

Strategies for Implementing a Community School Model

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COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION

MARYLAND EQUITY
PROJECT



Overview

- Context
- Overview of academic literature
- Our research process
- Key takeaway from our research
- Strategies for implementing a community school model
- Future directions for the AIB



Context: Community Schools under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Community schools—which aim to **strengthen connections between schools, families, and communities** with the goal of improving students' educational outcomes and well-being ([Community Schools Forward, 2023](#))—are a **key component** of the Blueprint. Under the Blueprint, schools are automatically designated as community schools based on their **four-year average of students living in poverty**, which makes them eligible for additional state **funding through Concentration of Poverty Grants** ([Maryland State Department of Education \[MSDE\], n.d.](#)). The poverty threshold for designation as a community school will **change over time**. In **2021-22**, schools where **80% of students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals** were deemed community schools; in **2029-30**, the threshold will be **55%** ([Maryland Out of School Time Network, n.d.](#)).

The number of community schools in Maryland has **grown substantially** over the last several years, from **206** in 2019-20 ([MSDE, 2021](#)) to **621** as of July 1, 2024 ([MSDE, 2024](#)). The **theory of action** undergirding this policy effort is that an expansion of community schools will **facilitate an expansion of wraparound services**—such as extended learning time, vision and dental care, and mental and behavioral health providers—to students who need them ([MSDE, 2022](#)).

For additional information about community school expansion in Maryland, see [Bill et al. \(2024\)](#).



Community Schools are a Promising Model to Support Students

- Community school model is **promising strategy for providing services that address challenges students face outside schools**, such as racism, poverty, and food insecurity ([Coleman-Jensen et al., 2022](#); [Warren, 2005](#))
- Goal of community schools is to **strengthen connections between schools, families, and communities** with goal of **improving students' well-being and educational outcomes** ([Community Schools Forward, 2023](#); [Coalition for Community Schools, 2017](#))



Literature Points to Promising Implementation Strategies

Research on community schools identifies **implementation challenges and strategies**. This evidence points to several steps districts may take to implement a community school model that has the **potential to fulfill its transformative aims**.

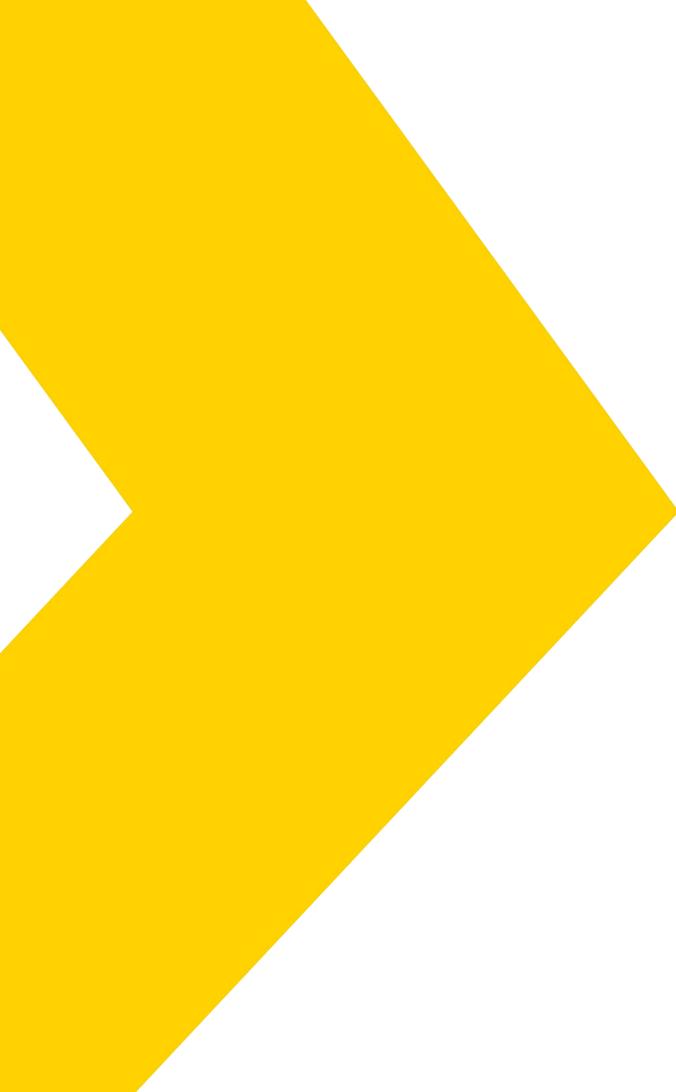
- Develop a **shared vision and goals** ([Lubell, 2011](#))
- Create a system of **shared leadership and accountability** that involves **multiple stakeholders**, particularly parents, families and communities ([Daniel et al., 2023](#); [Ishimaru, 2019](#); [Medina et al., 2019](#))
- Conduct **needs assessments and resource inventories**, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups with key stakeholders ([Lubell, 2011](#))
- **Build institutional and personnel capacity**, including by creating positions specific to community school management and partnership facilitation and training staff ([Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016](#); [Sanders et al., 2021](#))
- Collect and evaluate **data on desired outcomes** ([Lubell, 2011](#))



