

The Basics



The Community School Coordinator

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CSLX
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
LEARNING EXCHANGE

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Key Takeaway

The Community School Coordinator (CSC) is a site leader, strategic thinker, and connector who can hold the meaning-making and engagement of CS development; they are NOT the one “in charge” of managing new programs.







What is The Basics?

Welcome to The Basics by CSLX! In this series, we'll cover foundational elements of community school development by answering the questions we see most from practitioners like you. Have a question you don't see covered here? Please get in touch.

Now, let's get down to The Basics, shall we?

So, what does a Community School Coordinator actually do?

The Community School Coordinator (CSC) – sometimes called a Community School Manager, Community School Director, or Resource Coordinator, among other names – plays an essential role in a community school.¹ A CSC functions as a high-level school administrator – similar to an Assistant Principal – to facilitate community school partnerships and practices aimed at supporting student learning and development.² The job can and will look different at each community school site; however, the CSC role will often entail:

-  Convening, facilitating, and often staffing a community school leadership team to set goals, evaluate progress and support community school development.
-  Recruiting, coordinating, and convening partners to integrate and align efforts that support student and school success (including identifying new partnerships).
-  Helping facilitate trust and relationship-building among school staff, families, and the community.
-  Supporting community school practices, structures and systems (e.g., needs and asset assessment process, culture-climate teams, restorative practices, family learning partnership initiatives).
-  Facilitating data-driven inquiry, continuous improvement, and creative problem-solving (e.g., looking at student referral data to identify patterns and opportunities for Tier 1 support, working with staff to improve attendance systems).
-  Building teacher and administrator capacity to enhance whole child learning and instruction (e.g., to integrate community school practices into the classroom).

The CSC is a leader and strategic thinker, who brings specific expertise to the table and works in tandem with the principal to staff and guide a shared community school development process. They often “connect the dots” between divergent programs and initiatives, bringing key stakeholders together into collaborative conversation, and help integrate and align resources to support student learning.

¹ We use the term Community School Coordinator, as this is the language adopted in the CCSP legislation and framework.

² More on the CSC role can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

A Community School Coordinator IS...

- Like a Chief of Staff; someone who works behind the scenes to solve problems, mediate disputes, and deal with issues before they are brought to the school principal, the “Chief Executive;”
- An honest broker and truth teller when the school leader needs a wide-ranging view without turf considerations;
- An integrator who connects work streams that would otherwise remain siloed;
- A communicator who links the leadership team and the broader organization.

A Community School Coordinator IS NOT...

- The one “in charge” of CS implementation;
- The “engagement” person;
- The “wrap-around services” person or the case manager;
- Just a set of “helpful hands.”

OK, what does a Community School Coordinator NOT do?

Just as important as what the CSC role is, it’s important to understand what the CSC role is NOT. The CSC is not the person “in charge” of community school implementation. They are not the person tasked with overseeing the many different community school-related “programs” emerging and underway at a site. Rather, they *will need* to develop an understanding of what programs and initiatives are already underway and those that are emerging, and support strengthening how those efforts contribute to shared school and student learning goals.

Because of the unique and non-traditional nature of the CSC role, the temptation often exists to pull the CSC in many different directions or to treat the CSC as a “case manager” or an “extra set of hands” to help out with daily, urgent problem-solving and putting out fires. The CSC certainly contributes in these ways (as do all school staff and team members). However, it is critical to protect the CSC from being constantly pulled to manage “fires”: they need dedicated time and space to focus on the specific systems, culture, and infrastructure-building of community school development. For example, building relationships with school and community stakeholders; making connections between various efforts, resources, and needs; creating systems and structures; building school staff capacity to implement community school strategies; and thinking strategically with the site leadership team.

Doesn't the Community School Coordinator manage the additional programs and services we bring to our community school?

Nope. The CSC must be informed and engaged in many of the services and programs offered at the school, but does not necessarily directly oversee or explicitly manage these programs. They continue to be a connector, engager, strategic thinker, and systems-builder to strengthen new and existing efforts. For example, the CSC might:

- ▶ **Facilitate a coordination of services team (COST)** with instructional and partner staff to help students connect to needed services;
- ▶ **Work with a teacher to strengthen home-school connections** as part of their community-connected learning activities;
- ▶ **Collaborate with the school site leadership team** to more systematically engage student voice in school improvement; or
- ▶ **Bring expanded learning partners together with teachers** to better align school-day and afterschool instruction and enrichment.

