of continuous funding and opportunities for technical assistance and networking, such that community schools can be part of a broader state strategy to support students and increase equity. The states featured in this report are California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, and Vermont (see Figure 1). The select state examples included here come from a scan for the mention of “community schools” in state American Rescue Plan Act plans, as well as a review of records on state legislative and state education agency websites and other online resources.<sup>7</sup> The report concludes with a discussion of trends across states and implications for how states can support and invest in community schools.

**Figure 1**  
**State Support for Community Schools**



Note: ESSER = Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund.

Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

## What Does a Community School Look Like in Action?

Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School (Mendez) is a community school located in East Los Angeles. Named for the plaintiffs in the 1946 landmark Supreme Court desegregation case *Mendez v. Westminster*, Mendez has deep ties to the Boyle Heights neighborhood in which it is located. These ties include a robust network of partnerships that engage and support Mendez students and their families. Staff, families, and partners share leadership opportunities at this 12-year-old community school and provide students with rigorous and engaging academics in a nurturing and inclusive environment. The school has a full-time community school and restorative justice coordinator whose position has been funded through the Los Angeles Unified Community Schools Initiative since 2020.

Mendez has two signature equity initiatives—Advanced Placement (AP) for All and Computer Science for All—along with a school safety strategy that is rooted in relationships and restorative practices rather than punitive measures. In 2019, as part of the school community’s commitment to restorative practices, students and staff led a movement to end the district’s policy of randomly searching students for weapons as they arrive on campus.

Four community partners provide foundational support: InnerCity Struggle supports students and families in developing leadership and organizing skills; Promesa Boyle Heights serves as a connector for the neighborhood’s many community organizations and coordinates much of the after-school programming; the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools builds the capacity of the adults on campus through instructional coaching and Parent College; and Communities In Schools of Los Angeles provides a dedicated social worker who supports 50 students and their families with case management and also provides whole-school social-emotional and academic services. In addition, there are 16 partner organizations providing health and wellness services (e.g., health care, mental health supports, nutrition, social services) through the school’s Wellness Center, 13 partner organizations providing academic support and case management (e.g., tutoring, academic interventions, college counseling), 10 partner organizations providing arts and enrichment opportunities (e.g., visual and performing arts, programs, social clubs, sports teams), and 5 partner organizations focused on leadership development and community organizing (e.g., campaign strategizing with students and families).

Source: Thompson, C. (2021). *Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School: A community school that honors its neighborhood’s legacy of educational justice*. Learning Policy Institute.

## Ongoing Support Through School Funding Formulas

Maryland and New York have provided ongoing investments in community schools through school funding formula allocations. In both states, this ongoing funding builds on prior state efforts to support community schools through other methods. Maryland has adopted an entitlement grant program for high-poverty schools, while New York has created a set-aside in its school funding formula for districts identified as high need.

### Maryland: An Entitlement Grant Program

Maryland first supported community schools through 2016 legislation directing the State Department of Education to notify and help local school systems use discretionary Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title I funds and apply for ESSA Title IV funds to pay for community school coordinators and related expenses.<sup>8</sup> The state made a direct investment in community schools 4 years later, in 2020, as part of a broad education funding reform effort called the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. This legislation established the **Concentration of Poverty (CoP) entitlement grant program**, which provides funding to create and support community schools in low-income settings.

#### Funding amount and sources

The CoP grant program provides all eligible Maryland schools with two complementary sources of state funding. First, **personnel grants** provide \$248,833 annually to employ essential community schools staff.<sup>9</sup> This funding is set to increase every fiscal year to account for inflation. Second, **per-pupil grants** provide additional funding through a sliding scale, calculated for each eligible school based on the proportion of eligible students, the per-pupil maximum funding amount (set by the state legislature), and the number of years that the school has received CoP grant funding.<sup>10</sup> In 2022, the CoP grant program distributed a total of \$116.7 million in state aid to 300 eligible schools (approximately 21% of all public schools in the state), each of which received \$248,833 in personnel grants. Qualifying schools also received, on average, \$539.81 in per-pupil grant funding for each eligible student (an additional 7% of the per-pupil base funding in fiscal year 2022).<sup>11</sup> The total CoP investment in 2022 was \$74.6 million for personnel grants and \$41.4 million for per-pupil grants.