Our Research Process: Coding Blueprint Implementation Plans for Promising Strategies and Challenges

- Developed **coding tool designed to capture relevant data** (e.g., implementation strategies)
 - Coding tool was informed by literature but we **coded inductively** to identify **districts' challenges with and strategies for implementing a community school model**
- Used coding tool to guide analysis of relevant **portion of districts' 2024 final implementation plans**:
 - Pillar 4: Question #20
 - *Asked districts to describe how they are supporting students attending community schools by aligning partnerships to needs assessments and engaging in shared leadership, goal-setting, and accountability practices*
- Reviewed coded data to **identify themes** (e.g., shared leadership, needs assessments)
 - Grouped themes into phases addressing different aspects of implementation (e.g., progress monitoring)
 - Attended to how districts' strategies aligned with literature





Key Takeaway

Districts **did not discuss challenges** with implementing a community school model in their 2024 implementation plans. However, they described **ample strategies for developing and maintaining community schools**. These strategies generally corresponded to **different phases of implementation** and **aligned with academic literature**; thus, based on our analytic criteria, they are **highly promising**. However, strategies were **consistent across contexts**, to the extent that many districts used the ***exact same language*** to describe their implementation efforts. Furthermore, many districts noted promising strategies but **failed to provide adequate detail** about them. The fact that this analysis is based on data from a **single question**, coupled with the **limited detail** most districts offered in their responses, makes it **challenging to garner specific insights** about how implementation in this Blueprint area is progressing.

Phases of Implementing a Community School Model

Developing a Shared Vision

1 Includes developing a vision or goals for community schools shared across stakeholders

Practicing Shared Leadership

2 Includes creating a leadership structure that engages multiple stakeholders

Assessing Community Needs

3 Includes assessing the needs of communities schools serve

Building Capacity

4 Includes institutional structures and training opportunities that support capacity to implement a community school model

Addressing Community Needs

5 Includes identifying and instituting resources and services that align with community needs

Monitoring Progress

6 Includes collecting and evaluating data to track progress toward addressing community needs

We organize our findings by the different **phases of implementing a community school model** that emerged from our analysis.

Each phase also represents a distinct implementation strategy.

We categorize each strategy—aligned with a distinct phase—on a continuum from ***Most Promising*** to ***Least Promising***. Criteria determining the category in which a strategy falls, detailed on subsequent slides, include the **extent to which it aligns with academic literature** and the **level of detail** in which it is described in districts' implementation plans. To reflect the academic literature, **criteria vary by phase.**

Subsequent slides present an overview of promising strategies, followed by criteria for degrees of promise and related qualitative examples organized by phase.



Across Phases, Most Strategies are Promising

We used a **district-by-phase** approach to place data into ***Most Promising*** and ***Potentially Promising*** categories. No strategies fell into the ***Least Promising*** category because they all aligned with academic literature to some degree. Additionally, **all districts were engaging in most strategies**, likely because they were state-mandated. Within each phase, **categories are mutually exclusive**. If a district provided examples that had **different degrees of promise**, we placed it into the **higher category**.

