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Oakland Unified School District Full-Service Community Schools Outcomes: A Retrospective

Shifting School Culture & Relationships with Families and the Broader Community

BY KENDRA FEHRER

In 2012, OUSD leaders, staff, families, students, and community partners launched an ambitious effort to transform the district into a community school district. What started as a pilot in mostly secondary schools has expanded to become a far-reaching district strategy across all school levels. Currently, 42 OUSD schools have Community School Managers and most schools have some elements of community schools programming. As OUSD enters a new phase of planning and strategy, this brief provides an opportunity to reflect back on progress made and prospects for development moving forward.

How Do We Measure Community School Success?

Community schools are more than a specific program or intervention. A community school is a complex endeavor which, when done well, can dramatically increase the resources and opportunities available to help students learn and grow.

OUSD community schools focus on four school-level outcomes

- Seamless integration of services and opportunities to support learning
- Conditions that allow teachers and principals to focus on high quality instruction
- Enhanced collaboration and partnership across adults at school and home
- Climate of high expectations and high levels of support for students

john w. gardner
center for youth and their communities

Quality full-service community schools (FSCS) develop across multiple years as schools take on new responsibilities, collaborate with partner organizations, develop relationships, clarify roles, and align activities towards common goals. As a result, it takes time to effect the changes in culture and practice that can lead to desired organizational and student outcomes.

Implementation of any large-scale, multifaceted endeavor such as OUSD's community schools initiative is often incremental. The roll-out has been iterative and gradual. Many current schools are in only their first or second year of implementation; others have had seven or eight years. Further, changes in principal leadership or staff turnover can also effect implementation. Due to these complexities, we focus our analysis on "mature" FSCS, where longevity and leadership stability has allowed for more robust, continuous implementation; however, we also include data from "emerging" community school sites where the model may be newer, as well as district community schools more broadly.

Despite the complexities of large-scale and varied implementation, OUSD community schools have made impressive headway on bolstering conditions for learning. This brief draws from five years of Gardner Center research on and with OUSD community schools to assess progress to date on each of the initiative's goals, as well as signal opportunities for further development.

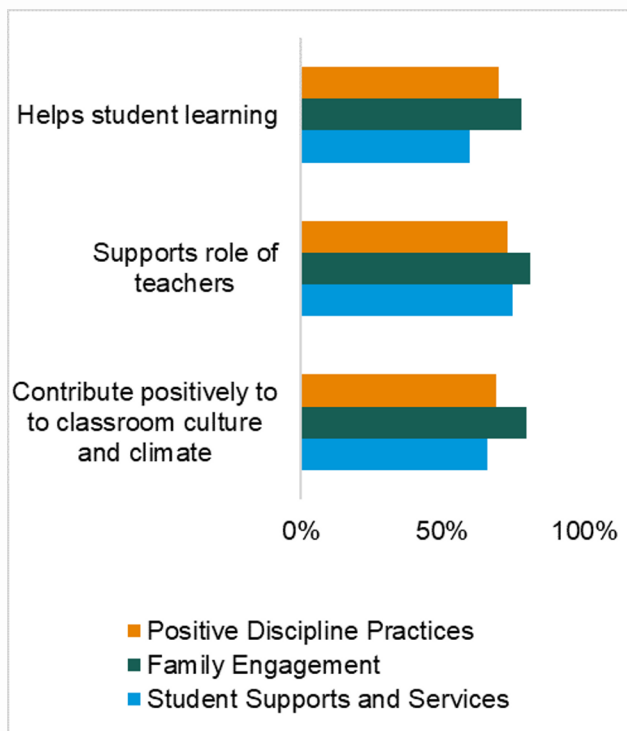
Seamless integration of services and opportunities to support conditions for learning

OUSD full service community schools aim to build schools' organizational capacity to expand services and opportunities that support student learning. The Coordination of Services Teams (COST) and the expansion of strategic partnerships—all managed by the Community School Manager (CSM)—are instrumental in providing seamless services to students.