#### Eligibility requirements

Funding for Maryland's CoP grant program is structured in phases that initially focus on the highest-poverty schools and gradually expand eligibility to other high-poverty schools over time. To ensure that CoP grant funding goes to the highest-need districts and schools, personnel grant eligibility is determined based on the greater of: (1) the proportion of students receiving free or reduced-price meals; (2) the proportion of students identified in a Community Eligibility Provision school, which

provides free meal service options in low-income areas; or (3) the proportion of students identified through direct certification.<sup>12</sup> In 2020 (when this funding was first made available), at least 80% of a school's student body had to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals in order for the school to qualify. Each year after that, the eligibility threshold has decreased by 5%, such that 70% of a school's students must be eligible for the school to qualify in 2022 for the personnel grant, and at least 55% of the student body will need to be eligible for the school to qualify starting in 2025. One year after receiving the personnel grant, eligible schools receive additional funding through the per-pupil grant. The eligibility thresholds are different for the per-pupil grant. In fiscal year 2022, 80% of a school's students must be eligible for the school to qualify for the per-pupil grant, and at least 55% of the student body will need to be eligible for the school to qualify starting in 2027. This additional funding is calculated annually based on the percentage of eligible students, along with other factors described above.<sup>13</sup>

### **How the money is used**

Personnel grants provide funds for the salaries of two full-time positions: (1) a community school coordinator to facilitate the implementation and assessment of community schools programming at the school level, and (2) a licensed health care practitioner (i.e., physician, physician's assistant, registered nurse) to offer students health care services. Any surplus from the personnel grant may be used to provide students with wraparound services or conduct student needs assessments. Per-pupil grants provide additional resources to offer a broad range of services and supports. These include expanded and enriched learning time, integrated student services (e.g., medical, dental, and vision care; transportation; healthy food; attendance support), family and community supports (e.g., language classes, workforce training, early education linkages, support to engage with a child's learning), professional development for staff (e.g., trauma-informed interventions), and additional support staff (e.g., social workers, mentors, counselors, restorative practice coaches).<sup>14</sup>

### **New York: A School Funding Formula Set-Aside**

New York state first supported community schools in 2013 when legislation allocated up to \$15 million in state funding for competitive grant awards to establish community schools in high-need districts.<sup>15</sup> This Community Schools Grant Initiative provided up to \$500,000 per community school site (to be distributed over the course of 3 years), with awards going to approximately 30 different school districts.<sup>16</sup> A second round of awards in 2014 brought the total investment to \$30 million supporting 62 grantees. Since then, the state has significantly expanded its investment in community schools, first through the creation of an ongoing set-aside in the state's Foundation Aid formula (i.e., Community Schools Set-Aside) in 2016, and second by establishing three community school technical assistance centers.



New York City operates the largest initiative in the state, drawing on both state and local funding to support a network of over 420 community schools. An evaluation of the New York City initiative found promising results, including increased graduation rates, increased achievement in elementary and middle school mathematics, and reductions in chronic absenteeism.<sup>17</sup>

## **Funding amount and sources**

New York invested \$100 million in the state’s Foundation Aid formula as **community schools set-aside** funding in 2016.<sup>18</sup> The set-aside amount increased gradually over time, reaching \$200 million in 2018 and \$250 million in 2020, with another \$250 million appropriated in 2021 and again in 2022.<sup>19</sup> In 2022, the set-aside funding was distributed to 240 districts. In New York City alone, over \$117 million in 2022 state funding reached 252 community schools (averaging \$467,048 per school).<sup>20</sup> Additionally, beginning in 2018, state legislators have allocated approximately \$1 million in state funding per year to establish three technical assistance centers to aid school districts in establishing or operating community schools.<sup>21</sup> These regional centers provide a range of supports across New York City and the Central/Western and Eastern regions of the state.<sup>22</sup>

## **Eligibility requirements**

Community schools set-aside funds are available to supplement, not supplant, community school–related expenditures in: (1) school districts identified as high-need and (2) schools with extraordinarily high levels of student need, as defined by New York’s commissioner of education. The definition of “high-need” considers the amount of funding a district or school receives compared to similar districts and schools, as well as weighted proportions of students eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals, English learners, and students with disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

## **How the money is used**

Community schools set-aside guidance outlines allowable expenditures for schools receiving this supplemental funding.<sup>24</sup> These guidelines aim to support the implementation of community schools programming and transform school buildings into community hubs that provide students and their families with services that maximize academic achievement and student well-being. Allowable uses include community school site coordinators, academic supports (e.g., professional development to strengthen classroom instruction, staffing costs, instructional materials), mental and physical health services, trauma-informed supports, enrichment and expanded learning (e.g., after-school programming, youth development), dual language programs for English learners, nutrition programs, legal services, and transportation costs.