Number of Districts Engaging in Most and Potentially Promising Strategies to Implement a Community School Model

	Most Promising	Potentially Promising	Total
Developing a Shared Vision	7	13	20
Practicing Shared Leadership	13	7	20
Assessing Community Needs	6	16	22
Building Capacity	14	8	22
Addressing Community Needs	22	0	22
Monitoring Progress	5	17	22

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Addressing Community Needs	22	0	22
Monitoring Progress	5	17	22

Note that the **maximum number of districts engaging in each strategy is 22**, given that 2 districts (Calvert and Queen Anne's) did not have any community schools at the time 2024 implementation plans were finalized.

Phase 1

Developing a Shared Vision

Includes developing a vision
or goals for community
schools shared across
stakeholders



Phase 1: Developing a Shared Vision *n=20*



Most Promising

Includes:

- Examples of a **shared vision and/or goal(s)** for community schools **developed in collaboration with multiple stakeholders**
- **Sufficient detail** about **how** a shared vision and/or goals were **collaboratively developed** (e.g., regular meetings) and **with whom** (e.g., teachers, families)

Potentially Promising

Includes:

- Examples of a **shared vision and/or goal(s)** for community schools **developed in collaboration with multiple stakeholders**
- **Does not include sufficient detail** about **how** a shared vision and/or goals were **collaboratively developed** and **with whom**

Least Promising

Given evidence that developing a shared vision can support the implementation of a community school model, **no references** to this strategy were categorized as Least Promising.

Developing a Shared Vision Examples

Most Promising (n=7 districts)

*“A **community school vision** was finalized at the beginning of SY 2023-2024 by the community coordinators and Supervisor of Community Schools **with input from families, students, staff, community partners, and the ... Community School Workgroup** ... Commitment statements directly related to this vision were also developed. This vision is referenced during all community school meetings with any stakeholders.”*

*“The Office of Community Schools hosts bimonthly steering committee meetings that focus on the district’s top three needs ... based on the annual Needs Assessment. Members of the committee are **school district employees, community partners, union representatives, and one ... parent/guardian**. ... Through the facilitation of these bimonthly steering committee meetings and community mapping ... **goals are established** and monitored.”*

*“[We] will establish a Community Schools Advisory Council, inviting **representatives from key organizations such as the Judy Center, Junior Achievement, ... faith-based partners, and partners from local institutes of higher education**. This Council will meet quarterly ... **Partners contribute to the establishing of goals** by engaging in ongoing need and assets assessments, sharing data from their organization that identifies a need in the community, and offering their assets to the school community.”*



Developing a Shared Vision Examples

Potentially Promising (n=13 districts)

*“During the second year as a community school, the **Program Manager and steering committee** collaborated on a three-year implementation plan using information gathered from the needs assessment. The **implementation plan identifies goals** and measurable action steps.”*

*“Each [district] Community School aligns their partnerships to their needs assessments and **collaborates with partners to share leadership, establish goals, and increase accountability for achieving intended outcomes** in service of a specific community and its students.”*

*“The CSC [community school coordinator] is often the point of contact and connection for all partners. They ensure that school leaders approve of each partner’s work, that space is scheduled if needed, and that **the partner’s goals are aligned with those of the school.**”*

*“[District] staff actively participate in Collective Impact action teams, fostering **collaboration with diverse stakeholders**. They contribute expertise and firsthand knowledge to **shape common goals** and collaborative initiatives addressing community-wide challenges.”*



Phase 2

Practicing Shared Leadership

Includes creating a leadership structure that engages multiple stakeholders



Phase 2: Practicing Shared Leadership *n=20*



Most Promising

Potentially Promising

Least Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **shared leadership that involves multiple stakeholders** (e.g., teachers, students, families, administrators, community partners)
- **Sufficient detail about shared leadership structures and practices** how they include **multiple stakeholders**

Includes:

- Examples of **shared leadership that involves multiple stakeholders** (e.g., teachers, students, families, administrators, community partners)
- **Does not include sufficient detail about shared leadership structures and practices** how they include **multiple stakeholders**

Given evidence that shared leadership practices support the implementation of a community school model, **no references** to shared leadership structures and practices were categorized as Least Promising.

