



Community Schools Research: Existing Evidence and Emerging Priorities

***A Frequency Analysis of the Research
Practice Network Clearinghouse and the
2026–2030 Research Agenda***

Prepared by Institute for Educational Leadership

Executive Summary

The Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network (RPN) strengthens connections between research and practice by bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and partners to build an evidence base that is responsive and useful to the Community Schools field. Two interconnected resources support this work: the updated Community Schools Research Agenda 2026–2030, which identifies eight priority areas for inquiry and provides a shared framework for what the field needs to know, and the RPN Clearinghouse, a living collection of research, evaluations, reports, and other resources that documents what the evidence base currently addresses. By organizing Clearinghouse resources according to the Research Agenda, the RPN can assess how existing research aligns with field-defined priorities, identify areas of strong research activity, and surface gaps where further inquiry is needed.

This report presents a frequency analysis of **506 resources** in the RPN Clearinghouse to examine their alignment with the eight Research Agenda topics. Because Community Schools are a comprehensive strategy and individual resources often address multiple dimensions of the work, resources could be coded to more than one topic. The frequencies therefore represent the presence of each topic across the literature rather than mutually exclusive categories.

All eight Research Agenda topics are substantially represented in the Clearinghouse, although attention varies. **Engagement, Organizing, and Shared Decision Making (RA3)** is the most frequently represented topic, appearing in **70.4%** of resources, followed by **Data Systems, Data Sharing, and Knowledge Mobilization (RA5)** at **67.6%** and **Sustainability, Scaling, and Systems Alignment (RA8)** at **63.8%**. Leadership, whole-child supports, opportunity and belonging, and measures of success each appear in more than half of the resources. **Defining Community Schools and Mapping the Implementation Journey (RA1)** is the least frequently represented at **45.0%**, pointing to an opportunity for deeper research on how implementation develops and changes over time.

Across the eight topics, several broader themes emerge. First, the Community Schools evidence base is increasingly **interconnected and systems-oriented**. Research frequently connects implementation with leadership, governance, engagement, data use, integrated support, and sustainability, reinforcing the importance of studying Community Schools as a comprehensive strategy rather than as a collection of separate programs. Second, the literature increasingly focuses on **how Community Schools work and the conditions that produce outcomes**. Studies highlight the importance of implementation

quality, leadership and workforce capacity, shared decision-making, relational trust, community partnerships, and alignment between instruction and whole-child supports. Third, the definition of **success and impact is expanding beyond academic performance**. Literature increasingly considers attendance, graduation, school climate, belonging, student and family engagement, collaborative leadership, implementation quality, postsecondary pathways, and economic mobility. Interest in continuous improvement and return on investment is also growing, although rigorous economic and longer-term community impact studies remain comparatively limited.

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Overview

The Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network (RPN) brings together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and other partners interested in strengthening the evidence base for Community Schools and ensuring research is informed by, and useful to, the field. The network's central purpose is to strengthen connections between research and practice by creating opportunities for members to share emerging evidence, identify questions that matter to practitioners and communities, and collectively advance knowledge about Community School implementation and impact.

The RPN Clearinghouse grew out of this commitment to making Community Schools research more accessible and useful. The Clearinghouse serves as a living collection of research, evaluations, reports, briefs, and other resources shared and identified through the network. Rather than functioning solely as a traditional research repository, it helps organize and track the evolving Community Schools evidence base and makes relevant knowledge more accessible to researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and partners. As new studies and resources emerge, the Clearinghouse also shows where research activity is concentrated and where important questions remain underexplored.

The Clearinghouse is closely connected to the Community Schools Research Agenda, which provides a shared framework for identifying priority questions for the field. The updated Community Schools Research Agenda 2026-2030 was developed to guide the next generation of Community Schools research and identifies eight interconnected areas for inquiry, spanning implementation, leadership, engagement and shared decision-making, teaching and learning, data and knowledge mobilization, measures of success, opportunity and belonging, and sustainability and systems alignment. The Research Agenda therefore helps articulate what the field needs to know, while the Clearinghouse documents what existing and emerging evidence currently addresses.

Connecting the two creates an important learning mechanism for the RPN and the broader Community Schools field. By categorizing Clearinghouse resources according to the Research Agenda, the network can examine how the current evidence base aligns with field-defined priorities, identify areas with substantial research activity, and surface questions or dimensions where additional research may be needed. The frequency analysis presented in this report is one application of that approach: it uses the eight Research Agenda topics as an organizing framework to assess the distribution of resources in the Clearinghouse and, more importantly, to consider what those patterns suggest about the strengths, gaps, and future directions of Community Schools research.

This frequency analysis of the Community Schools Research Practice Network Clearinghouse shows that research spans all eight priorities of the 2026-2030 Community Schools Research Agenda, though representation varies by topic. Because publications may align with more than one research agenda area, the categories are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the frequency of each topic indicates how extensively the existing research base has addressed particular dimensions of the Community Schools strategy.

Methodology

This frequency analysis examines the distribution of research across the eight priorities of the **2026-2030 Community Schools Research Agenda** using resources contained in the Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network (CCS RPN) Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse includes research articles, evaluation studies, literature reviews, case studies, conceptual pieces, reports, and practitioner-oriented publications related to Community Schools. The broader Clearinghouse update included resources spanning several decades, with particular attention to research published in recent years. The existing Clearinghouse records were subsequently realigned with the revised 2026–2030 Research Agenda so that the frequency analysis reflected the current eight-topic framework.