Additionally, the state's regional technical assistance centers provide another layer of support for school districts, including statewide dissemination of information on effective and promising practices for community schools, community schools planning and implementation support, and facilitating connections with community partners and stakeholders.<sup>25</sup>

## Competitive Grant Funding

While Maryland and New York have adopted a school funding formula approach, other states have invested in community schools through competitive grant programs. These grant programs are supported by general state funding (e.g., California, New Mexico), as well as federal emergency relief funds (e.g., Illinois, Vermont), with some states utilizing both federal and state resources.

### California: A Historic State Grant Investment

California has made the nation's largest investment in community schools. In 2020, the state established a pilot competitive grant program to sustain and expand existing community schools, using \$45 million from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER).<sup>26</sup> Then, in 2021, the state funded the **California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP)** to

California has made the nation's largest investment in community schools, with \$4.1 billion in funding for community school grants and technical assistance.

significantly strengthen and expand both new and existing community school initiatives. This investment is intended to provide sufficient resources for every high-poverty school in California to become a community school within the next 5 to 7 years.<sup>27</sup>

### Funding amount and sources

In 2021, California passed a historic \$3 billion investment in the CCSPP, followed by an additional \$1.1 billion investment in 2022.<sup>28</sup> The CCSPP provides funding through the 2030–31 fiscal year and supports three grant types to qualifying local education agencies (LEAs) and schools. **Planning grants** offer up to \$200,000 per LEA for up to 2 years of planning and are available in fiscal years 2021–22 and 2022–23.<sup>29</sup> **Implementation grants** allocate between \$150,000 and \$500,000 annually to each qualifying school for up to 5 years to help sustain or expand existing community school initiatives.<sup>30</sup> Finally, starting in fiscal year 2025–26, **extension grants** will offer up to \$100,000 annually per site for 2 years after the implementation grant ends.<sup>31</sup> The first funding round in 2022 awarded planning grants to 192 LEAs and implementation grants to 76 LEAs, representing 458 school sites.<sup>32</sup> A second round of funding in 2023 awarded planning grants to 226 LEAs, with a second round of implementation grants in process as of April 2023.<sup>33</sup>

The CCSPP also allocated approximately \$140 million to create a network of regional technical assistance (TA) centers across the state, with coordination from a lead center, to provide support and assistance to LEAs and community schools.<sup>34</sup>

## Eligibility requirements

CCSPP funding is available for LEAs (i.e., county offices of education, school districts, and charter schools) as well as county behavioral health agencies, federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and child care programs within public institutions of higher education that commit to operating in partnership with at least one qualifying LEA. To qualify, applicants must serve a student population in which 50% or more of pupils are from low-income households, English learners, or youth in foster care. Applicants can also qualify if they have higher-than-state-average rates of dropout, suspension and expulsion, children experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, or justice-impacted youth. The state prioritizes funding for applicants that serve 80% or more pupils who are from low-income households, English learners, or youth in foster care, along with several other competitive priorities.<sup>35</sup>

## How the money is used

CCSPP grants can cover staffing (e.g., community school coordinators, service contractors); school and community needs and assets assessments; partnership development; service coordination and provision (e.g., physical and mental health care, academic supports, counseling, nutrition services, youth development, and case management); family and community engagement; ongoing data collection and evaluation; and professional development on integrating school-based pupil supports, social-emotional well-being, and trauma-informed practices.

TA centers are operated through LEAs, with preference given for partnering with institutions of higher education or nonprofit community-based organizations. TA center responsibilities include outreach and support for applicants and grantees, along with development of community school resources, sharing of best practices, and data collection.<sup>36</sup> The support addresses a variety of topics, including needs and assets assessments, authentic family and community engagement, community partnerships, sustainable funding sources (e.g., accessing and combining funding from multiple revenue sources), and coordinated services across child-serving agencies and schools.