Practicing Shared Leadership Examples

Most Promising (n=13 districts)

*“Steering committees bring together a diverse group of stakeholders including **school leaders and staff, family members, students, and most importantly community partners**. ... The participating partners are actively involved in the needs assessment process and implementation plan development. ... This **shared leadership** ... ensures that the work of the community school **involves community partners as well as family members as active participants** in the work. It provides a common understanding of community schools to allow for alignment of support.”*

*“An [elementary school] **stakeholder group** was created that consists of **family members, teachers, members of the onsite health suite, a local government official, members of the district office, Judy Center, wraparound services for after school programs, and school leadership**. This group regularly reviews the data and findings by the Community School manager and **helps make future recommendations**.”*

*“To enhance collaboration and stakeholder buy-in, the **Partner Community School Collaborative (PCSC)** was established. Comprising **community partners, school staff, central office, and families**, this group advocates for community empowerment and engagement, meeting bi-monthly to **review data, identify gaps, and advocate for CS [community school] initiatives** within the larger community.”*



Practicing Shared Leadership Examples

Potentially Promising (n=7 districts)

*“We realize that our past approach to procuring resources for students will differ for our community schools, and the needs assessment will provide the structure for **inclusive decision-making**, a shared vision, and actionable data to assess outcomes of our plan. ... We anticipate using a similar process/approach that **leverages shared leadership** and accountability.”*

*“Each [district] Community School aligns their partnerships to their needs assessments and **collaborates with partners to share leadership**, establish goals, and increase accountability for achieving intended outcomes in service of a specific community and its students.”*

*“The school community, led by the community school advisor, will ... **utilize shared governance structures to create collaborative leadership**, and shared power and voice.”*

*“The Community School Specialist created a **steering committee** which included **school and central office staff, community partners, and parents of [the local] community.**”*



Phase 3

Assessing Community Needs

Includes assessing the needs of
communities schools serve



Phase 3: *Assessing* Community Needs n=22



Most Promising	Potentially Promising	Least Promising
<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examples of needs assessments conducted with key stakeholders (e.g., students, families)• Sufficient detail about how needs assessments were conducted and with whom	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• References to conducting needs assessments• Does not include sufficient detail about how needs assessments were conducted and with whom	<p><i>Given evidence that assessing community needs supports the implementation of a community school model, no references to conducting needs assessments were categorized as Least Promising.</i></p>

Assessing Community Needs Examples

Most Promising (n=6 districts)

*“Each community school conducts a **needs assessment** to identify assets and prioritize the **physical, behavioral and mental health needs of students, their families, and their communities**. During the needs assessments, CSCs collect feedback from students, families, school staff, partners, and community members. ... The first cohort of 64 community schools had **conversations with 1,070 students, 730 staff, 700 families, 320 partners, and 410 community members.**”*

*“The Community Schools Coordinator conducts the **needs assessment** in collaboration with the school administration, school staff, students, families, Community School Nurse, and steering committee partners. ... The needs assessment utilizes **multiple methods of data collection, including ... surveys [and] focus groups and interviews [with students, families, school staff, and partner agencies].**”*

*“The **needs assessment** highlights the connection between the school and community partners at multiple levels. For example, **community partners** are one of several stakeholder groups who are **formally surveyed** during the needs assessment process. Partners not only **provide information about the services** rendered in the school and community but also share **suggestions for continuous improvement, thus strengthening service delivery.**”*



Assessing Community Needs Examples

Potentially Promising (n=16 districts)

*“Partners contribute to the establishing of goals by engaging in **ongoing need and assets assessments**, sharing data from their organization that **identifies a need in the community**, and offering their assets to the school community.”*

*“[The district] supports students in community schools by contacting and meeting regularly with community partners to **identify needs** and programs offered to support the identified needs of ... students.”*

*“During this first year, [our school] has conducted a **comprehensive needs assessment** including partnership inventory, asset mapping, surveys, key informant interviews, listening sessions, and quantitative data review.”*