Alignment with the 2026-2030 Research Agenda

Each publication in the Clearinghouse was reviewed for alignment with the eight Research Agenda topics:

1. Defining Community Schools and Mapping the Implementation Journey
2. Leadership Practice, Role Design, and Workforce Capacity
3. Engagement, Organizing, and Shared Decision Making
4. Community-Connected Instruction and Whole Child Supports
5. Data Systems, Data Sharing, and Knowledge Mobilization
6. Measuring Success, Continuous Improvement, and Return on Investment
7. Expanding Opportunity and Belonging: Removing Barriers and Strengthening Pathways
8. Sustaining and Scaling: Policy Alignment, Funding Models, and Cross-Sector Integration

Because Community Schools are multidimensional, a publication could be aligned with more than one Research Agenda topic. Therefore, we treated the eight categories as **non-mutually exclusive**. A single publication could receive a “Yes” classification for several topics if its research questions, methods, findings, or implications substantively addressed multiple areas of the agenda.

Coding and Classification Process

The Clearinghouse had previously been organized according to the earlier Community Schools Research Agenda. As part of the updated analysis, we re-sorted existing publications using the crosswalk developed for the 2026-2030 Research Agenda. The broader Clearinghouse methodology used an initial automated realignment of previously classified resources followed by manual validation of approximately 10% of those records. We classified newly added research using a double-review process in which one researcher completed the initial coding and a second reviewer verified the alignment.

For the frequency analysis, we examined the eight Research Agenda variables as binary classifications. A publication marked “Yes” was counted as addressing that Research Agenda topic, while a publication marked “No” was counted as not addressing the topic. Blank or unclassified cells were excluded from the denominator for that specific topic rather than being treated automatically as “No.” This distinction is relevant for Research Topic 1, where one of the otherwise classified records contains a blank entry. As a result, Topic 1 has a denominator of **505**, whereas Topics 2 through 8 each have **506 classified records**.

Frequency and Percentage Calculations

Frequency counts were calculated by summing the number of publications coded “Yes” for each Research Agenda topic. Using this method, the frequency distribution was:

Research Agenda Topic	Percent
RA1. Defining Community Schools and Mapping the Implementation Journey	45.0%
RA2. Leadership Practice, Role Design, and Workforce Capacity	58.3%
RA3. Engagement, Organizing, and Shared Decision Making	70.4%
RA4. Community-Connected Instruction and Whole Child Supports	56.9%
RA5. Data Systems, Data Sharing, and Knowledge Mobilization	67.6%
RA6. Measuring Success, Continuous Improvement, and Return on Investment	53.6%
RA7. Expanding Opportunity and Belonging: Removing Barriers and Strengthening Pathways	56.3%
RA8. Sustaining and Scaling: Policy Alignment, Funding Models, and Cross-Sector Integration	63.8%

The frequencies were then ranked to identify areas of relatively high, moderate, and lower representation within the Clearinghouse. The analysis focuses primarily on the proportion of classified publications addressing each topic, rather than interpreting lower-frequency

topics as less important. A lower frequency instead indicates that a topic has received comparatively less explicit attention within the literature represented in the Clearinghouse.

Qualitative Interpretation of the Frequency Results

Frequency counts alone do not explain how a Research Agenda topic is addressed within the literature. Therefore, a second interpretive step was used to examine representative studies associated with each topic. Selected studies were reviewed based on their research questions, methodological approaches, findings, and relevance to the specific priorities identified in the 2026-2030 Research Agenda.

Examples were selected to illustrate different dimensions of each topic rather than simply choosing publications based on recency. For instance, studies in the leadership section include research on Community School Coordinators, relational leadership, teachers, and professional practice, reflecting the agenda's emphasis on multiple workforce roles. Studies in the measurement section examine attendance, achievement, implementation, and other outcomes, reflecting the agenda's broader definition of success.

This qualitative interpretation also recognizes substantial overlap among Research Agenda topics. A study focused on whole-child programming, for example, may simultaneously contribute to evidence use, outcome measurement, equity, and sustainability. Such overlap is expected within the Community Schools framework and reflects its integrated nature rather than a limitation of the coding system.

Scope and Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the frequency results. First, the analysis describes the distribution of research within the CCS RPN Clearinghouse, not the entire universe of Community Schools scholarship. Research not yet added to the Clearinghouse is not represented. Second, frequency does not measure the strength, quality, or rigor of evidence. A topic represented in many publications is not necessarily supported by stronger causal evidence than a less frequently represented topic. The Clearinghouse includes a range of methodologies, including case studies, qualitative studies, literature reviews, quantitative studies, mixed-methods research, evaluations, conceptual pieces, and practitioner reports. Third, because publications can address several Research Agenda priorities, percentages across the eight categories should not sum to 100%. Each percentage represents the proportion of publications addressing that topic independently. Finally, the frequency analysis captures whether a publication addresses a Research Agenda area but does not measure the depth of that alignment. A publication with one relevant component and a publication devoted primarily to that topic

may both receive a “Yes” classification. The study examples and qualitative interpretation included in the findings are therefore important for understanding the nature of the research represented within each category. Overall, the methodology combines systematic frequency counting with qualitative examination of representative research. This approach provides both a broad view of how scholarship is distributed across the eight priorities of the 2026-2030 Research Agenda and a more detailed understanding of how those priorities are being investigated within Community Schools research.

Use of the Frequency Analysis

This frequency analysis is intended to serve as a field-level mapping tool to help researchers, practitioners, funders, policymakers, and Research-Practice Partnerships understand how the existing Community Schools evidence base aligns with the priorities of the 2026-2030 Research Agenda. By identifying areas that are more frequently represented and those receiving comparatively less research attention, the analysis can inform conversations about where additional research may be needed, which questions warrant deeper investigation, and where opportunities exist to strengthen or diversify the evidence base. The findings may also support decisions about future research priorities, funding opportunities, collaborative studies, and knowledge-building activities within the Community Schools field. Importantly, lower frequency should not be interpreted as indicating that a topic is less important. Rather, it may signal an area where the available research is less developed or where additional evidence could be particularly valuable. Similarly, high frequency does not necessarily mean a topic has been sufficiently studied, as important gaps may remain in research quality, methodology, populations, contexts, or the specific questions addressed. Therefore, use frequency analysis as a starting point for identifying research gaps and opportunities, alongside consideration of the rigor, depth, relevance, and applicability of the existing evidence.