With the support of the CSM, most full-service community schools have developed school culture/climate teams. Additionally, most CSMs are coached to assess school population-level strengths, needs and gaps through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. They then work with school leadership and partner organizations to fill in gaps and bring needed supports to campus.

- At most full service community schools, partner organizations provide a range of supports and services. These include afterschool programs, Linked Learning opportunities, clinics, dental exams, vision testing and eye-glasses provision, and behavioral health services. The CSM manages these partnerships.
- Seventy-two percent of teachers surveyed reported they use COST to refer students to needed services and supports. While this suggests high utilization, teachers also expressed concern with COST effectiveness. They did not always hear back or see desired 'progress' with students, or they found available programs were insufficient for students' needs.
- Most teachers refer students for targeted academic interventions (80%), expanded learning programs (78%), and attendance support (74%). All teachers (100%) refer students for health supports.
- Our research suggests that partners and services are seamlessly integrated into the fabric of mature FSCS. At one school, clinic staff teach a health sciences class which includes clinic visits and tours for students. At another school, afterschool mentors adjusted their schedules so they could "push in" to classrooms during the day. In doing so, they could align afterschool activities with school day instruction.

Figure 1. Teacher Perception of FSCS Resources in Relation to Teaching, Learning, and Classroom Climate (n=394-406)



Conditions allow teachers and principals to focus on high quality instruction

Building teachers’ and principals’ capacity to focus on high quality instruction is one of the primary goals of the community schools initiative. By bringing strategic partnerships to the school site, introducing collaborative leadership practices, and integrating services and supports, community schools aim to bolster principal and teacher capacity to focus on instruction.

- Teachers favorably report that FSCS resources and practices help bolster student learning, support them in their role as teachers, and contribute to positive culture/climate.
- Our research at mature full-service community schools shows that principals and teachers attribute resources, partners, and the CSM with removing non-academic responsibilities from their plates, freeing up more time to focus on instruction.

In the words of one OUSD teacher:

“Having support services for counseling, housing, and mental health have helped [me] tremendously. It allows me to focus more on academic interventions and classroom instruction.”

- FSCS services and supports can diminish classroom disruptions and student absences. They can provide more tools for teachers to use (e.g., positive discipline), which makes for higher quality instructional time. In recent years, CSMs have taken a more explicit role in bolstering school staff capacity.

Enhanced collaboration and partnership between adults at the school and home

Full-service community schools aim to build a culture of trust and collaboration across adults at the school, including partners, school staff, and families. Students do better when the educational practices and school environments include the values, expectations, and experiences that shape their lives at home (Zepeda et al, 2011; Zentella 2005). When the adults in children’s lives work together to support students, young people are more likely to thrive.

In line with this research-base, OUSD’s collaborative leadership practices help full-service community schools push the boundaries of who is included in the school, expanding the school community to include partners and families.

- Teachers report that they communicate with families in support of student learning. The most common practices included calling families at home to share positive news about their child (100%), texting families (94%), holding classroom parent meetings (82%), looking at data with families (75%), and communicating with families about their hopes and dreams for their child (73%). This suggests far-reaching norms and expectations around school-family partnerships.
- More than half (60%) of OUSD community school teachers surveyed agree that partners contribute positively to their school's goals. At mature full-service community schools, these levels are much higher. Staff at mature sites often do not distinguish 'partners' from school staff. Partners attend staff meetings, the principal and/or the CSM regularly meets with partners, and all adults engage in shared goal-setting and planning.
- At mature full-service community schools, families are active contributors to school improvement and decision-making. Many schools have implemented new practices to facilitate deeper partnerships. For example, transforming standard parent-teacher conferences with Academic Parent Teacher Teams scaffolds data-based conversations, shared goal-setting, and skill-building between families, teachers, and students.

In the words of one OUSD teacher:

“It doesn't matter what shirt you're wearing, we're all here for the same students.”



A student-centered, culturally responsive climate of support

Students do best when expectations are high and they receive high levels of support. OUSD full-service community schools aim to provide culturally responsive services and supports that meet students' needs, thus strengthening student-adult relationships and contributing towards a culture/climate conducive to learning. The following measures suggest that classroom teachers are embracing and adopting community school resources and practices. These efforts complement progressive practices, such as culturally responsive instruction and student centered instruction.