*“The Community School Liaison conducts a **needs assessment** and **focus groups to assess the needs** and determine what supports are most needed for their specific school.”*

*“Based on the **needs assessment**, which included asset-mapping, the community coordinators have worked with stakeholders to evaluate prior existing relationships and determine what partnerships and programming should continue and how to ensure that these partnerships are meeting the direct needs of the community.”*



Phase 4

Building Capacity

Includes institutional structures and training opportunities that support capacity to implement a community school model



Phase 4: Building Capacity *n=22*



Most Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **staff positions dedicated to supporting community school implementation**; and/or
- Examples of **professional development to support resource acquisition and/or service delivery**
- **Sufficient detail about how designated staff and/or professional development support implementation**

Potentially Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **staff positions dedicated to supporting community school implementation**; and/or
- Examples of **professional development to support resource acquisition and/or service delivery**
- **Does not include sufficient detail about how designated staff and/or professional development support implementation**

Least Promising

*Given evidence that designated staff positions and professional development support the implementation of a community school model through capacity building, **no references** to these strategies were categorized as Least Promising.*

Building Capacity Examples

Most Promising (n=14 districts)

*“[The district] utilizes local funding to staff a **Community School Coordinator** and a **Fiscal Assistant**, who collaborate with team members within our Student Engagement, Behavioral Health, and Academics Office to **ensure the community school strategy is implemented with fidelity**. Staff members meet twice a month with school and district leadership to **support all aspects of Community School Implementation and training of Community School Liaisons.**”*

*“Under the direction of the Student Services Supervisor, the **Concentration of Poverty Coordinator** works with the finance department, school administration, school bookkeepers, and community liaisons to **address the implementation plan and related budgetary considerations**. **Community School Liaisons** interface with the school administration, students, staff, and community to **develop and implement the needs assessment and ensuing plan**, coordinating programming that addresses the identified needs.”*

*“**Staff members** meet monthly with district leadership to support all aspects of Community School Implementation and training of Community School Coordinators. Throughout the first two years **training** includes ... **development of the steering committee, shared leadership and partner collaboration, asset mapping and regional coordination, aligning budgets** to identified wrap-around services in the law, and the **completion of the needs assessment and implementation plans.**”*



Building Capacity Examples

Potentially Promising (n=8 districts)

*“[The district] provides **professional learning opportunities to community schools** in the needs assessment process and the creation of Shared Decision-Making Teams (SDMT) to support a collective impact approach.”*

*“The Supervisor, Principals, and Coordinators attend state and **national trainings focused on promoting and implementing the Community School strategy effectively**. These trainings expand their knowledge and skills, enabling them to better support the needs of students, families, and community partners.”*

*“Each designated community school in [the county] has a **Community School Liaison**.”*

*“School-based teams can vary depending on the positions at the school, but the team can comprise of a **Community School Specialist**, PPW, social worker, school psychologist and other support staff and lead by Community School Specialist to ensure students receive whole child supports, avoiding duplication of services, and maximizing partner Resources.”*



Phase 5

Addressing Community Needs

Includes identifying and instituting resources and services that align with community needs



Phase 5: Addressing Community Needs n=22



Most Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **asset mapping** (i.e., identifying resources and services available in the school's community)
- Examples of **partnerships with community organizations**
- **Sufficient detail** about how schools engaged in **asset mapping** and/or how **partnerships were developed or enhanced**

Potentially Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **asset mapping** (i.e., identifying resources and services available in the school's community)
- Examples of **partnerships with community organizations**
- **Does not include sufficient detail** about how schools engaged in **asset mapping** and/or how **partnerships were developed or enhanced**

Least Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **seeking out and/or providing resources and services that are not aligned with community needs**

Addressing Community Needs Examples

Most Promising (n=22 districts)