The statute also calls for an annual formative evaluation, starting in 2023 and ending with a final comprehensive report by December 31, 2031.<sup>37</sup> This evaluation will look at outcome data (including measures of pupil well-being and engagement), the nature and kind of services provided and changes made within community schools, and evidence of best practices.

## Illinois: Grant Support From the State Board of Education Using Federal Recovery Funds

Illinois first took action to support community schools in 2009, when the state amended its school code to recognize community schools as an evidence-based, cost-effective strategy that can have a profound and positive impact on students, their families, and their communities.<sup>38</sup> This legislation tasked the State Board of

Education with creating a community schools grant program for schools and districts, subject to the availability of funds. However, funding did not become available until recently, when the State Board of Education established the competitive **Community Partnership Grant** program, aiming to address post-pandemic gaps in opportunity and unfinished teaching and learning through the development, implementation, and expansion of community schools.<sup>39</sup>

## **Funding amount and sources**

In 2021, using federal ESSER funding, Illinois established the Community Partnership Grant program.<sup>40</sup> In March 2022, the Illinois State Board of Education awarded 136 grants totaling \$86 million (and representing more than 684 school sites) to support the mental health of students and educators through community school partnerships over the course of 2 years.<sup>41</sup> During the first year of the 2-year grant program (fiscal year 2022), each grantee received \$323,529 in funding.

## **Eligibility requirements**

The Community Partnership Grant application is open to public or private entities, including (but not limited to) LEAs, laboratory schools backed by public universities, state-authorized charter schools, area vocational centers, regional offices of education, community-based organizations, community-based health providers, and Indian tribal organizations.<sup>42</sup>

## **How the money is used**

Community Partnership Grant objectives focus on the implementation and expansion of community schools programming to help address pandemic recovery efforts. Grantees will conduct an evidence-based needs assessment and develop an action plan that addresses the following features: (1) integrated student wellness supports that address out-of-school barriers in partnership with community-based social and health agencies (e.g., mental health services, bullying prevention, conflict resolution, restorative justice practices), (2) expanded learning time and opportunities (including after-school, weekend, and summer programs) to provide academic support and real-world enrichment opportunities, and (3) active parent (or guardian) and community engagement to partner with families and make schools neighborhood hubs for learning. The plans must also address the following: student voice, substance abuse prevention and treatment, early childhood, LGBTQ populations, homeless students and youth-in-care, and marginalized communities. Finally, the Community Partnership Grant stipulates that LEAs may set aside up to 5% of their funds to pay for an external evaluation. Upon the grant's completion, all recipients are required to provide the State Board of Education with a report outlining how they used grant funding to implement community school programs and services. Support is available from the State Board of Education in the form of weekly virtual office hours, virtual site visits (planned for the second year of the grant), and coaching on an as-needed basis.

## New Mexico: Competitive Grants for Planning and Implementation

New Mexico has a long history of supporting community schools at both the local and state level. In 2013, the New Mexico legislature passed the Community Schools Act, which aimed to provide school districts with a strategy to offer whole student supports and ensure academic success through the mobilization of community resources.<sup>43</sup> While this legislation offered initial guidance to districts and schools on how to implement a community schools strategy and proposed grants for community school initiatives, state funding was not available until 2019, when the legislature amended the Community Schools Act.<sup>44</sup>

### Funding amount and sources

In 2019, the first year of implementing the revised **Community Schools Act**, New Mexico dedicated \$2 million to community school grants administered by the New Mexico Public Education Department (NM PED).<sup>45</sup> This amount has since increased annually, with \$4.8 million in state funding for community school grants in 2021. NM PED also leveraged \$1.8 million in federal Title I, Part A school improvement funds in 2021 to provide additional grants to schools designated as “targeted for support and improvement” that became community schools. In 2022, the legislature appropriated \$8 million to support community school grants.<sup>46</sup> There are currently over 150 community schools across New Mexico, 69 of which receive NM PED grant funding. Funding comes in three forms: (1) 1-year, one-time **planning grants** up to \$50,000; (2) **implementation grants** in the amount of \$150,000 per year for 3 years; and (3) **renewal grants** for a fourth year of funding up to \$75,000 in 2022.<sup>47</sup>

### Eligibility requirements

Any public school district, group of public schools (i.e., a school consortium), or single public school is eligible to apply for grant funding according to the following criteria: (1) 40% or more of the school’s students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, (2) the school has been identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement according to federal guidelines, and/or (3) the school has been identified by the state as requiring additional support.