Findings

The frequency analysis shows that research is distributed across all eight Research Agenda topics, although some areas receive considerably more attention than others. Research Topic 3: Engagement, Organizing, and Shared Decision Making is the most frequently represented, appearing in 356 resources (70.4%). It is followed by Research Topic 5: Data Systems, Data Sharing, and Knowledge Mobilization, with 342 resources (67.6%), and Research Topic 8: Sustaining and Scaling: Policy Alignment, Funding Models, and Cross-Sector Integration, with 323 resources (63.8%). Together, these findings suggest that the literature has placed particularly strong emphasis on community engagement and shared decision-making, the use and sharing of data, and the systems and conditions needed to sustain and scale Community Schools.

The other five topics are also well represented, although at somewhat lower levels. Research Topic 2: Leadership Practice, Role Design, and Workforce Capacity appears in 295 resources (58.3%), followed closely by Research Topic 4: Community-Connected Instruction and Whole Child Supports, with 288 resources (56.9%), and Research Topic 7: Expanding Opportunity and Belonging: Removing Barriers and Strengthening Pathways, with 285 resources (56.3%). Research Topic 6: Measuring Success, Continuous Improvement, and Return on Investment is represented in 271 resources (53.6%). Finally, Research Topic 1: Defining Community Schools and Mapping the Implementation Journey appears least often, in 227 resources (45.0%). While less frequently represented topics may point to opportunities for further research, frequency alone does not indicate the importance, quality, or completeness of the existing evidence in any topic area.

The following section provides a more detailed analysis of each of the eight Research Agenda topics. Beyond overall frequency counts, the analysis examines how each topic is represented in the existing literature, the key themes and areas of inquiry that emerge, and examples of individual studies that illustrate the types of research being conducted. It also considers how the current evidence aligns with the priorities and questions identified in the 2026-2030 Research Agenda and highlights areas where additional research may be needed. Together, these topic-level analyses provide a more nuanced understanding of both the current state of the Community Schools research base and opportunities for future research and knowledge development.

Research Topic 1: Defining Community Schools and Mapping the Implementation Journey

Research Agenda (RA) topic 1 is the least frequently represented area in the Clearinghouse, appearing in 227 resources (45.0%). The updated Research Agenda emphasizes the need for a clearer shared definition of the Community School strategy that aligns with the Essentials Framework and distinguishes Community Schools from programs focused primarily on service delivery. The agenda describes Community Schools as a schoolwide approach involving shared leadership, integrated support, and community-connected instruction. It calls for research to identify what quality implementation looks like at different stages, including observable indicators of progress from launch to established practice. RA1 also emphasizes the importance of governance and coordinating entities. Research should examine district-led, school-based, partner-led, and hybrid structures; clarify responsibilities among district and school-level coordinators; and identify the readiness conditions and community assets associated with different implementation models. Context is another major priority. The agenda calls for research examining how Community Schools appropriately adapt across rural, suburban, and urban environments while maintaining fidelity to core principles. It also highlights the need for stronger tools and implementation research related to high schools.

One strong example of research aligned with RA1 is Johnston et al. (2017), *Developing Community Schools at Scale: Implementation of the New York City Community Schools Initiative*. The study examined 118 Community Schools in New York City using a mixed-methods approach. It sought to understand the extent to which the initiative's core structures and services had been implemented, how schools were developing along four core capacities, and what factors were associated with variation in capacity development. Findings indicated that core structures and services were being implemented across the schools, but with substantial variation in the format and degree of implementation. Schools were generally more developed in coordination and connectedness than in continuous improvement and collaboration. This study closely aligns with RA1's emphasis on examining what quality implementation looks like at different stages and documenting how Community Schools evolve, rather than treating implementation as a simple binary distinction. The current Research Agenda specifically calls for research identifying stages of development and observable signals of movement from launch to established practice.

Building on this example, several other studies illustrate how Community School implementation develops across different organizational and system contexts. Klevan and Fehrer's (2023) *District Support for Community Schools: The Case of Oakland Unified School District* shifts attention from individual schools to the district level, examining the

infrastructure and supports that enable Community Schools to develop and operate. The study highlights how district governance, organizational capacity, and broader strategic conditions shape school-level implementation.

More recent studies further illustrate the value of understanding implementation as a developmental journey rather than a fixed state. Gyles, Lara, and Bustamante (2026), in *From the Ground Up: The Journey of the Monroe UC Irvine Community School Partnership*, trace the development of a Community School partnership over time, documenting how relationships among educators, university partners, students, and community members evolved as the initiative took shape. Brown, Ranck-Buhr, Villasenor, and Diamond (2025) similarly document the evolution of Mountain View Community School from a small-school model into a PreK-8 Community School connected to broader district and state systems. The case demonstrates how implementation can change over time in response to funding opportunities, institutional relationships, community priorities, and governance conditions.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that Community School implementation is not a single event. Schools move through developmental stages, establish relationships and governance structures, develop workforce and organizational capacity, adapt to local context, and respond to changes in policy and resources. The comparatively low representation of RA1 therefore points to a significant opportunity for future research. Longitudinal implementation studies and shared measures of readiness, developmental stages, quality, and adaptation would strengthen researchers' and practitioners' ability to compare models and determine which implementation conditions are associated with stronger outcomes.