- Nearly all teachers surveyed were using some form of positive discipline practices. All teachers (100%) reported using positive discipline, while 90% used restorative justice circles and 68% used trauma-informed practice.
- The majority (92%) of teachers surveyed indicated that building strong relationships is a high priority in their classroom. More than half (59%) indicated they actively considered their students' life experiences in class planning and instruction. Yet less than half (48%) felt they understood what their students' lives were like outside of the classroom.
- At mature full-service community schools, CSMs work to strengthen teachers' knowledge and awareness of students' community context. At an individual level, for example, they might supply teachers with relevant contextual information when students are struggling. At the school level, they might facilitate 'community visits' for teachers to get to know the students' neighborhood.

Positive Outcomes for Students

When assessing community school outcomes for students, it bears noting that OUSD FSCS, by design, target those schools serving the students most impacted by poverty and other social factors such as immigration status. While FSCS resources and practices may mitigate some of the barriers young people experience, there remain substantive challenges far outside the influence of one school or district. Some examples include rapid demographic change and rising cost of living, an increasingly hostile political environment, and repressive immigration policies.

Consequently, comparisons of FSCS student outcomes to district-wide or non-FSCS averages can be misleading, as they reflect substantively different student demographics and community contexts. When discussing student-level outcomes in this brief, we emphasize changes over time, rather than comparison groups.

Although FSCS activities can support conditions for high quality teaching and learning, most strategies identified prior to the district's Instructional Focus 2019-22 plan do not target direct instruction or academic content mastery. Community school implementation instead aims to bolster conditions for learning through school-level shifts in culture and practice.

While student-level data on social and emotional learning outcomes are somewhat limited, OUSD data suggest several positive long-term indicators of change across the period of FSCS implementation.

These data suggest that full-service community schools are keeping track with or improving at a faster rate than schools district wide, despite working with demonstrably more disadvantaged students.

As intended, OUSD full-service community schools are serving the most vulnerable students

The community schools initiative emerged as an equity strategy. Community school resources and practices provide targeted supports and services to students most vulnerable to the negative effects of poverty and other social inequalities.

FSCS currently serve 35% of the district's 53,100 students. Of these, 34% are English learners, and 22% are Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). Twenty-six percent are African American, 50% are Hispanic, 12% are Asian, and 6% are Caucasian. Just over 1% are students in the foster system. Most of these figures are modestly higher than district averages.

Notably, long-term student level outcomes are steadily improving in the secondary schools where FSCS implementation has been the longest: While 35% of all OUSD students are in a FSCS, approximately 72% of middle school students and 98% of high school students were served in a FSCS during the 2018-19 school year. Prior to Dewey and Skyline High Schools' adoption of the FSCS model in 2017-18, approximately 78% of OUSD high school students were in a FSCS.

Students are persisting in school and making positive transitions

OUSD students are graduating with standards-based diplomas or, if they do not graduate, are making transitions that reflect continued academic engagement, such as obtaining an alternative diploma, or confirmed enrollment in a GED, adult education, or community college continuing education program. These trends reflect positive shifts district wide, but are slightly more pronounced at FSCS.

Ultimately, the full-service community schools initiative aims to create school environments where students experience social-emotional and academic learning, schools have the conditions to support high quality teaching and learning, and families partner in student's success in high school, college, and beyond.

