



# Transitioning to a Community School: The Role of a Needs and Assets Assessment

California's unprecedented \$3 billion investment in community schools creates a unique opportunity for communities to advance a transformative vision for our schools—one deeply rooted in relationships of trust and a commitment to racial justice. An inclusive, thorough and ongoing needs and assets assessment is a best practice in the transition to a community school.

Why would communities choose to conduct a needs and assets assessment as part of their design of a new or existing community school? According to the [National Center for Community Schools \(NCCS\)](#), “A needs assessment is a systematic process used to understand and create a profile of a community school's needs

[and assets].” When executed well, these [needs and assets assessments](#) can provide the opportunity for a diverse group of stakeholders to engage in data collection and analysis, and foster shared responsibility and accountability, as they develop a shared understanding of the needs and assets of the community and how to best address and leverage them.

What are the different components of a needs and assets assessment? NCCS has developed a [Needs Assessment Toolkit](#) that describes eight comprehensive steps of the assessment process. These include:

1. Getting started
2. Archival data review
3. Initial analysis
4. Surveys
5. Key informant interviews
6. Focus groups
7. Final analysis
8. Reporting



Art by Adrienne, @adzca

Each school is different, and the exact process for conducting a needs and assets assessment may look different and will be context specific. This is also true of the type of existing or new data that a school community collects and analyzes as part of its assessment process. Data sources can include surveys, resource mapping, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and listening sessions as well as academic, school climate, and economic data.

Based on interviews with community school experts, common best practices that thriving community schools have used as part of an effective needs and assets assessment process include:

- building a diverse team to conduct the needs and assets assessment that includes students, families, educators, and community partners as co-owners of the process;
- creating the appropriate environment for the needs and assets assessment to be successful, including understanding a school's history and building trusting relationships among stakeholders;
- facilitating a culture of continuous improvement, supported by the investment of human and financial resources; and
- using ongoing data to support a transformative vision and goal setting and to advance positive change in such areas as school culture and climate, student mental health and well-being, and academic opportunities and outcomes.

This backgrounder was informed by community schools research from the National Center for Community Schools' [Needs Assessment Toolkit](#), and by interviews with community school experts from the [National Center for Community Schools](#), the [National Education Association](#), and the [UCLA Center for Community Schooling](#).

All artwork comes from artists commissioned through the California Partnership for the Future of Learning [2021](#) and [2022](#) Art Showcases, with individual artists attributed below each image.

[California Partnership for the Future of Learning](#) | [Community Schools Toolkit](#)