Research Topic 2: Leadership Practice, Role Design, and Workforce Capacity

Research Agenda (RA) topic 2 appears in 295 resources (58.3%). The updated topic emphasizes the importance of understanding how leadership and workforce capacity support effective Community School implementation. Rather than focusing simply on whether collaboration occurs, this topic examines how collaborative leadership, relational trust, shared decision-making, and shared power are reflected in everyday practices and organizational structures. The agenda highlights site-based leadership teams that bring together administrators, Community School Coordinators, educators, families, students, and community partners, as well as the capacity of principals and superintendents to lead collaboratively across sectors. The agenda also highlights the central role of Community School Coordinators, calling for greater clarity around their responsibilities and competencies in areas such as partnership management, shared planning, community

engagement, and data-informed improvement. At the same time, it raises important questions about Coordinator workload, supervision, and role clarity to ensure that Coordinators are adequately supported and are not expected to address every unmet need within a school. Finally, RA2 recognizes teachers as essential members of the Community School workforce, emphasizing the need to better understand what teaching role is in a Community School, how educators can be prepared for community-connected practice, and what recruitment, professional development, and retention strategies are needed to build and sustain a strong workforce.

Sanders, Galindo, and DeTablan (2019), in *Leadership for Collaboration: Exploring How Community School Coordinators Advance the Goals of Full-Service Community Schools*, provide a particularly relevant example of the leadership roles emphasized in RA2. Their research focuses on Community School Coordinators as cross-boundary leaders who connect principals, educators, students, families, service providers, and community organizations. Sanders (2018), in *Crossing Boundaries: A Qualitative Exploration of Relational Leadership in Three Full-Service Community Schools*, similarly highlights the relational nature of Community School leadership. Together, these studies suggest that leadership in Community Schools extends beyond traditional administrative roles and depends on relationships and collaboration across organizational and professional boundaries.

Other studies highlight the important role of teachers within the Community School workforce. In *The Role of Teachers in Transforming an Urban Full-Service Community High School*, Sanders and Galindo (2020) examine how teachers contribute to school transformation, family engagement, and collaboration beyond their classroom responsibilities. Their findings indicate that teachers generally held positive beliefs about students and teaching but expressed less confidence regarding parent engagement. Teachers with stronger academic optimism were also more likely to engage in professional practices supportive of the Full-Service Community School model. Collectively, these studies reinforce RA2's emphasis on leadership as both structural and relational and point to the need for continued research on Coordinator preparation and supervision, principal-coordinator relationships, teacher professional learning and retention, relational trust, and the conditions that enable meaningful shared leadership.

More recent research extends these earlier findings by examining the organizational conditions surrounding Community School leadership roles. Hine, Sheldon, and Abel (2024), in *Getting Things Done in Community Schools: The Institutional Work of Community School Managers*, examined how Community School managers understood their roles and

how school and district structures supported or constrained their work. Their findings indicate that principal support significantly influenced managers' ability to carry out their responsibilities and that leadership structures varied from hierarchical to collaborative across schools. The study also found that unclear organizational structures could make Community School implementation dependent on individual staff members rather than embedded within the institution. These findings closely align with RA2's emphasis on role clarity, formal authority, supervision, and the organizational conditions needed to sustain shared leadership.

Recent studies also provide greater insight into the experiences of Community School Coordinators themselves. Dinon (2024), for example, examined the experiences of eight current and former Coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that established relationships and Coordinator networks were critical for sharing resources and responding to rapidly changing student and family needs. Similarly, Manko's (2024) case study of Community School implementation in Baltimore, Maryland identified principals and Community School Coordinators as particularly important to implementation while also finding a siloed structure between academic and community functions. Together, these recent studies reinforce the importance of examining not only the competencies individual leaders bring to Community Schools, but also the role definitions, supervisory relationships, organizational structures, and professional networks that enable Coordinators and school leaders to work effectively as co-leaders.

Research Topic 3: Engagement, Organizing, and Shared Decision Making

Research Topic 3 is the most frequently represented research priority in the Clearinghouse, with 356 resources (70.4%) addressing this area. The 2026-2030 Research Agenda defines this topic as examining how organizing promotes shared power and builds collective community assets. It calls for research documenting what organizing looks like in practice, including leadership development for families and young people, structured opportunities for communities to establish priorities, and collective problem-solving that meaningfully influences school decisions. The agenda also emphasizes family leadership, co-design, sustained participation, trust-building, communication loops, and distributing organizing responsibilities among principals, educators, partners, families, students, and other stakeholders. The agenda calls for research that distinguishes authentic organizing from basic needs assessment, service coordination, or partnership development. It also emphasizes understanding how engagement and shared decision-making differ across urban, rural, and suburban contexts and how schools move from soliciting community input toward shared power. Several studies in the Clearinghouse illustrate how engagement, organizing, and shared decision-making operate within Community Schools.

Covelli, Woo, and Augustine (2026), for example, examined implementation within New York City's Community Schools Initiative using surveys and interviews with their Office of Community Schools staff, district leaders, school leaders, and service providers. Although participants identified staffing challenges and uncertainty around leadership expectations, they also emphasized the importance of collaborative leadership and trusting relationships in supporting implementation. The study demonstrates that shared decision-making depends not only on formal leadership structures but also on relational trust that enables stakeholders to work together effectively.

Medina et al. (2020) provide a more direct example of how schools can formally structure shared decision-making. Their study of five urban Community Schools examined Community School Councils through principal interviews, observations of council meetings, document analysis, surveys, and other participatory methods. The researchers found that the councils engaged partners in collaborative problem-solving, supported long-term parent engagement, and used student and community data to identify needed support and services. These findings illustrate how Community School Councils can create an organizational structure through which educators, families, community partners, and other stakeholders participate in identifying priorities and shaping school decisions.