*“[District] Community School Liaisons lead their steering committees in the process of **community needs and asset assessment** throughout their first year. This process includes **community asset mapping** that allows them to identify **current and potential partners in the community** surrounding the school building. The committee creates a physical document that shows the location of **community organizations, health care providers, grocery stores, public libraries, businesses, etc.** ... They identify and leverage existing partnerships before the implementation of the community school strategy and **include many of these partners as members of the steering committee**. In addition to enhancing existing partnerships, Community School Liaisons look for gaps to **determine other services and resources that are needed to meet the needs of the students and families.**”*

*“Community school coordinators also engage in regular **community mapping to identify stakeholders and resources** that can benefit the school community. Through the completion of the **annual needs assessment and parent referrals**, each community school invites all stakeholders to provide insight regarding the avenues for support and their perceptions of schools. This actionable data is then utilized ... to **identify partners and resources** that can enhance the achievement of students, combat chronic absenteeism, and identify resources for the families of origin.”*



Addressing Community Needs Examples

Most Promising (cont'd) (n=22 districts)

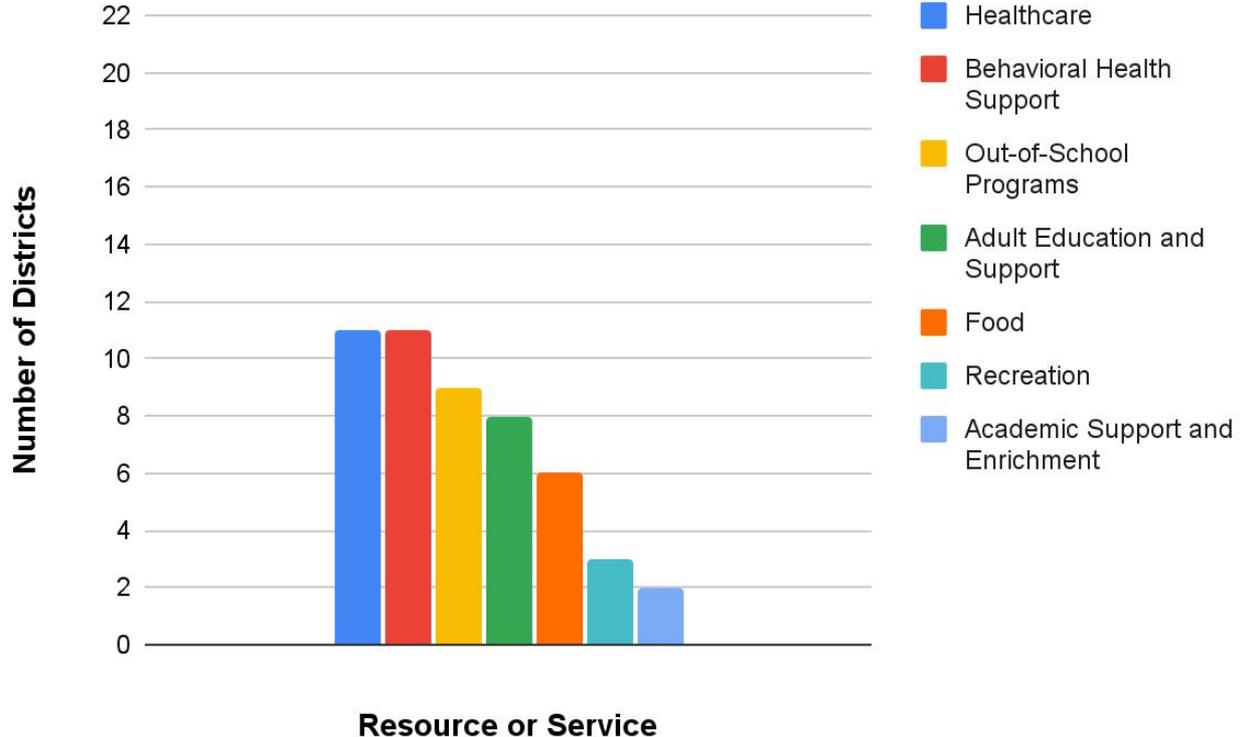
*“As the first community school, [the elementary school] has worked in coordination with the school district to develop a **district partnership inventory**. [The district] has created a district partnership inventory for existing partnerships and potential new partners. Sharing a developed inventory allows for current and future [district] community schools to **align with existing partnerships as needed based on their needs assessment**. The Community School Manager facilitates **outreach to organizations and stakeholders to evaluate partnerships and determine whether current programming is meeting the direct needs of the school and community.**”*