### How the money is used

Planning grant recipients are required to conduct an initial needs assessment and asset map and establish a site-based and community-wide leadership team.<sup>48</sup> Implementation grant funds support a full-time community school coordinator, with flexibility for community school expenditures that support the following pillars, or features, of community schools (1) integrated student supports, (2) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, (3) active family and community engagement, and (4) collaborative leadership and practices. Finally, renewal grant funds provide ongoing support for community school coordinators.



New Mexico’s amended Community Schools Act also required that NM PED appoint a “coalition for community schools.” This statewide coalition—which consists of community school experts, culturally responsive content experts, and tribal leaders—assists NM PED with implementing the grant funding. NM PED also provides technical assistance to community school grantees, including a community of practice and virtual resource library.<sup>49</sup>

## **Vermont: A Pilot Grant Program Using Federal Recovery Funds**

Vermont legislators invested in community schools in 2021 when they passed Act 67, the Community Schools Act.<sup>50</sup> This legislation identified community schools as a recovery strategy for small and rural communities across the state negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It appropriated funding to support community schools and authorized the Vermont Agency of Education to create a grant program to distribute the funding.<sup>51</sup>

### **Funding amount and sources**

Under Act 67, Vermont appropriated approximately \$3.4 million in federal ESSER funding from the American Rescue Plan Act for community school grants.<sup>52</sup> In 2021, the Vermont Agency of Education developed a competitive 3-year pilot grant program and used these funds to award between \$50,000 and \$250,000 annually (contingent on continuation applications) to each of five participating school districts for a total award of approximately \$3.1 million to support 16 community schools.<sup>53</sup>

### **Eligibility requirements**

Vermont’s community school grant program prioritizes the transformation of public schools in high-need districts. As such, only Title I schools, schools with 40% or more of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, or schools that have been identified for comprehensive or equity<sup>54</sup> support and intervention under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are eligible to apply.

### **How the money is used**

Grantees can use the funds to develop and implement community schools programming that addresses the following features: (1) integrated student supports (e.g., mental and physical health care, immigration services, nutrition, transportation, housing assistance); (2) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities (e.g., before- and after-school learning time, individualized academic support, real-world and community-based problem-solving); (3) active family and community engagement (e.g., language and technology classes, green card and citizenship support, financial literacy training, career counseling, substance misuse treatment); (4) collaborative leadership and practices (e.g., community school coordinators, integrated school and community leadership teams); and (5) safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments for students, families, and community members. Act 67 also set aside

up to 3% of the total appropriation each year for the Agency of Education to work with grant recipients and research partners to support the funded schools and evaluate the efficacy of the overall implementation of the legislation. Available supports for grantees include individualized reporting tools organized by feature, quarterly check-in meetings with the Agency of Education as well as quarterly cohort meetings for grant participants, a bimonthly community school coordinator learning series, and a research-practice partnership between the Agency of Education and the University of Vermont to support grantees and study the implementation and effectiveness of the grant program.

## Capacity-Building Supports

Some states seek to support community schools through capacity-building approaches such as school certification programs, as in Florida and Georgia, and the inclusion of community school initiatives as school turnaround strategies (see Community Schools as a Turnaround Strategy). Several of the state funding initiatives described above were preceded by nonmonetary capacity-building supports for community schools. For example, Maryland encouraged districts to use federal funds to implement community schools, while Illinois amended the state education code to express support for community schools.

### Community Schools As a Turnaround Strategy

Community schools can be employed as a turnaround strategy in districts or schools that need extra support. In some cases, this involves direct funding. As documented above, New York sets aside community schools funding in its state aid formula for districts and schools identified as high need. New Mexico has leveraged federal Title I, Part A school improvement funds for community school grants. A 2017 review of the community schools evidence base confirms that community schools qualify as an evidence-based intervention under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) guidelines and can receive support from Title I, Part A interventions for low-performing schools, as well as competitive federal grants.