Family engagement represents another important dimension of RA3. In their examination of Oakland Unified School District's Community Schools initiative, Klevan, Daniel, Fehrer, and Maier (2023) documented substantial districtwide investment in family engagement. Oakland's approach extended beyond encouraging family participation in school activities to include creating welcoming environments, providing family-centered services, and incorporating families into decision-making. At the same time, the researchers identified continued tensions around the extent to which families exercised decision-making authority. This distinction between participation and genuine power-sharing closely reflects the updated Research Agenda, which calls for greater attention to family leadership, co-design, sustained participation, trust, and communication about how community input is ultimately used.

More recent resources in the Clearinghouse extend this emphasis on shared power and community-led decision-making. Brown, Weinberg, and Serrette (2025), in *Nothing for Us without Us: Community-Led Transformation through Coalition-Building*, examine how local empowerment, structural flexibility, and intentional district-community co-creation can drive Community School transformation. The resource is coded "Yes" for RA2, RA3, and several related agenda areas, reflecting the way shared leadership and community

organizing intersect in practice. This example aligns particularly well with RA3 because it shifts the discussion from simply inviting community participation to creating structures in which communities help shape the direction of Community School implementation.

Youth leadership provides another emerging dimension of RA3. Gijon and Millow (2025), in *Student Leadership and Community Engagement at Mountain View*, describe a student-driven Leadership Elective designed to build student agency, collaborative problem-solving, and inquiry around community-identified needs. Students participated in projects that allowed them to investigate challenges, develop recommendations, and influence school culture, positioning young people as active contributors to school improvement rather than simply recipients of services. This example directly reflects the Research Agenda's call for greater attention to youth leadership development and structured opportunities for young people to influence school priorities and decisions.

Taken together, the literature aligned with RA3 suggests that meaningful engagement involves more than increasing participation or strengthening communication between schools and communities. Across these studies, engagement becomes most consequential when stakeholders have sustained opportunities to identify priorities, participate in collective problem-solving, develop leadership capacity, and influence decisions. The high frequency of RA3 within the Clearinghouse therefore reflects a broader understanding of Community Schools as structures for collaborative governance and shared responsibility, rather than simply mechanisms for delivering additional services. At the same time, literature points to an important area for continued research: distinguishing between opportunities for participation and the actual redistribution of decision-making power. Future studies could examine how schools measure the quality of shared decision-making, how they incorporate family and student input into final decisions, and which organizing and governance structures best sustain authentic community leadership over time.

Research Topic 4: Community-Connected Instruction and Whole Child Supports

Research Topic 4 appears in 288 resources (56.9%). The updated Research Agenda emphasizes that teaching and learning should remain at the core of Community School research. It calls for investigation into rigorous, community-connected instruction that uses local issues, knowledge, culture, and community contexts as meaningful components of academic learning. The agenda also emphasizes collaboration between teachers and Community School Coordinators. Coordinators may help align community partners and resources with classroom goals, while educators can incorporate arts, sciences, expanded learning, and other community resources into core instruction.

Teacher and principal preparation programs are therefore encouraged to develop competencies in community-connected pedagogy, shared leadership, and cross-sector collaboration. Importantly, the agenda explicitly integrates whole child supports with teaching and learning. Future research should examine how integrated supports reduce chronic absenteeism, improve engagement, address youth mental health needs, and contribute to stronger school climate, culture, and belonging.

More recent research provides examples of how Community Schools connect teaching and learning with the experiences and needs of students and their communities. Thomas and Kress (2025), in *Voices that Soar*, focus on the evolution of Community School teaching practices, providing a contemporary example of the instructional dimension of RA4. Their work is particularly relevant to the updated Research Agenda's emphasis on understanding how community-connected teaching develops and how educators create learning experiences that connect classroom instruction with students' identities, experiences, and communities.

The literature also illustrates how Community Schools create broader conditions that support student learning. Klevan, Daniel, Fehrer, and Maier (2023), in *Creating the Conditions for Children to Learn: Oakland's Districtwide Community Schools Initiative*, show how a districtwide strategy can integrate academic, health, social-emotional, and family support. Their findings reinforce a central premise of RA4: students' ability to participate fully in rigorous learning is connected to the broader conditions in which learning occurs. Allen, Jacobs, and Wulfestieg (2024), in *Learning to Support Student Success through a Whole Family Approach*, provide a more recent example of this whole-child and whole-family orientation. Quartz (2020) offers a complementary example through the UCLA Community School, where teaching and curriculum are intentionally connected to community context. In this model, community knowledge, identity, and local experience are incorporated into instruction rather than treated as separate or extracurricular elements.

Daniel, Malone, and Kirkland (2023), in *A Step Closer to Racial Equity: Towards a Culturally Sustaining Model for Community Schools*, offer a more recent empirical example of how teaching and learning can connect to students' communities and identities. The findings emphasize culturally sustaining pedagogy, community-oriented curricula, student agency, genuine partnerships with community organizations, and attention to power and historical trauma. This study is particularly relevant to RA4 because it demonstrates how instructional practice can be shaped by community knowledge, culture, and students'

lived experiences rather than treating community engagement as separate from teaching and learning.