*“The **implementation plan tracker and the partnership document** have become guiding tools for each community school coordinator. Coordinators use these tools to plan activities to **address needs and then identify partners to provide support**. ... The steering committees are responsible for **assessing which partners are capable of providing services aligned to identified needs or goals**, ensuring that identified partners are contacted, and that the services are delivered as intended. Through this process, the community schools have realized that there are a number of partners whose services overlap. Yet, as the needs of the community change, the coordinators have noted that certain **partners are helpful in assessing needs or linking the schools with new partners to address the emerging needs.**”*



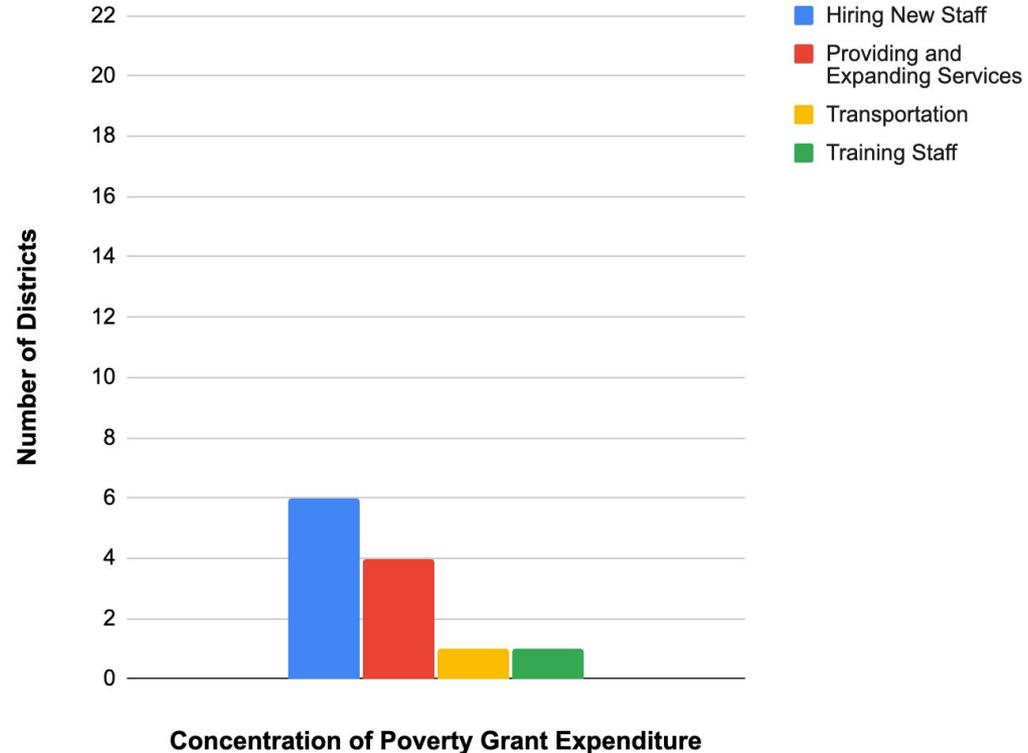
Resources and Services Provided

Many districts specified the **types of resources and services their community schools offered**. The most frequently mentioned resources and services were **healthcare**, including vision, hearing, and dental services (n=11); **behavioral health support**, including counseling and mental health services (n=11); and **out-of-school programs**, including after-school childcare and programs run by community partners (n=9).



Concentration of Poverty Grant Expenditures

Fewer districts specified how they were **spending Concentration of Poverty Grant funds**. Uses of funds among those who specified included **hiring staff** such as social workers, counselors, and psychologists (n=6); **providing and expanding student wraparound services** (n=4); **providing transportation to promote access to off-site services** (n=1); and **training staff in areas of behavioral health support** (e.g., trauma response) (n=1).