What professional skills, background, or experience make for a good CSC?

The experiences, educational backgrounds, and career trajectories of CSCs can vary quite a bit. In some schools, the CSC has transitioned from a teaching or paraprofessional role. In other schools, parent liaisons grow into the CSC role. Sometimes when schools partner with a community based organization or lead partner agency, the CSC comes from a background connected to that partners' mission, e.g., an Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) or a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC).

Successful CSCs often have the following "superpowers."

- Building teams, fostering collaboration, organizing & championing CS efforts;
- Case management & systems-building experience;
- Understanding of school systems, the California education system, and/or youth-serving systems, including how schools and youth-serving agencies work and the dynamics inherent in those systems;
- Strong connections to and trusting relationships with community, students, family or school site (e.g., community organizer long-term resident, parent, para-professional).

Look out for these capacities on a prospective CSC resume:

- Organizational and project management skills
- Demonstrated ability to form coalitions, build and foster relationships
- Flexibility and ability to respond to changes and course correct
- Creative problem-solving skills
- Strong communications skills

It is also important to consider the CSC’s “fit”– compatibility *and* complementarity – in the following areas:

- ▶ **Personality:** Are they a good match with the site leader? Do they bring a balancing energy or workstyle?
- ▶ **Skill set:** Do they have a strong background in restorative practices that meshes with a current community school priority? Do they have experience in community organizing to build shared leadership and trusting relationships? Do they know how to connect with and navigate the public agency systems?
- ▶ **Community connection:** Do they have existing relationships with families, community partners, and/or the school community?.

Should a CSC be a school, district, or agency employee?

A number of factors come into play when deciding whether to hire the CSC through the school, the district or a lead partner agency (such as a community based partner). Considerations include funding sources/nature of the funding, labor/management agreements and relationships, and whether the CSC will be based at one school or work across a few. There is no “right answer” – the right structure for each community school depends on the school’s needs and structures.

Regardless of who ultimately employs the CSC, the principal and school community should be involved in the hiring decision-making process – including interviewing, and ultimately recommending potential candidates. Additionally, all CSCs, regardless of their employer or staffing structure, should be included in any district-led professional development offered for CSCs.

Those different staffing structures might include:

- ▶ **Hired/staffed by the school site.** Hired by the principal and leadership team, the role is supported by school funding or grants to school and part of school staff headcount.
- ▶ **Hired/staffed by the district.** Hired by district, deployed to a specific school, the role is supported by district funding or grants to the district, and part of district headcount. In rural communities where districts may only have one or a few schools, a CSC might be hired by a County Office of Education to maximize access and connections, especially to other County agencies.
- ▶ **Hired/staffed by a CBO/partner.** Hired by a lead partner agency or a backbone organization, deployed to a school, part of the hiring organization’s headcount. The role is supported by partner organization funding, grants and/or a service contract channeled through the partner organization.

Under each of these structures, the CSC role can be full-time or part-time, depending on the needs, context and resources of the school and the community. In small and rural contexts, it may make sense for a CSC to be shared across multiple school sites.

If we are a district hiring a CSC, should they be certificated or classified?

People of many different professional backgrounds are successful CSCs. The most important characteristic of a CSC is about the right fit with the site, relational and systems capacity, and organizational and problem-solving skills (see above questions). It is important to note, however, that requiring a CSC to be certificated and/or credentialed staff may limit the pool of candidates to those whose strength and professional experience lies *within* the formal education system, and unintentionally exclude staff who have valuable lived experiences and trusting relationships within the community. There also may be immediate and long-term funding implications (e.g., salary pay scales), and/or labor-management considerations (e.g., head counts, available candidates) for each option.

How can we sustainably fund the CSC role?