Across these studies, strong Community School practice involves connecting rigorous instruction to students' identities, cultures, and communities while also creating the academic, social-emotional, health, and family conditions that support students' ability to engage and succeed. The research also highlights the importance of collaboration among teachers, coordinators, families, and community partners in shaping learning experiences and supports. Moving forward, research should examine more closely how community-connected pedagogy is implemented across grade levels and contexts, how teachers and coordinators co-plan and align resources with instructional goals, and how integrated supports influence outcomes such as engagement, belonging, chronic absenteeism, mental health, and academic learning. Such work would strengthen understanding not only whether Community Schools support the whole child, but how instructional practice and coordinated supports work together to improve students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Research Topic 5: Data Systems, Data Sharing, and Knowledge Mobilization

Research Topic 5 appears in 67.6% of resources (342), making it one of the most frequently represented areas in the updated Clearinghouse. The updated Research Agenda focuses on strengthening the pathway from evidence to action so that research and data directly inform implementation at the school, district, and policy levels. This includes developing usable research products and implementation tools, strengthening infrastructure for collecting and reporting cross-sector data, and building the capacity of Coordinators and leadership teams to use data for continuous improvement rather than primarily for compliance. The agenda also places greater emphasis on responsible data sharing, including governance structures that clarify purpose, access, consent, privacy, and communication with communities. Finally, it expands the concept of knowledge mobilization to include technology and AI and positions Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) as an important mechanism for moving from transactional data collection toward co-designed inquiry and improvement.

Recent literature offers examples of how evidence can inform implementation and system improvement. Covelli, Woo, and Augustine (2026) examine New York City's Next Generation Community Schools pilot through stakeholder surveys and interviews. Their findings underscore the importance of generating implementation evidence that helps systems identify barriers and adjust practice. The study found that short implementation timelines, staffing challenges, and unclear expectations initially limited coherence across

the initiative, while coaching and instructional leadership supports helped build staff capacity. The findings also identify trusting relationships and collaborative leadership as important conditions for implementation. This work aligns with RA5's emphasis on producing evidence that is useful for implementation decisions rather than focusing exclusively on whether an initiative ultimately produces desired outcomes.

A clearer example of RA5's knowledge-mobilization dimension is Dye et al. (2022), *An Urban Partnership: Embracing Collaboration and Feedback*. The study examined a research-practice partnership between a high-poverty urban high school and a neighboring university, focusing on how the partnership supported teacher development, instructional improvement, and student engagement. Using a mixed-methods design that included surveys, collaborative coaching logs, and professional development records, the researchers found that teachers reported greater comfort working with instructional coaches, increased technology use, and stronger use of student data to inform instruction. The partnership also created opportunities for ongoing feedback and professional learning, helping educators translate evidence and data into changes in classroom practice. This example closely reflects RA5's emphasis on Research-Practice Partnerships as mechanisms for connecting evidence with practice, particularly through collaborative inquiry, data interpretation, feedback loops, and capacity building that help practitioners use evidence for improvement rather than simply for reporting or compliance.

More recent literature also broadens the meaning of data by highlighting the value of information generated by students and communities themselves. For example, Gijon and Millow (2025) describe a youth-driven Leadership Elective at Mountain View School in which students engage in inquiry around community-identified needs, design projects, respond to school challenges, and contribute insights that improve the school environment. Earlier examples in the Clearinghouse similarly show students conducting interviews and surveys to identify peers' needs and using the resulting evidence to develop recommendations for schools and districts (Matthews, Reconoco, & Diaz, 2023). These examples are consistent with the updated agenda's explicit interest in integrating community-generated or "street" data into formal improvement and accountability systems while preserving trust and protecting privacy.

Overall, the literature provides substantial support for the broad aims of RA5, particularly around using evidence to guide implementation, collaborative inquiry, and the role of partnerships in connecting research with practice. However, the updated agenda also identifies areas where the evidence base remains less developed. Future research should more explicitly document how cross-sector data systems operate in practice; which data-

sharing and governance arrangements effectively protect privacy while enabling collaboration; how practitioners develop the capacity to interpret and use evidence; and how community-generated data can be incorporated into formal decision-making without undermining trust. The emerging role of technology and AI represents another gap: although the agenda identifies their potential to synthesize evidence and accelerate knowledge sharing, more research is needed to determine when these tools add meaningful value and what safeguards are necessary.

Research Topic 6: Measuring Success, Continuous Improvement, and Return on Investment

Research Topic 6 appears in 271 resources (53.6%). The updated Research Agenda provides a considerably broader definition of Community School success than student achievement alone. It calls for measuring both outcomes and the conditions that produce them. Potential quantitative indicators include attendance, chronic absenteeism, discipline, course completion, graduation, and other student outcomes. However, the agenda also identifies implementation quality, collaborative leadership, partnership coordination, student and family engagement, school climate, trust, belonging, and educator perceptions as important formative indicators. The agenda further calls for common measures that can be used across Community School contexts, as well as cost-benefit and return-on-investment frameworks that communicate value without reducing Community Schools to a single economic metric. Potential benefits include avoided costs associated with chronic absenteeism, improved graduation, stronger workforce pathways, economic mobility, civic participation, and neighborhood well-being. Longitudinal and place-based effects are therefore central priorities.

Recent research reinforces the importance of measuring Community School success across multiple dimensions rather than relying on a single academic indicator. Lee et al. (2025) examined 4,769 New York State schools using a quasi-experimental propensity score matching approach to assess both implementation and student outcomes. The study considered indicators including academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, graduation, access to school-based health centers, state funding, and implementation of policy-aligned Community School practices. Findings were mixed: Community Schools showed no clear overall effects on academic achievement or chronic absenteeism but were associated with improved high school graduation rates. However, among Community Schools with school-based health centers, chronic absenteeism decreased.