Phase 6

Monitoring Progress

Includes collecting and evaluating data to track progress toward addressing community needs



Phase 6: Monitoring Progress *n=22*



Most Promising

Potentially Promising

Least Promising

Includes:

- Examples of **collecting and evaluating *qualitative and/or quantitative* data to track progress toward addressing community needs**
- **Sufficient detail about how data collection and evaluation will indicate progress** (or lack thereof)

Includes:

- Examples of **collecting and evaluating *qualitative and/or quantitative* data to track progress toward addressing community needs**
- **Does not include sufficient detail about how data collection and evaluation will indicate progress** (or lack thereof)

*Given evidence that tracking progress toward addressing community needs can support implementation of a community school model, **no references** to progress monitoring were categorized as Least Promising.*

Monitoring Progress Examples

Most Promising (n=5 districts)

*“[The district] has generated a **partnership tracker** for each community school which is updated continuously by the community school facilitator at each school. This partnership tracker includes information pertaining to **whether the partnership is strategic, what needs this partnership meets, and which stakeholders are impacted**. This collective strategic approach aims to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all stakeholders within each individual community.”*

*“Our MD Leads work has focused on developing a **partnership assessment tool where the partner and school rate each other on six elements**: (1) Strategic Alignment Around Educational Equity, (2) Clear Expectations and Shared Accountability, (3) Coordinated Services, (4) Effective Communication, (5) Regular Evaluation and Continuous Improvement, and (6) Sustainability. A **report is created** and there is a **debrief protocol** that partners and schools complete to review their partnership and identify opportunities for improvement. ... This data can also be **shared with school teams to support the coordination of services and monitoring of partner outcomes**.”*

*“The coordinators are committed to engaging with their partners to **monitor the achievement of program outcomes**. ... For example, ... [one] Elementary School noted a **decrease in students accessing the backpack program**. A **survey was administered** to families to identify what they would want to see in the backpack. This **feedback** allowed for a revised approach and subsequently **increased students accessing the program**.”*



Monitoring Progress Examples

Potentially Promising (n=17 districts)

*“[The district] **monitors progress in achieving intended outcomes** through their Concentration of Poverty (COP) Implementation Plans, which are aligned with School Improvement Plans and reviewed monthly. Based on the monitoring data, [the district] and its partners can make timely adjustments to strategies and interventions.”*

*“The implementation plan identifies goals and **measurable action steps** that will provide a way of **assessing progress in achieving the goals**. Steering committees utilize the Continuous Improvement Cycle ... to identify, plan, implement, and reflect. As needed, these documents are revised and updated to **ensure that goals and activities are aligned with services and supports** that are unique to the school community.”*

*“**Goals are established and monitored** through monthly steering committee meetings that augment a shared sense of responsibility/accountability to the ... Pillars of [the district’s] Community Schools.”*

*“The collective impact of the school and community partners involves fostering relationships, establishing shared goals, sharing data and resources, and **maintaining continuous communication and progress monitoring**.”*





Future Directions for the AIB

- Commission studies of whether *Most Promising* and *Potentially Promising strategies* are actually promising and facilitating progress toward community schools that offer expanded, high-quality resources for students, families, and communities
- Through implementation plans, yearly community school plans, or other avenues, require districts to provide **more information about**:
 - *Challenges with implementing a community school model*
 - *How they are involving students, families, and communities in each phase of implementation*
 - *How they are measuring and monitoring progress toward shared goals*
 - *What resources and services they are providing to address identified needs*
 - *Whether and how Concentration of Poverty Grant funds are supporting their ability to address identified needs*



Future Directions for the AIB

- Consider **additional data collection methods** to gauge implementation progress that **center the voices of families, communities, students, school administrators, and other stakeholders**, given their centrality to a successful community school model:
 - **Interviews** and **focus groups** with stakeholders (e.g., students and their families)
 - **Observations** of key implementation activities (e.g., shared leadership engagements)
 - **Surveys** of stakeholders accessible through multiple modes (e.g., digital, paper)

While districts may be engaging in the aforementioned methods themselves, the AIB—through interim or final evaluations of the Blueprint or other endeavors—may benefit from a more systematic collection of these data across schools and districts.