Colorado has adopted a nonmonetary approach to supporting community schools as a turnaround strategy. In 2019, the state passed legislation giving schools the option to seek out “innovation status” by proposing a plan to operate as a community school. This status allows for greater autonomy and managerial flexibility, including permission to waive state laws or local policies. In 2022, Colorado passed additional legislation authorizing a state review panel to recommend that a district public school be converted to a community school if that school fails to make substantial progress under its turnaround plan.

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### Florida: A University-Led Community Schools Certification Process With State Funding

Other states are exploring community schools certification as well. For example, Florida has provided annual funding to support a certification process developed and administered by the University of Central Florida’s Center for Community Schools (UCF Center).<sup>55</sup> State funding for Community Partnership Schools (CPS) of \$680,000 first became available for this work in 2014. The Florida legislature codified

the grant program in 2019 and substantially increased the available funding.<sup>56</sup> In fiscal year 2022, \$7.1 million in state funding was distributed through planning and implementation grants administered by the UCF Center. This is a recurring line item in the state education budget, although the amount has varied by year. The UCF Center currently serves 36 schools that agreed to participate in the certification process and, in return, are eligible for state-funded planning and implementation grants.

The grant funding, which is awarded to a convening nonprofit agency partnered with the school, is intended to be used primarily for staffing core positions at the community school and for administrative costs (up to 8%). It can also be used for ancillary positions for a single site and operational costs for programs and services that directly address student, family, and community needs, and lastly, project support—including positions that support more than one site. Planning grants are awarded for up to \$80,000 and require a 25% match from community contributions (either cash or in-kind). Typically, the implementation grants range from \$150,00 to \$200,000 per year for the first 5 years. After certification, there is a gradual step-down in grant money as schools are expected to have sustainability plans in place as they increasingly blend and braid funding to cover costs.

The CPS approach to community schools is grounded in well-defined structures and fundamental practices that are captured in 12 standards outlined in the UCF-Certified Community Partnership Schools Fundamental Practices 3.0.<sup>57</sup> At the center is a partnership between four entities: a nonprofit, a university or college, a school district, and a health care provider. Those entities collaborate to understand the needs of the community and design a community school around four pillars, or features: (1) wellness supports (similar to integrated student supports), (2) expanded learning, (3) family and community engagement, and (4) collaborative leadership. Each of these pillars has dedicated personnel—a community school director, who is a staff member of the nonprofit partner organization and is responsible for implementing collaborative leadership practices, and a coordinator for each of the other pillars (three coordinators total, working with the director).

The initial certification process takes 5 years, with the possibility of early certification after a third-year readiness assessment, and a renewed certification is required every 5 years. Throughout the certification process, schools are required to submit quarterly progress reports to the UCF Center. In the certification year, schools complete a self-study, which mirrors the quarterly progress reports. The self-study is intended to be a diagnostic tool that is completed by the core partners. For each standard and accompanying indicator, the partners craft a narrative and provide evidence and documentation that illustrates the ways in which they are trying, have implemented, or have innovated in that particular area. Participating sites enter this information in a data portal (utilizing a shared drive) offered by the UCF Center. Once this is completed, a team of four to six external reviewers (involving both peer reviewers—a director from another site always participates in the process—and reviewers from the UCF Center) conduct their own assessment using the same tool. Some of these reviewers then visit the campus to conduct observations, interviews, and focus groups.

## Georgia: A Whole Child School Certification Process

The Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE) has created a Whole Child Model School certification process for community schools. This process is part of the state's broader efforts to support whole child educational practices, as articulated in its Every Student Succeeds Act plan.<sup>58</sup> In 2016, GA DOE created the Office of Whole Child Supports to help districts and schools identify and address nonacademic barriers to success while expanding learning opportunities.<sup>59</sup> In 2021, the Office of Whole Child Supports received \$10 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to support its work, including an online Whole Child Toolkit and the certification process.<sup>60</sup>

The overarching goal of the certification process is to help community schools develop and independently sustain a whole child education model. GA DOE has drawn on two education frameworks to define this model. This includes the four pillars of community schools: (1) integrated student supports, (2) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, (3) active family and community engagement, and (4) collaborative leadership and practices.<sup>61</sup> It also includes five whole child tenets for students that they are: (1) healthy (e.g., they enter school healthy and practice a healthy lifestyle); (2) safe (e.g., they learn in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults); (3) engaged (e.g., they actively engage in learning and connect to the school and broader community); (4) supported (e.g., they can access personalized learning and be supported by qualified, caring adults); and (5) challenged (e.g., they are challenged academically and prepared for career pursuits and to be critical thinkers in a global environment).<sup>62</sup>

The overarching goal of the certification process is to help community schools develop and independently sustain a whole child education model.

