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The Role of the Community School Manager

Facilitating Partnerships and Programs to Support Teaching and Learning

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The Community School Manager (CSM) in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) integrates a school's partnership work with its academic mission.

The CSM collaborates with principals to:

- identify school goals
- align partners and resources to those goals
- build relationships with families, students, and the community

At mature OUSD full-service community schools, the CSM operates as a school-level administrator who manages, leads, and coordinates partnerships and programs to support school and student needs. Over time, the CSM has helped formalize structures and processes designed to bolster conditions for teaching and learning in community schools. This brief offers insight into the CSM role as it occurs in Oakland schools, emphasizing the CSM's contribution to teaching and learning goals.

OUSD is made up entirely of community schools. Of these, 42 have a designated community school manager (CSM). This funded position manages and integrates the additional functions of the full-service community school, such as partnerships and family engagement activities. The CSM works to maximize the impact of resources through strategic collaboration, coordination, and alignment efforts.

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Managing & Integrating Resources to Maximize Impact

The CSM plays a host of roles related to managing and integrating community school elements, depending on school/community needs and school level. These include:

- managing and maintaining the quality of partnerships
- strengthening Coordination of Services Teams (COST) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
- supervising and/or supporting family engagement staff and afterschool program staff
- addressing chronic absence

The CSM role is intentionally highly collaborative. CSMs work in close concert with the principal, partners, and other staff in all aspects of the school. Often, CSMs are deeply involved in school leadership and decision making. For example, they participate in culture/climate and even instructional leadership teams, work with the principal to ensure partners are aware of instructional goals, and facilitate youth, family, and staff engagement.

Over time, the full-service community schools model has evolved, and the CSM role has been refined through ongoing collaboration with principals, partners, district leadership, and CSMs themselves. This iterative process has informed core practices and district-wide expectations for quality partnerships.

For example, the COST best practices protocols and the quality partnerships conversation guides emerged out of feedback from CSMs, partners, and principals. While partnerships may look different school by school, the CSM draws from best practices and shared standards to strategically engage partners and maximize impact.

Enhancing Conditions for Teaching & Learning

Implementation research confirms that CSMs are engaged in a number of initiatives directly related to conditions for teaching and learning. They are a voice for school culture and climate. They lead school attendance teams. They create meaningful relationships with students and families, both individually and institutionally. They might, for example, bring important student context to bear in a sensitive situation, or create the structures for parent leadership and advisory councils. CSMs look at data to solve problems and build systems. They bring on partners to address specific academic priorities—for example, tutors to support 4th grade math learning. They increase the resources and tools available to teachers through coordinated services, positive discipline and restorative practices, and deep community knowledge.

OUSD full-service community school teachers report that these community school resources and practices support student engagement in the classroom, create an environment more conducive to learning, and help teachers in their role as instructors (Fehrer, 2019).

School staff and faculty most often associate the CSM role with connecting students to services and supports (Fehrer 2019). In reality, their reach goes far beyond coordinating services and managing partnerships.

Aligning Partnerships to Support School Goals

The CSM plays an important part in aligning partner activities to support the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Nearly all CSMs are responsible for recruiting, managing, and coordinating with partner agencies on campus.

Through regular meetings and ongoing evaluation, CSMs work with partners to:

- identify clear shared goals
- determine appropriate measures
- outline expectations for the partnership

This alignment ensures that partnerships provide more than stand-alone services. Instead, the CSM strategically integrates partnership work to support specific school goals. Over time, partnership expectations and processes have become more formalized as district staff developed rubrics and protocols, and CSMs iterated with their peers at district-facilitated professional learning communities. Many CSMs, in collaboration with their principals, are active participants in developing the school's SPSA. In this way, the CSM's role has been formalized as integral to the statewide accountability process.

Building Teacher Capacity to Integrate Community School Practices in their Classrooms

CSMs can play a pivotal role in supporting teachers' use of and confidence with key community school practices. For example, nearly half of teachers in a 2017-18 FSCS survey indicated that the CSM helped them in their use of positive discipline practices, family engagement, and connecting students to support services (Fehrer, 2019). CSMs reinforce this. They site both systematic and informal efforts to build teacher knowledge and capacity with full-service community school resources. Some CSMs may lead their school's Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) efforts, or help teachers become comfortable with restorative practices.

Other CSMs may support teachers navigating a delicate conversation with a student or parent. In recent years, district leadership has signaled the importance of the CSMs' role building school staff capacity with community school practices.

Increasing the Principal's Capacity to Focus on Instruction

The CSM is an ally and collaborator for school principals. While community schools offer needed programs and opportunities for students, they also require additional workflow. As a school-level administrator, the CSM manages, integrates, and aligns this workflow to benefit the school without overloading the principal's docket.

School stakeholders report that CSMs are savvy at solving problems, addressing needs, and engaging with data. The CSM can also be a "bridge" to bring knowledge and relationships around culture/climate work, community partners, and family-school partnerships into leadership discussions.

For many schools, especially those with limited administrative staff, hiring a CSM can be an equity strategy. Schools with limited staff in leadership roles are less likely to access all the features of community school programming because they do not have the human capital to do so. By having the CSM as an ally to lean on, principals are able to access more resources that enhance teaching and learning at the school, while having the capacity to make instruction their primary focus.



Conclusion

The CSM is a critical actor in OUSD's community school approach. The CSM's work tightens the alignment between community school resources and conditions for teaching and learning. Over time, the CSM role has been refined and extended. School stakeholders describe CSMs as champions for equity and cultural competency. They share responsibilities that allow their principals to focus on high quality instruction; they support teachers' use of and confidence with key community school practices; and they collaborate with partners and other non-teaching staff to ensure coherence. In these ways, the CSM can leverage the impact of the community school resources to support conditions for effective teaching and preparation for college and career-ready learning.

“I honestly do not know how I would function as a leader without this role being at my school. Having someone that focuses on 'community' makes it much easier for me to stay connected and be able to make great decisions that are for the greater good of all those at the school site.”

OUSD Principal

References

Fehrer, K. (2019). *Teacher Perception and Experience in OUSD Community Schools*. Stanford, CA: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities.

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH SERIES

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