

ACEs COMMUNITY SCHOOL MODELS

District takes on challenges of creating community schools

By [Susan Frey](#) | December 2, 2015 | [1 Comment](#)



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Lauren Petry, left, and Imani Williams from Bishop O'Dowd High School volunteered to read to children during a summer program that is part of the Hayward Unified School District's transition to a "community schools" approach.

For the past five years, the [Hayward Unified School District](#) has been focusing on its lowest-income neighborhoods, transitioning to a “community schools” approach that provides health, social and other services to students and their families.

The East Bay Area district south of Oakland offers a case study in the potential of an approach whose goal is to transform schools into hubs for the entire community by offering a range of services, such as mental health counseling, health clinics, after-school programs and classes for parents.

Nationwide, about 5,000 community schools serve 2 million students, according to the [Coalition for Community Schools](#). The concept is “catching on in California,” said Deanna Niebuhr, senior director of the Community Schools Initiative of the [Partnership for Children & Youth](#), a nonprofit organization based in Oakland. In response, the partnership launched a [statewide network](#) in September to connect community school districts to each other and to advocates who work with them.

Now that districts have more flexibility in how they use their resources under the Local Control Funding Formula, “we wanted to seize the moment” to steer the conversation about how to reform education toward community schools, Niebuhr said. The approach emphasizes building

relationships within schools and beyond their walls, she said. That includes building a positive school climate, creating community partnerships and engaging with parents.



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Children choose a free book to take home, donated through a community book drive. Bernice Patricio says her son Gabriel, right, “checked the calendar every day to see if it was story time in the park.”

Although schools can be the focal point in a community’s attempt to meet students’ needs, districts cannot do it alone. Hayward began its drive to build community schools by seeking support from local governments and nonprofits, and its efforts have met with success. City police pick up truant students and take them to their schools rather than arrest them. Chabot College offers free classes to students and parents. The local food bank delivers food to schools in the lowest-income neighborhoods. Alameda County supports the mental and physical health needs of students at their schools.

The Hayward Public Library helps the district keep children reading during the summer through a program called “Words for Lunch.” On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the district provides lunch and the library offers a story hour with trained volunteers reading to the children. Afterwards, the children take home a book, donated through a community book drive.

Stanley Dobbs has spent much of his 2½ years as Hayward’s superintendent building these community relationships. Each year, he holds an education summit that includes every group in Hayward involved with children, including the city, county, churches, nonprofit agencies, Chabot College and charter and parochial schools.

“I want to do whatever it takes to show we’re all in this together,” Dobbs said.

HAYWARD SERIES

In an ongoing series of articles, EdSource will follow the Hayward Unified School District’s efforts to involve its community in its schools. The district wants to turn all of its schools into

community schools – neighborhood hubs that offer expanded learning programs and wellness centers to meet students’ mental and physical needs.

However, the community schools approach can be costly. District leaders said that despite the support of a wide network of community and government organizations, they do not have enough funding to fully implement their vision. For example, turning a classroom into a health clinic that meets all the required specifications costs more than \$1 million, said Chien Wu-Fernandez, assistant superintendent of student and family services for Hayward Unified.

Instead, the district plans to create full-service community schools in its highest-poverty neighborhoods, offer key services in all schools, and turn a former elementary school into a central hub that will provide a full range of services. Hayward Unified educates more than 22,500 students, about three-quarters of whom come from low-income families.

“We’re taking the community schools framework and using it as a way to start to organize our system, rather than just get services in,” Wu-Fernandez said. “We’re building services based on data and where we see the gaps.”

For example, some schools are closer to grocery stores and clinics, she said, while in other neighborhoods it’s harder for families to get nutritious food and health care.

One of Hayward’s neediest neighborhoods surrounds Cherryland Elementary, which is closest to the district’s ideal of a community school, Wu-Fernandez said. At Cherryland, 85 percent of the children come from low-income families and more than half are English learners.

“We figure out what the needs in our community are – students first and then families,” said Cherryland Principal Itoco Garcia. “Then we do what we can in our power to meet those needs. We try to give our students a chance.”

Principal Itoco Garcia is well-versed in the community school approach, noting that it is based on the theory of a “hierarchy of needs,” developed in the late 1940s by psychologist Abraham Maslow. Only when students’ basic needs are taken care of – whether it’s a toothache or stress in the family – can they focus on academics.

