

Stage 5: Sustain and Grow a Community Schools System



1. Expand and Deepen Community Schools
2. Build Financial Capacity
3. Build Political Capacity

Overview

Planning during Stage 5 focuses on the fourth characteristic of effective systems building—sustainability. Sustaining and growing a system of Community Schools requires that leaders monitor for environmental and systemic challenges that could derail change efforts. The system should refresh and strengthen its leadership and also engage the community in a process of continuous improvement. The Community Schools system must also attend to the key sustainability elements of financial and political capacity. Having the funds, leadership, and policy support ensures that the system will sustain across leadership changes.

Milestones

Milestone #1: Expand and Deepen Community Schools

Regular system scans across all four characteristics of effective systems building—shared ownership, spread, depth, and sustainability—can help identify areas that need attention. Here are some questions to explore each area:

Shared Ownership

- Are the system’s vision and principles of Community Schools understood by all the partners at a deep level and used to inform funding, policy, and practice decisions?
- Do key leaders demonstrate sustained participation and commitment?
- Is shared ownership evident in the operation of the system’s Collaborative Leadership Structure?

Spread

- Does building a system increase the number of Community Schools vertically (throughout the educational pathway) and horizontally (across several schools and school districts)?
- Do professional learning opportunities and communications activities ensure a flow of people steeped in the Community Schools strategy?

Depth

- Does the system build capacity of students and their families to be their own agents of change?
- Do professional learning opportunities programs incorporate the vision and principles of Community Schools for educators, service providers, and other partners working with children and youth? Is there appropriate data and is it used effectively?
- Do data collection systems permit school-site personnel to track students on key indicators of success and allow policymakers to make informed policy and resource alignment decisions at the community level?

Use the **ROI App for Community Schools Coordinators** to:

- Document impact across partners and programs
- Inform and guide your state and district-wide scaling efforts
- Support implementation of your FSCS Program or Grant

The ROI app is the first part of the new Community Schools Data Hub. The ROI App and Data Hub will help Community Schools collect and report data to advocate for community schools locally and nationally.

Sustainability

- Does the Community Schools system continuously engage new organizational and community leaders so that Community Schools remain a priority during leadership transitions?
- Is a constituency for Community Schools evident and sufficient to leverage redirected funding for Community Schools? How clearly do partner agencies' policies foster collaborative work, resource sharing, and strategies to support agreed-upon results for children, schools, families, and communities?

Milestone #2: Build Financial Capacity

Building the financial capacity of a Community Schools system poses three sets of challenges: the cost of planning and management at each school site; the cost of program and service delivery at each site; and costs to support the collaborative.

Calculate costs for school-site planning and management. Calculation of these costs during development of the rollout strategy determines the number of schools in the initial systems building effort. Being clear about the costs for Community School Coordinators is essential.

Calculate costs for programs and services. Most Community Schools make strategic use of existing resources provided by the school and community partners and draw on funds allocated from new grant programs, a combination of federal funding as well as grants from various state and local agencies, and local private sources, including United Way chapters and business.

Whatever the funding source(s), it is important to recognize that development of a comprehensive set of supports and opportunities takes time, requires long-range planning and outside-of-box approaches to guide the leveraging and alignment of existing resources. Faith-based institutions, businesses, and civic groups can offer their assets in the form of human and social capital. These organizations and their members are a vital part of the system of support that Community Schools must mobilize to support student success.

The #CommunitySchools Costing Tool allows users to input information about their district, available resources, and desired elements, and receive an estimate of additional funding required to establish a Community School. Learn more at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-costing-tool>.

Support the Collaborative Leadership Structure through intermediary services and other costs. The costs related to building the system’s capacity extend to all the key functions needed to develop a Community Schools system. Included are the cost of personnel and related assets redirected to support the Collaborative Leadership Structure.

Milestone #3: Build Political Capacity

Political capacity refers to the willingness and skills of people to take the action needed to achieve agreed-upon results—in this case, a Community Schools system. School-site teams must consider how the principles of Community Schools can help schools achieve their mission. The participation of school and community partner staff, families, residents, and students builds personal, organizational, and neighborhood support for Community Schools. Together, they work to:

- Identify issues
- Select a set of priority results
- Plan and implement activities aligned with the curriculum and school improvement plan to make measurable progress
- Revise their work for continuous improvement

It is essential to tap networks in which families and community members are already connected and to seek new people to Community Schools that bring an essential and diverse set of cultural and personal strengths, perspectives, and knowledge. It is essential that Community Schools do not replicate traditional parent education groups but rather engage in authentic family and community Engagement. Policymakers will want to hear from them about how Community Schools are making a difference in their lives and the lives of their children.⁵

A Community Schools systems needs champions. School superintendents, United Way chapters, local government agencies, CBOs, principals and teachers, and community members are just some of the leaders who began their Community Schools work as innovators and over time become viewed as champions. Champions are typically highly motivated self-starters, but not all champions have the time to participate in a new venture. The following approaches may prove useful in motivating champions to participate on an ad hoc basis and eventually become fully engaged:

⁵ Visit The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships website to learn more about effective family and community engagement <https://www.dualcapacity.org/> **Learn more about IEL’s annual National Community Schools and Family Engagement conference at <https://iel.org/engage/>**

- Identify champions' skills, resources, and interests
- Specify the need
- Recognize the critical value of the efforts
- Provide feedback
- Ask for their observations and input
- Invite additional contributions