As of November 2022, CCSP Implementation and Planning funding guidelines allow for using CCSP funds to hire a CSC. It is important to think about a long-term funding strategy for the role. There are several approaches to consider:

- ▶ Offer community school implementation sites a graduated funding model, wherein the district funds the CSC role 100% for the first year, with the school site absorbing an additional 25% of costs each succeeding year (e.g., 100%/0%, 75%/25%, 50%/50%, 25%/75%, 0%/100%). In districts utilizing this approach, school sites have found the position indispensable and worth ongoing funding from their general site budgets (including using LCAP funds).
- ▶ Sometimes CS partners – municipal agencies, local nonprofits and others – commit to sharing the costs associated with the CSC role. In this scenario, each partner sees the benefit and value in the work that the CSC does, and underwrites a portion of the costs associated with the position.

While the CSC does add a cost line-item to the school site, they also provide tremendous value that many school leaders find worth the investment. See, for example, this [study](#) on the return on investment of a community school coordinator.

What is the district's role in supporting CSCs?

Your CSCs need district support to be successful in their role! Whether the CSC is hired/staffed by an individual school site, the district, or a community-based organization, the district plays an important role in supporting CSC success.³

The district will likely need to support school site leaders to better understand CS development, and how to best leverage their CSC. The district can also provide training and capacity-building to CSCs, and help to develop coherence and alignment across sites – for example, identifying a shared set of priorities that all CSCs can work towards.

³ This “backbone” role can be played by the district, a County Office of Education (may be especially relevant in small/rural contexts), or by a community based organization. The “backbone” supports should serve and engage all CSCs in the community, regardless of their particular staffing/hiring entity.

A community of practice or professional learning community for CSCs can be incredibly helpful and provide opportunities for:

- ▶ **Sharing innovations and practices** between CSCs (e.g., consultations);
- ▶ **Identifying consistent trends and needs** for successful community school implementation (e.g., multiple CSCs share that their school communities are struggling with a specific challenge—possibly something that the district can address);
- ▶ **Informing CSCs of important district and partner resources**, opportunities, and practices relevant to CS development (e.g., dual enrollment opportunities, equity initiatives, health services);
- ▶ **Garnering input from CSCs to inform district infrastructure and priorities** (e.g., the roll-out of a new student attendance data system, feedback on MTSS team best practices);
- ▶ **Codifying, standardizing and systematizing local community school practices** (e.g., annual partnership meetings with school leadership team and partner agencies to review data, share goals and set common priorities for the coming year);
- ▶ **Supporting each other** as they work through the processes – and potential pitfalls – of CS implementation (e.g., mentoring new CSCs).

Do you have any tips on hiring and/or sample job descriptions for a CSC?

We're glad you asked – yes!

For one, involve your community. Regardless of who is actually staffing/funding the CSC position, (e.g., school site, district, community based agency), it is wise practice to involve school site staff and community partners in the hiring process. For example, if a district or COE is housing the CSC role, they can support the site by managing the application process (e.g., do a preliminary screening of candidates, check references, schedule interviews), and provide the school site with the “top three” candidates. This reduces the administrative burden of hiring on school sites, while still allowing the site team to assess “fit” with their specific culture, workstyles, and needs.

Ideally, the school site hiring team would include the principal, as well as other school community members (e.g., teachers, classified staff, families, students, community partners) to reflect a robust understanding of school culture, needs, and “fit” offered by each candidate. Given the centrality of the CSC-principal relationship, it is especially important that the principal be on-board with the CSC selection, and that the successful CSC candidate is a good “match” for the principal – e.g., personality, skill set, community connection.

Keep in mind: A poorly paid, entry-level role will likely not attract and retain candidates for the long-term, so make sure you can offer competitive pay for your CSC role. Given the highly relational nature of the CSC’s work, regular turnover can be highly disruptive, and can ultimately negate any salary savings. For more on the return on investment on the CSC role, check out [this study](#).

Where can we go for more information?

The CSLX team has found the following tools to be helpful in our work with other schools and districts. Have a great resource to share? Please **get in touch**.

- **Leading with Purpose and Passion: A Guide for Community School Directors** (National Center for Community Schools)
- **Return on Investment of a Community School Coordinator: A Case Study** (Apex & ABC Community School Partnership)
- **Community School Coordinators Network** (Coalition for Community Schools)
- **Small Rurals Sample Job Description** (Lost Hills Union School District)
- **Community School Coordinator Sample Job Description** (Ottawa Community Schools Network)
- **Sample CSC Job Description** (Oakland Unified School District)

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