Earlier research provided additional evidence for using both leading and long-term indicators to assess Community School success. Covelli, Engberg, and Oppen (2022), in

Leading Indicators of Long-Term Success in Community Schools: Evidence from New York City, examined more than 300 New York City Community Schools over four academic years. Their analysis found that the initiative reduced chronic absenteeism by 5.6 percentage points and that improvements in mathematics and English language arts became more apparent in later years. Importantly, the authors identified improved attendance as a potential leading indicator of longer-term academic success, suggesting that Community School evaluation should consider the sequence in which outcomes emerge rather than expecting all effects to occur simultaneously.

Other recent resources reinforce the need for a broader definition of success. A joint report by In the Public Interest, the Network for Public Education, and the Partnership for the Future of Learning (2024) synthesized evidence of improvements in academic performance, attendance, student well-being, family engagement, and equity-related outcomes. Saphier (2024) adds a continuous-improvement perspective, emphasizing organizational learning, teacher collaboration, coaching, and instructional leadership as conditions for sustained educational improvement. Together, these resources support the updated RA6 emphasis on measuring not only final student outcomes but also the intermediate conditions and improvement processes that may contribute to those outcomes over time.

The literature also reflects growing interest in understanding the economic value and return on investment of Community School strategies. Gracie and Goldman (2025), examining the Communities In Schools model across Texas, report long-term benefits including higher graduation rates, increased enrollment in two-year degree programs, and higher future earnings among students served by the model. Together, these resources illustrate two complementary approaches to ROI: one estimates the direct return generated by a specific Community School role, while the other considers longer-term educational and economic benefits associated with integrated student supports. These examples also highlight the need for additional research that connects the costs of Community School implementation with a broader range of educational, social, and economic outcomes over time.

Research Topic 7: Expanding Opportunity and Belonging: Removing Barriers and Strengthening Pathways

Research Topic 7 appears in 285 resources (56.3%). The updated Research Agenda focuses on how Community Schools can reduce barriers to opportunity and strengthen belonging for students and families who are least well-served by existing systems. These barriers may include poverty, public policies, access to learning support, housing

instability, access to health care, rural isolation, community disinvestment, and discrimination. RA7 therefore calls for research that examines how integrated student supports, community-connected teaching, engagement and organizing, and shared leadership work together to expand students' access to learning and future opportunities.

Recent studies in the Clearinghouse provide particularly strong examples of how Community Schools respond to specific barriers. Eizadirad, Abudiab, and Baartman (2022) examined the Community School Initiative in Toronto's Jane and Finch community, explicitly framing inequity as an opportunity gap involving unequal access to resources and educational opportunities rather than simply differences in academic achievement. The study found that structured academic support helped mitigate some of the challenges marginalized students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings also highlighted the importance of culturally relevant programming, ongoing community engagement, and sustained resource allocation.

Immigration-related barriers provide another example. Murillo, Liboon, and Quartz (2023) examined the development of an immigrant family legal clinic within a K-12 Community School. The qualitative case study found that the clinic responded to urgent immigration-related needs by providing direct legal representation, consultations, and community education. Anti-immigrant policies and heightened community fear shaped its development, while student and community advocacy helped build support for the initiative. The study highlights how integrated student supports can be tailored to locally identified needs and strengthened through collaboration among schools, community partners, students, and families.

Recent Clearinghouse resources also address housing instability. Anderson and Kinnard (2023), in *Oakland High School: Student Agency, Partnership, and Dignity*, examine Community School practice in a context where students experience a lack of housing. The case highlights the school's Law and Social Justice pathway, its emphasis on student agency and self-definition, and formal partnerships that connect students with integrated district services. McKoy's (2023) *Creating Coherence: Building a Home for Students Experiencing Homelessness in California's Community Schools* similarly centers the need for coordinated strategies that combine resource access with academic expectations and a commitment to students' sense of belonging and value.

Recent literature also draws greater attention to inclusion and belonging as outcomes. Vogel-Campbell (2025), in *Parent Perceptions of Inclusion in the Development of District Community Schools*, found that families consistently described inclusion as creating a

sense of belonging in which differences are respected and valued. Parents also associated inclusive school environments with positive academic and social development, increased student confidence and empathy, greater family engagement, and a more positive school climate. At the same time, parents identified continuing barriers for students with IEPs and English learners, including lowered expectations and less rigorous curriculum.

Taken together, the recent literature aligned with RA7 shows that Community Schools can address opportunities through multiple, interconnected strategies: mitigating inequities in access to academic and other supports for different student populations, including immigrant families, and housing instability, strengthening inclusion and belonging, elevating student agency, and creating pathways toward postsecondary and economic outcomes. At the same time, the updated Research Agenda points to areas where the current Clearinghouse appears less developed. Future RA7 research could therefore examine more directly how Community Schools connect barrier removal with long-term pathways, asking not only whether students receive needed support, but whether those supports ultimately expand their access to rigorous learning, post-secondary education, meaningful employment, civic participation, and sustained economic opportunity.

Research Topic 8: Sustaining and Scaling: Policy Alignment, Funding Models, and Cross-Sector Integration

Research Topic 8 is the third most frequently represented priority, appearing in 323 resources (63.8%). The updated Research Agenda defines sustainability as a system-wide issue involving funding models, workforce stability, governance, policy alignment, and cross-sector integration. It calls for research on blending and braiding local, state, and federal funding; understanding how resource requirements change from startup to full implementation; examining budgeting and resource allocation; and identifying the roles of state education agencies and higher education institutions in supporting implementation. The agenda also treats scaling as sustainability rather than simple replication. Research should examine which elements of Community Schools can be standardized, which must remain locally adaptable, and how to preserve implementation quality as the strategy expands. It also calls for attention to changing political and funding environments and to how Community Schools become embedded as a sustained organizational identity rather than remaining a separately funded initiative.