Participation in the certification process is voluntary. Incentives for schools to participate include professional learning opportunities, public recognition and acknowledgment as a Whole Child Model School (e.g., a banner, press coverage), and priority if state funding becomes available.

Schools that opt in are required to employ a whole child coordinator. The coordinator establishes a collaborative leadership team that creates a school improvement plan based on a needs assessment including students, families, staff, and community members. Districts with multiple pilot sites also employ a systems-level coordinator. These staff members—along with school principals—receive coaching and support from GA DOE as well as externally provided technical assistance. The positions are funded through federal resources (e.g., ESSER) identified by GA DOE, as well as local dollars. Direct state funding is not provided for participating pilot schools.

Certification is based on a pre-assessment conducted by GA DOE, a review of relevant school documents, and personal interviews with district and school leaders conducted by a cross-disciplinary team of GA DOE staff. A school can maintain its certification for 3 years, with recertification contingent on showing growth in at least one area of the whole child model. The Whole Child Model School certification program is currently in its second pilot year, with 10 districts that have been involved in the process since 2020. GA DOE plans to certify 10 participating schools by April 2023. The Office of Whole Child Supports also recruited a new cohort of pilot sites through interest meetings and principal trainings that onboarded in January 2023.



## Trends in State Support for Community Schools

Across the examples featured in this report, five trends have emerged that can help to inform states that are interested in supporting the development of community schools (see Table 1).

- 1. A growing number of states are investing in community schools, using both discretionary federal funds and state funds.** The state investments featured in this report range from \$3.4 million to \$4.1 billion, mostly occurring within the past 3 years. Florida and New York are the exceptions, with investments dating back approximately a decade. Most states are primarily or exclusively drawing on state funding sources, while Illinois and Vermont are exclusively drawing on discretionary federal recovery funds (i.e., Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, or ESSER). New Mexico has employed a blending and braiding strategy as it supplemented its state funding with federal Title I, Part A school improvement funds, while California used federal recovery funds to launch a pilot grant program before making a major state investment.
- 2. States are adopting a range of approaches to supporting community schools—from capacity-building assistance to grant programs to ongoing school funding formula allocations—and many have increased the level of support offered over time.** Some states have opted to provide capacity-building supports, including certification processes (in Florida and Georgia) and turnaround or innovation strategies (in Colorado). Others have invested in community schools through competitive grant programs that are time-limited in nature. A third category of states has made ongoing investments in community schools through their school funding formulas with a set-aside or an entitlement grant program. It is important to note that ongoing funding is a more predictable and sustainable source of support for districts and schools than grant programs that might be discontinued—an especially important consideration for the additional coordinative staffing required to implement community schools at the school and local education agency (LEA) level. However, grant funding can be increased over time and can serve as a precursor to establishing an ongoing funding stream. For example, New York increased its annual school funding formula set-aside from \$100 million to \$250 million after making an initial investment in competitive grants. Maryland offered support to districts in leveraging federal funding for community schools before making an ongoing investment through its school funding formula. California started with \$45 million in federally funded pilot grants before making a \$4.1 billion state investment. New Mexico increased its grant program from \$2 million to \$8 million over the course of a few years. Multiyear and ongoing state commitments are important since the community schools strategy is complex and takes time to fully implement.

