

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS & THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COORDINATOR

AN INFORMATION GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS AND
DISTRICTS IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS APPROACH

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Where to begin?

District / Supervisory Union Level

Benefits:

- System level approach; Enables coordination of existing roles and resources across district (e.g., home-school coordinators, community liaisons, etc.)
- Increased connection with district administration, financial management/coordination
- Greater connection/access to multiple school boards
- Increased distribution of CS related funds, technical assistance, and inter-district collaboration/partnership efforts

Challenges:

- Less concentrated implementation based on school-specific needs, goals
- Fewer funds available for individual schools' programmatic efforts

School Level

Benefits:

- Greater opportunity to blend CS work with an existing role or duty within a school
- Localized program/policy development based on specific school goals, student/family needs
- Focused partnership opportunities with community members and orgs. that exist within a schools immediate community
- Lays groundwork for natural expansion of CS model and organic growth within district/SU based on individual school implementation readiness
- Greater concentration of funds for CS implementation at the onset

Challenges:

- Fewer opportunities for collaborative efforts around programming, community partnerships alongside other schools
- Decreased opportunity to meet needs/goals that exist district-wide

There is no 'right way' to implement the Community Schools approach. It depends on the level of readiness your district or an individual school has to take on the critical elements of setting up a Community School.

The Community School Coordinator (CSC)

A Vermont community school coordinator is defined as “a full-time or part-time staff member serving in an eligible school or in a school district or supervisory union with an eligible school and appointed per Vermont law; and is responsible for the identification, implementation, and coordination of community school programs, subject to the operational and reporting structure of the community school coordinator’s employer” (VT Act 67, 2021).

CSCs are seen as the linchpin of successful community schools, serving as essential bridge-builders who promote trusting relationships among multiple stakeholders.

CSCs manage linkages between schools and communities, act as cultural brokers, and mitigate stakeholder conflict to preserve collaboration.

Unlike School Social Workers who have case loads and work with individual students and families to navigate systems and manage needs, **Community School Coordinators operate in a school-wide manner and facilitate the connections between school and community to build programming, enhance safe/equitable school climates and cultures, and coordinate resources and opportunities that every student, families, and community members can participate in and benefit from.**

By being insulated from daily school operations, the CSC can maintain flexibility and focus to support a team of two staff, their caseload of students and families, and school leaders. This structure prevents the Coordinator from being pulled into filling immediate school-level gaps, unlike peers based within schools.

While the SU-wide role allows for broad impact, there are trade-offs. A focus on a single school community might allow for deeper integration with one leadership structure, PTO, and local initiatives. For districts without school-based support staff or robust after-school programs, having a CS Coordinator develop those systems at the school level could be more effective. The decision to place the role at the SU or school level should align with the specific priorities and resources of the CS initiative.

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