Clearinghouse resources aligned with Research Agenda Topic 8 raise an increasingly important question for the Community Schools field: what systems, governance arrangements, partnerships, funding structures, and leadership conditions are needed to sustain Community Schools over time and on at scale? While earlier research often

focused on individual schools or partnerships, more recent work examines Community Schools as part of broader district, municipal, state, and cross-sector systems. Across the RA8 resources, sustainability is therefore not simply a question of whether a program continues; it depends on whether the Community School strategy becomes embedded in durable structures for funding, shared decision-making, coordination, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Recent research suggests that shared governance and meaningful community power are central components of sustainable systems. Goessling et al. (2024), examining organizing for Community Schools in Philadelphia, found that a grassroots vision of Community Schools as a transformative, community-driven strategy was weakened when decision-making and accountability structures were unclear. At the same time, the study identified community leadership development, relationship-building, political education, shared governance, and community accountability as important mechanisms for strengthening collective influence. This finding is particularly important for RA8 because it suggests that collaboration alone is insufficient: sustainable Community School systems must clarify who has authority, how decisions are made, and how families and community members can exercise meaningful roles.

Recent work also expands partnership beyond the school itself. Bierbaum, Butler, and O’Keefe (2022) examined Baltimore’s 21st Century School Buildings Program and found that investments in schools could contribute to social, institutional, economic, and physical community development. This potential depends on community trust, staff capacity, a clear vision, and the ability to navigate jurisdictional boundaries between school districts and city agencies. Related research by Butler, Bierbaum, and O’Keefe (2022) found that Community Schools were more likely to contribute to broader neighborhood development when lead organizations held an explicit vision for transforming both schools and their surrounding communities. Community School Coordinators were particularly important because they connected organizations across sectors, while neighborhood conditions and partner organizations’ visions shaped what was possible. However, coordination across education, government, community organizations, and neighborhood-development systems remains difficult.

Clearinghouse resources also address policy and financing as systems-level conditions for scale. Maier and Rivera-Rodriguez (2023) examined Community School investments across eight states and found a growing range of state strategies, from temporary grants and capacity-building investments to ongoing formula funding. Funding was generally targeted toward schools and districts with the greatest needs, while several states paired

financial investments with technical assistance and implementation supports. The findings suggest that in addition to financing individual Community Schools, states can construct an enabling infrastructure through funding formulas, implementation guidance, technical assistance, and capacity development.

Recent evidence also suggests why these systems investments matter. Swain, Leung-Gagne, Maier, and Rubinstein (2025) examined 458 California schools receiving California Community Schools Partnership Program implementation grants and found positive first-year effects, including reductions in chronic absence and suspensions and improvements in test scores. This study provides important emerging evidence that large-scale public investment in Community School implementation can produce measurable student outcomes. At the same time, it leaves open a central RA8 question: which features of the state, district, and school implementation infrastructure produced those effects, and which are necessary to sustain them? Similarly, Lee et al. (2025) found that Community Schools demonstrated greater alignment with state-supported practices, including higher levels of funding and greater access to school-based health centers. This study found that Community Schools had positive effects on graduation rates, and schools with school-based health centers experienced reductions in chronic absenteeism.

At the same time, important gaps remain. Much of the recent RA8 literature describes promising governance structures, investments, or partnership arrangements, but causal evidence remains limited on which governance models work best, how power is distributed within shared leadership structures, which funding mechanisms are most durable, and how district and state systems can sustain quality as Community Schools expand. Future RA8 research could therefore examine not only whether Community Schools are sustained, but also what is sustained and by whom. Particularly valuable questions include how state and district policies distribute authority and resources; how public agencies braid or align funding; how Community School Coordinators and intermediary organizations function within larger systems; how families, youth, and community organizations share decision-making power; how implementation quality changes during expansion; and what governance and financing arrangements allow Community Schools to remain locally responsive while operating at scale.

Cross-Agenda Interpretation and Implications

Taken together, the analysis across the eight Research Agenda topics suggests that the Community Schools evidence base is both broad and highly interconnected. No single topic operates independently. Implementation studies often raise questions about leadership and workforce capacity. Research on engagement and shared decision-making intersects with data use and governance. Whole-child supports are closely connected to opportunity and belonging. Funding, partnerships, and system conditions shape evidence of student outcomes. Although RA3, RA5, and RA8 are most frequently represented, more than half of the Clearinghouse resources address six of the eight topics. This suggests that Community Schools are increasingly studied as a systems strategy, rather than as a collection of separate programs or services.

At the same time, frequency should not be interpreted as evidence that a topic is sufficiently understood. The topic-level analysis reveals important differences between the volume of literature and the depth of evidence. For example, the strong representation of engagement and shared decision-making (RA3) does not answer whether participation results in genuine redistribution of decision-making power. Similarly, the prevalence of data-related research (RA5) contrasts with remaining gaps around cross-sector data governance, community-generated data, privacy, and emerging technologies. Meanwhile, less frequently represented areas raise other foundational questions, including how Community Schools develop over time (RA1), how success and ROI should be measured across multiple time horizons (RA6), and how barrier removal translates into sustained postsecondary and economic opportunity (RA7). These patterns demonstrate why the frequency findings should be interpreted alongside the substantive content, methods, and gaps within each topic.

Across the agendas, several priorities for future research emerge. First, the field would benefit from greater attention to relationships among implementation, processes, and outcomes, moving beyond whether a Community School strategy is present to understanding which components are implemented, at what quality level, under what conditions, and with what results. Second, more longitudinal and comparative research is needed to understand how implementation, leadership, community power, student experiences, and outcomes develop over time and vary across urban, suburban, and rural contexts. Third, research should continue expanding what counts as meaningful evidence by incorporating implementation quality, relational trust, belonging, community-generated knowledge, long-term pathways, and system-level outcomes alongside conventional academic indicators.

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