3. **States typically prioritize community schools funding for the highest-need schools and districts.** The featured states targeted schools and districts serving high-need student populations, defined in different ways. This approach is consistent with research showing that students living in low-income communities and attending under-resourced schools often experience barriers to learning that community schools can help to address.<sup>63</sup> California prioritized funding for schools serving 80% or more high-need students (defined as students from low-income households, English learners, and youth in foster care), while Maryland started with an 80% low-income eligibility threshold for schools that is set to gradually decrease to 55% by 2025. By contrast, New Mexico and Vermont prioritized funding for schools and districts serving 40% or more students from low-income households—consistent with Title I eligibility for schoolwide programs. Rather than setting an income eligibility threshold, New York took into account the proportion of students from low-income households, English learners, and students with disabilities when identifying “high-need” districts for support. The annual per-school (or in some cases per-district) funding amounts varied, ranging from \$50,000 (the low end of the range in Vermont) to \$500,000 (the high end of the range in California). School size and cost of living both impacted these different funding levels.
4. **States are investing in evidence-based strategies to support community schools implementation.** California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New Mexico, and Vermont have all identified evidence-based pillars, or features, of community schools in their funding and support. These pillars are integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership.<sup>64</sup> Maryland and New York also identify integrated supports and expanded learning time in their initiatives. The states featured here are also investing in practices grounded in the science of learning and development, including trauma-informed supports (e.g., California, New York) and safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments (e.g., Vermont). Many of the states specified support for community school coordinators (in Maryland, California, New Mexico, and Vermont) and other staff, professional development for educators, and technical assistance—all considered to be best practices for community schools implementation.<sup>65</sup> In addition, several states (California, Illinois, and Vermont) are including program evaluations in their grant investments to gain a better understanding of how these funds are implemented and what outcomes may result.
5. **State support often includes investments in technical assistance and other forms of capacity-building.** Several states have invested in technical assistance (TA) to build the capacity of community school practitioners and grantees, either through the state education agency or in partnership

with intermediary organizations.<sup>66</sup> California is opting for a “hub and spoke” approach, with a statewide lead TA center supporting a network of regional TA centers offering on-the-ground assistance to grantees. The New Mexico Public Education Department has developed a statewide virtual community of practice for grantees and other interested practitioners as part of its tiered system of support. New York has funded three regional technical assistance centers—open to all community school practitioners—to provide support for implementing the school funding formula set-aside funding. The Georgia Department of Education and the University of Central Florida’s Center for Community Schools build the capacity of community school practitioners through coaching offered as part of whole child and community school certification processes. These state investments recognize the complex nature of community schools implementation by supporting practitioners at community school sites, many of which are receiving state resources. This is especially important for school- and LEA-level staff who are brought on as coordinators to support students, families, school staff, and community partners.

States are increasingly supporting and investing in community schools at a time when districts and schools across the country are still recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The whole child and whole family supports offered by community schools can play an important role in meeting the needs of this moment and providing an opportunity to reimagine how schools function. As state investments in this approach continue, it will be important to continue to learn from early implementation efforts in these states to guide future investments. Doing so can help to increase access to high-quality and sustainable community schools that educate and support the whole child, family, and community.

**Table 1**  
**Summary of State Investments in Community Schools**

State	Support type	Year started	Funding amount	Funding source	Funding priority	Sites served (2022)	TA/capacity-building
CA	Competitive grants	2020 (pilot grants) 2021 (current grant program)	\$4.1B through 2030–31	State budget (used federal ESSER funds for pilot grants)	80%+ high-need student population	458 schools (first cohort of implementation grants)	Statewide and regional TA centers
FL	Certification	2014	\$7M in FY 2022	State budget	--	36 schools	Support through University of Central Florida
GA	Certification	2020	--	--	--	10 pilot sites	Coaching through state Department of Education
IL	Competitive grants	2021	\$86M over 2 years	Federal ESSER	--	136 grants (representing more than 684 school sites)	Virtual office hours and site visits, coaching as needed from State Board of Education
MD	Ongoing funding formula (entitlement grants)	2020	\$116.7M in 2022	State budget	70%+ population of students from low-income households in 2022	300 schools	--
NM	Competitive grants	2019	\$8M in 2022	State budget (also used federal Title I, Part A)	40%+ population of students from low-income households	69 schools	Virtual community of practice through state Department of Education
NY	Ongoing funding formula (set-aside)	2013 (competitive grants) 2016 (current set-aside)	\$250M in 2022	State budget	Districts and schools designated high need	240 districts	Regional TA centers
VT	Competitive grants	2021	\$3.4M through 2024	Federal ESSER	Title I or 40%+ population of students from low-income households	16 schools	Training and support from state Department of Education and University of Vermont

Note: TA = Technical assistance; ESSER = Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund.

Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

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