

Making coherent education systems: Community Schools, Multilingual Learners, and Coherence

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One of the biggest challenges educators, administrators and leaders face in transforming systems is innovation fatigue. Particularly in education systems, where staff work under volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Myung, 2020), staff, students and families can feel disengaged and disempowered. Coherence is a way to make meaning and carve out direction in complex systems. Coherence can be a protective factor that affirms a shared vision and ensures everyone sees how their work fits into the bigger picture.

Fullan and Quinn's (2016) coherence framework identifies four components: focusing direction to build collective purpose; cultivating collaborative cultures to build capacity across actors; deepening learning to improve systems for real-world application; and securing accountability and capacity within teams. These components aren't checkboxes, they're living practices that develop, and are honed over time. They are supported by trust and relationships among people and teams, and can be disrupted by loss of trust or purpose. At its heart, Coherence-making is for people and teams who aim to change the direction of their organization, challenge the status quo, and redesign how they do school.

The Community Schools Forward *Essentials for Community Schools* is a theoretical framework. At the heart of its design is a vision for transforming education systems to ensure that all children, families, and communities are thriving. The framework is premised on the relationships between school staff, community partners, and youth and families. These core components redesign how schools function by proposing a horizontal organizational design. Where most education systems are designed and governed in a top-down approach, the CSF framework emphasizes a collaborative role for educational partners to engage with their community and break out of a service provider model. In this way, students, families, community members, and staff, are not mutually exclusive categories of interest holders, but different facets of a human-centered educational system. Many educational spaces do not reflect English Learner students' cultural and linguistic identities or experiences. By tapping into the funds of knowledge of families and communities, educators can gain a better sense of what their students need.

In addition to who and why, the CSF framework identifies components of education from infrastructure, practices, and conditions. At the outermost ring, the six infrastructural components all emphasize sustainability, partnership, and continuous improvement. This category of the wheel indicates what we should see (e.g. shared governance structures, professional learning opportunities, strategic partnerships, data systems, sustainable resources). These infrastructural components also tell us the purpose of what we see. For example, professional learning opportunities aren't just to

update staff on new mandates and compliance, but to engage in continuous improvement. To that end, professional development might engage data systems, or emphasize the role of a community partner, or enhance resources by creating cross-functional teams and goals. It is easy to take a supportive infrastructure for granted, but in community schools, infrastructure isn't just what we see, it's also about redefining how we do this work.

In this framework, "how we do school" is demonstrated through a whole child approach to learning and human development that is carried out through deep partnership. Practices like integrated systems of support sit alongside community-connected instruction and expanded learning opportunities. In traditional schools, those practices sit under the purview of partnering agencies and are often limited by contractor and vendor agreements and siloed data systems of public health, community resources, and education. At best, traditional schools can offer a warm hand-off to another service provider and follow up on the status of care. In community schools, the boundaries around these practices are permeable and those efforts are redistributed across a network of partners with shared data systems for continuous improvement of all community-serving agencies, with a coherent vision of a collective purpose.

Similarly, the California English Learner Roadmap posits a shared vision to ensure that every level of educational systems understand their role in facilitating positive educational experiences for Multilingual Students/ English Learners and Newcomers. The conditions for success in equitable educational approaches that center students' most marginalized identities are markedly different from traditional education systems. Community schools go about education in a way that is rooted in a shared vision, trusting relationships, inclusive decision-making, and actionable data. Together, these conditions activate each other. The California English Learner Roadmap also uses four inextricable principles.

The central organizing feature of both of these frameworks is coherence. Coherence is represented through its parts as enabling conditions, making it both an ingredient and an indicator of how well the systems in the areas of practice and infrastructural support are functioning. These systems are made up of multi-faceted and dynamic individuals. The enabling conditions are not puzzle pieces to be set in place; they're a live team engaging and acting alongside each other.