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Staffing for School Transformation:
The Role of the Community School Coordinator

Each community school relies on a complex web of partnerships and resources to ensure student success. The community school coordinator (also called the community school manager or community school director) manages these resources and partnerships and plays a vital role in supporting the systems, structures, and practices needed for students and adults to thrive. In one study, it was estimated that for every $1 invested in the community school coordinator, the school community received $7.11 in benefit. Typical responsibilities of the community school coordinator include:

- leading and supporting efforts to create a safe, inclusive, supportive, and welcoming school community, which includes listening to and communicating regularly with key stakeholders;
- setting a vision and direction for the school in partnership with the principal, other school staff, and the school community by participating in and coordinating shared leadership opportunities;
- nurturing and maintaining productive, reciprocal relationships with school staff, students, families, local businesses, community organizations, and government agencies;
- managing the school's needs and assets assessments, including collecting and analyzing data from a broad range of school and community voices; and
- adapting the school's programming, partnerships, and resources to meet emerging needs.

Community school coordinators are typically employed by the school district or by a partner organization, such as a local community-based organization. Employees may be certificated or non-certificated staff. In some districts, community school coordinators are administrative staff.

The Many Responsibilities of a Community School Coordinator

Needs and Assets Assessments and Goal Setting

The community school coordinator works with school staff and leadership to strategically cultivate partnerships and leverage relationships, services, opportunities, and funding sources (local, state, federal, and private dollars) to meet the needs and interests of students and families. A critical first step in understanding needs and opportunities is the implementation of a thoughtful and inclusive needs and assets assessment. Through this process, school communities are able to identify key priorities (such as ensuring students experience psychological and physical safety on campus or increasing the community voice in decision-

making) and to develop an action plan for achieving desired results, including how to best use available resources and personnel and identifying new partnership needs to meet goals.

An important part of the community school coordinator's role is to work with other school leaders to engage students, families, and staff in co-creating a vision for the school. They also serve as "lead learner" in supporting a culture of continuous improvement. This includes understanding families' and students' emerging and evolving needs and interests and supporting both through relationships, resources, and programming.

Managing Relationships With Staff, Students, Families, and External Partners

Because a community school is both a place and a set of partnerships, the community school coordinator plays an important role in managing all aspects of partnerships at the school site, including maintaining relationships, developing contracts, and helping to manage the physical use of space. Community school coordinators can also be key liaisons between partners, staff, students, and families. Community school coordinators must consistently communicate with and convene collaborative teams to support students (such as a Coordination of Services Team). To be effective, they should also develop a structure and process for connecting regularly with teachers to ensure alignment of partnerships; stay updated on the changing needs of students and their families, and match resources to need. Effective community school coordinators are also supported by their districts, such as through the establishment of learning communities in which they share knowledge, grow best practices, and participate in a community of support.

Art by Bianca M., @samruvian

The community school coordinator plays an integral role in supporting authentic engagement and partnerships with families. Successful community schools model family engagement that goes far beyond Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and parent-teacher conferences. For example, community school coordinators often support the implementation of parent-teacher home visits. They can bring relevant family learning opportunities to campus and create opportunities for family members to share their skills and expertise with others in the school community. Some schools have a staff person who serves as the parent or family liaison and works closely with the community school coordinator to engage students and families. Community school coordinators can also support youth leadership, including by providing space for advocacy and social activism.

Setting Community School Coordinators Up for Success

There is no single profile of an effective community school coordinator. They possess a variety of work and life experiences and backgrounds. The following represent some key considerations when staffing for this position.

Factors to Consider

Parents, teachers, after-school program coordinators, family engagement specialists, and staff from partnering organizations all serve as community school coordinators in schools across the country. What is most important is that the community school coordinator is connected with or is a member of the school community. Community school coordinators who are employed by a partner organization (rather than the district) will need to establish effective data-sharing agreements, which can be vital to developing and monitoring systems to support students effectively. At the same time, coordinators who are employees of partner organizations may be able to leverage funding and other resources more effectively by virtue of their independence and community connections. While there is no single path to becoming a community school coordinator, key traits include being able to: manage trusting and authentic relationships with students, families, partners, and staff; analyze the assets and needs of the community; coordinate schedules and services; and balance short-term improvements with transformational change.

Providing a Foundation of Authentic, Shared Leadership

Community schools rest on a foundation of shared power and collaborative leadership. Because of the many relationships they manage, and their extensive knowledge of the needs, goals, and assets of their school communities, community school coordinators play an essential role in cultivating a culture and practice of shared leadership. Effective community school coordinators understand that distributed leadership is more sustainable and productive than top-down leadership. They therefore build structures to support broad participation; develop leadership capacity among all members of the community; and shift power to actively invite students, families, and staff into decision-making.

This backgrounder was informed by community schools research from the Learning Policy Institute, the National Center for Community Schools, the National Education Association, the Coalition for Community Schools, and the Community School Coordinators Network, as well as by key learnings from the April 27, 2022 California Partnership for the Future of Learning Shared Learning Session.

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.

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