Communicating with the leadership networks of the Community Schools system, maintaining contact with leaders of other institutions, and keeping the public apprised of progress are other essential elements of building political capacity. Effective strategies involve carefully targeted communications:

- Use social media
- Publish a brief newsletter
- Publicize performance of each Community School and system-wide progress
- Reach out to the media
- Connect with local civic and business groups
- Develop a web site for the system
- Produce a video

Pitfalls

There are four key pitfalls in this last stage:

- Thinking that running a Community school is all about money and programs rather than about focusing on the importance of mobilizing families, residents, business and civic organizations, and the broader community in support of agreed-upon results
- Not being willing to ask the hard questions about how existing resources are used, whether they are achieving the desired results, and whether something needs to change
- Not realizing that building a system is inherently more a political than a technical challenge
- Neglecting routine scans of system functional areas to indicate where work needs to be strengthened

How You Know You Are Making Progress

STAGE 5: Sustain and Grow the Ecosystem of Community Schools

MILESTONE (est. 6-month sprints)
 1. Expand and Deepen Community Schools
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Indicators (Action/Benchmarks) Toward Milestones

Function	Community Wide	Intermediary	Community School (Site)
Community Engagement	<p>Partners continue to expand their participation and develop trust in and ownership of a community-wide vision</p> <p>A strategy for finding new champions has been designed and implemented</p> <p>An increasing number of people are active advocates for Community Schools</p> <p>The system-wide initiative's name and logo are recognized and used throughout the community</p>	<p>Staff facilitate expanded participation, trust, and ownership of a vision for a Community Schools system</p> <p>Communication with the public occurs regularly as planned</p> <p>Data on the performance of each Community School as well as on system-wide expansion are published and made easily accessible to the public and policy makers</p>	<p>Site visits to Community Schools for elected officials and potential partners as well as for initiative leaders, family members, and residents are well attended and designed to build community support</p>

Indicators (Action/Benchmarks) Toward Milestones			
Function	Community Wide	Intermediary	Community School (Site)
Alignment & Integration	<p>RFPs, grant opportunities, and other potential funding requests developed by school districts, United Ways, local government, and others are aligned with the initiative’s results framework</p> <p>The district uses data collected by the initiative to improve the school system’s strategic plan</p> <p>Partners regularly scan the initiative’s operation across all functional areas to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and overall effectiveness in scale-up</p> <p>The school district uses data collected by the initiative to improve the school system’s strategic plan</p>	<p>Staff assist partners and site leaders in conducting regular system scans at their respective levels and monitor performance across networks of Community Schools</p>	<p>School improvement plans provide for the coordination of school district resources to achieve agreed-upon results</p> <p>Sites regularly scan initiative operation across all functional areas as well as external environment to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities</p>
Professional Learning Opportunities	<p>Partners participate in site visits, community forums, and other opportunities designed to familiarize them with the principles and practices of community schools, the assumptions and expectations of community-wide and site partners and to build common ground across the initiative</p>	<p>Intermediary staff coordinate technical assistance to help the initiative implement and sustain its expansion plan</p> <p>Technical assistance and professional learning opportunities respond to needs identified by participants</p> <p>Staff ensure that participants and technical assistance providers jointly design, implement, and evaluate training</p> <p>Two-way communication with state and federal officials is ongoing</p>	<p>School staff and site level partners participate in joint Professional Learning Opportunities and planning time designed to deepen the integration between in-school and after-school teaching and learning</p>

Indicators (Action/Benchmarks) Toward Milestones			
Function	Community Wide	Intermediary	Community School (Site)
Data & Evaluation	<p>Relevant data on participation, operation, and outcomes inform policy and practice decisions to improve site-level implementation and expansion activities</p>	<p>Staff deliver technical assistance to sites to design and implement effective data collection</p> <p>Staff analyze and package data for various audiences</p> <p>Evaluation designs include comparison schools and show longitudinal trends</p>	<p>Sites regularly collect, analyze, and use relevant information on participation, implementation, and results to make continuous improvement in practice and recommendations for policy change</p>
Finance & Resources	<p>A long-range financing strategy is in place</p> <p>Reliable funding streams are coordinated to sustain priority programs and services at Community Schools</p> <p>Community partners play a significant role in identifying and leveraging new revenue sources</p> <p>Financing decisions ensure that expansion does not threaten core components of the initiative</p>	<p>Technical assistance helps partners develop a long-range financing plan to harness existing public and private resources and to secure new funding sufficient to meet projected costs of scheduled expansion</p> <p>Partners build capacity and work to develop a long-range financing plan to harness existing public and private resources and to secure new funding sufficient to meet projected costs of scheduled expansion</p>	<p>Grant money is sought and used strategically to leverage additional resources</p>

Indicators (Action/Benchmarks) Toward Milestones			
Function	Community Wide	Intermediary	Community School (Site)
Policy & Practice	<p>A statement of support for community-wide results and the expansion of Community Schools is included in the strategic plans of major partners (school board/district, city, county, United Way, community foundation, other funders)</p> <p>The school district has set forth administrative guidelines enabling the effective operation of Community Schools</p>	Partners amend policies within their own organizations to support scale-up	
Progress Toward a Collaborative Leadership Structure			
Collaborative Leadership	Community issues that impact schools (e.g., safety, housing, immigration policy) are tracked, evaluated for their impact on the initiative's work, and considered for community-wide action		Parents and residents represent the concerns of Community Schools and their neighborhoods in decision-making forums at all levels