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In the fall, staff from a county-funded dental clinic come to Cherryland to offer students free screenings, fluoride treatments, sealants and referrals for other dental work.



LIV AMES FOR EDSOURCE

Gabriel Patricio, 6, enjoys manipulating the puppet during the Words for Lunch summer program in Hayward parks supported by the city and the school district.

In the spring, the school holds a health fair for families, which includes a mobile “vision van” with optometrists who test eyes and can provide free glasses the same day.

Garcia said caring for the whole family is another way to take care of kids. “Grandma needs glasses so she can help with the homework,” he said.

One large classroom at Cherryland is set aside for free Parent University classes based on what parents need and request, such as English as a Second Language, GED preparation and Zumba. And a mobile food pantry provided by the Alameda County Community Food Bank comes by the school once a month.

Cherryland was the first school in the district to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, a data-driven disciplinary system that relies on positive reinforcement.

“PBIS transforms the relationship between adults and students in a school,” Garcia said. “We removed ‘stop,’ ‘no’ and ‘don’t’ from school rules.” The school also offers parenting workshops so parents can apply the PBIS principles at home.

Parent Angelica Chanchola said that the parenting workshop helped her use a more positive approach in disciplining her children, talking calmly with them rather than getting upset and raising her voice if they disobeyed her.

“I learned that certain words can affect a child’s development,” she said. “I learned to say ‘consequences’ instead of ‘punishments.’”

Each month a city bookmobile offers books that children can borrow, and speakers come to the school to discuss relevant issues with parents, such as representatives from the Alameda County Sheriff's office who came to talk about domestic violence and disaster preparedness.

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Cherryland has one half-time and three full-time mental health counselors funded by the county and a part-time speech therapist, psychologist and nurse. The school has an after-school program, whose staff works closely with teachers.

“Nothing is a satellite program,” Garcia said. “Everything is integrated into the fabric of the school culture.”

What helps make it work, he said, is a combination of strong community partners and local control of district funds, called site-based funding. A school committee representing teachers, other staff, administrators and parents decides how to spend the funds the district allocates to the school.

Site-based decision-making “gives this community a sense of place, purpose, power,” Garcia said.

The community schools model also involves physical school design, such as intimate rooms for counseling and large rooms for community meetings and clinics. One factor limiting Cherryland’s final transition to a community school is space. Built in 1948 for 500 students, the school now serves almost 800 students and relies heavily on portable buildings.

But Cherryland is going to be rebuilt with school bond funds approved by Hayward voters in November 2014. School leaders are hosting public meetings to find out what community members think their new school should look like.

GOING DEEPER

[Positive Student Outcomes in Community Schools](#), Center for American Progress
[Making the Grade: Assessing the Evidence for Integrated Student Supports](#), Child Trends

Although not all of Hayward's schools offer everything available at Cherryland, all schools have after-school programs and most schools are implementing positive discipline practices and have mental health counselors. Chabot College offers on-site, for-credit classes at all middle and high schools, and the county provides alcohol and drug counseling at almost all of the secondary schools.

The county staffs a mobile health van at Hayward High three days a week, and the food bank provides food once a month to schools in the lowest-income neighborhoods.

This past spring, the district also opened a centrally located hub at a former elementary school that offers free Parent University classes, including some for community college credit. Parents can also register their children for school, preschool and after-school programs at the hub. It hosts community meetings, and the city may open a branch library there.

The food bank comes to the hub, and the district plans to send the mobile health van to the hub next summer to handle immunizations and physical exams when parents register their children for school. If funding can be found, the district would like to have the van visit the hub two days each week during the school year.

Niebuhr says mobile health vans work well. "It's not a discounted model to have a van come once a week," she said. The "bigger work," she said, is doing business differently: engaging families, building a positive school climate and working to continually improve.

"It's not 'these poor kids need services' and that's the end of the story," Niebuhr said. "But does every family have a good relationship with their children's teachers, and do teachers have the capacity to make that connection with families? That will drive student achievement."

The community schools framework is "a blend of services, engagement and good core instruction," Wu-Fernandez said "It is also a lens through which we do the work."