Figure 2. Positive Transition Rate

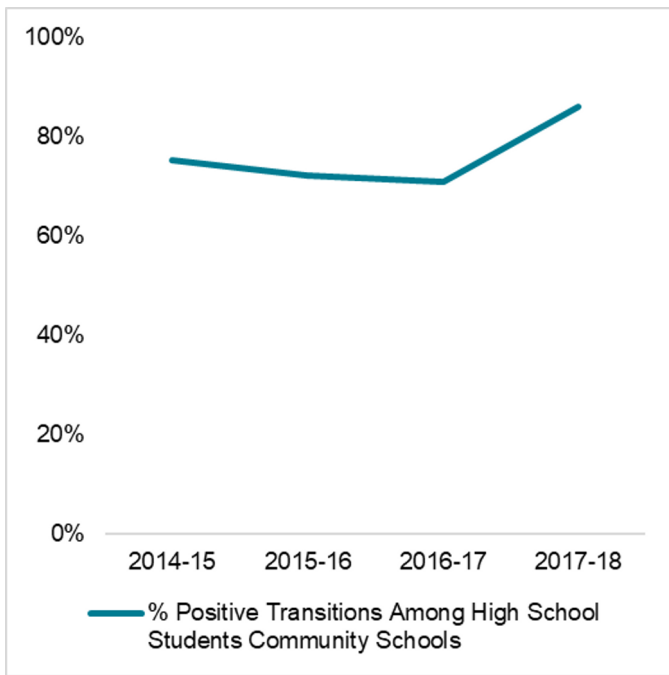
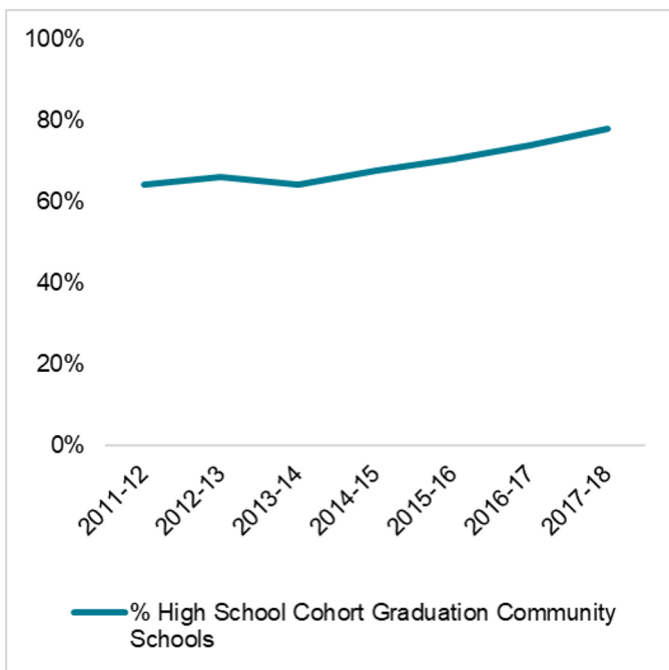


Figure 3. Graduation Rates



Students and families participate in school governance and district policy

Recent policy shifts, such as California's shift to Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) have created an opportunity for increased family and student engagement in school decision-making and governance. OUSD has a strong track record of innovative systemic youth engagement, evident in their Standard for Meaningful Student Engagement and operationalized in the All City Council Student Union and site-level student leadership. Mature full-service community schools have leveraged district and partner supports for family engagement to build families' skill and confidence participating in School Site Councils and parent advisory committees. The 2017-18 LCAP parent survey results indicate:

- 97.2% of parents feel welcome to participate in their child's school
- 89.6% of parents feel encouraged to be an active partner with the school in educating their child
- 89.1% feel encouraged to participate in organized parent groups (school site councils, committees, parent organizations, LCAP Parent Student Advisory Committee, etc.)

While family engagement efforts look different across schools, Gardner Center research suggests that at mature community schools, parents have played important roles in school improvement and decision-making.

The 2017-18 LCAP survey included a 57.5% response rate from families (12,855 responses) and, at the recommendation of the LCAP Parent Student Advisory Committee included a modified school connectedness scale.

These findings also indicate that 95.1% of parent respondents felt the school staff treated them with respect; 90.3% felt the school staff take their concerns seriously, 89.7% felt that the school staff welcomed their suggestions, 89.1% felt the school staff responds to their needs in a timely manner, and 91.7% felt their child's background is valued at their school.

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH SERIES

This brief is part of a series that presents findings from a research collaboration between OUSD and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, focused on understanding the implementation of the community school model in Oakland. The full series is available at gardnercenter.stanford.edu