

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS & THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COORDINATOR

A BRIEF INFORMATION GUIDE FOR VERMONT
SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS CONSIDERING
IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
APPROACH

Created By:



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Where to begin?

Community Schools in Vermont have been implemented in various formats - some originating from the District/Supervisory Union level, other at an individual school level. There are challenges and affordances to both formats.

District / Supervisory Union Level

Benefits:

- System level approach; Enables coordination of existing roles and resources across district (e.g., home-school coordinators, community liaisons, etc.)
- Increased connection with district administration, financial management/coordination
- Greater connection/access to multiple school boards
- Increased distribution of CS related funds, technical assistance, and inter-district collaboration/partnership efforts

Challenges:

- Less concentrated implementation based on school-specific needs, goals
- Fewer funds available for individual schools' programmatic efforts

School Level

Benefits:

- Greater opportunity to blend CS work with an existing role or duty within a school
- Localized program/policy development based on specific school goals, student/family needs
- Focused partnership opportunities with community members and orgs. that exist within a schools immediate community
- Lays groundwork for natural expansion of CS model and organic growth within district/SU based on individual school implementation readiness
- Greater concentration of funds for CS implementation at the onset

Challenges:

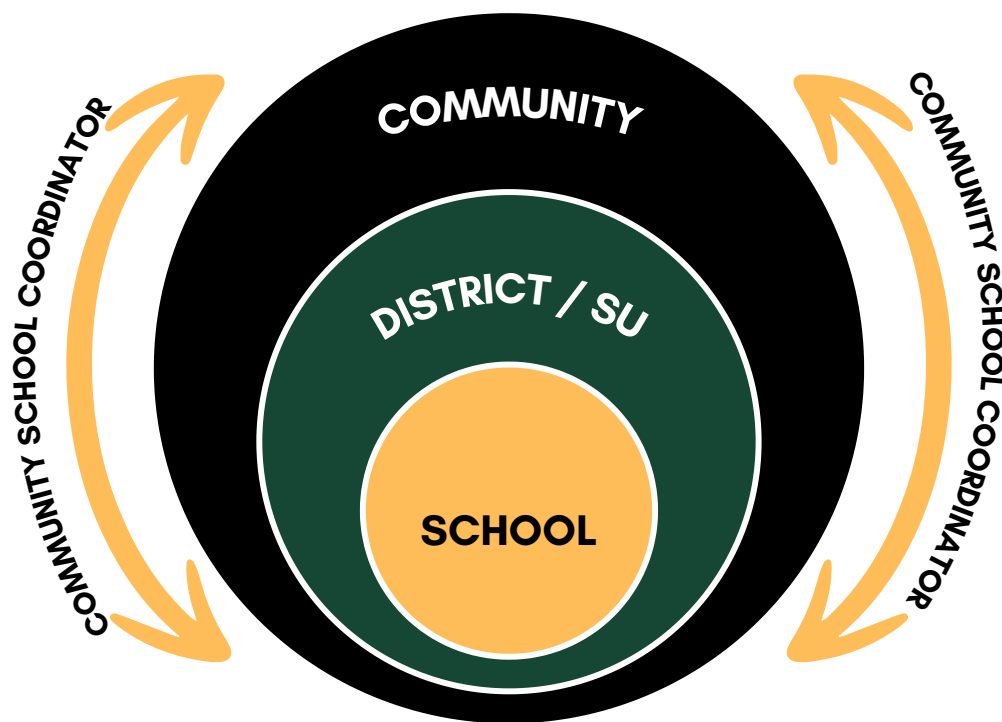
- Fewer opportunities for collaborative efforts around programming, community partnerships alongside other schools
- Decreased opportunity to meet needs/goals that exist district-wide

There is no 'right way' to implement the Community Schools approach.

It depends on the level of readiness a district or an individual school has to take on the critical elements of setting up a Community School.

A comprehensive district/school needs and asset inventory will help in determining positional location of the CS coordinator and the initial steps in the Community Schools implementation process.

Trickle-up (school to district/SU) and trickle-down (SU to individual schools) effects and impact of the Community Schools approach occur over time. Where you start is not where you end!



ENABLING CONTEXTS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Altering/bolstering existing services, programs, and support structures to do more, differently than had been allowed or thought of in the past. Balancing elements of schooling and meeting both existing and emergent needs within a school community and the broader community context is made manageable by the accountability structure and values-based approach taken by the VT CCSC and the expectations and parameters established in collaborative CS funding programs.

Implementation of Community Schools in rural contexts needs to consider **intersecting leverage points connected to other progressive educational policies that support the five pillars of Community Schools.** In doing so, Community Schools can create space to knit together a tapestry of educational policies that helps to avoid initiative overload and conflation.

Cultivating social capital through cohort models and communities of practice provide an infrastructure of continuous, supportive accountability that aids school leaders as they navigate the complexities of transforming their schools through the Community Schools approach. Through this process, school leaders feel less isolated and more empowered to pursue shared outcomes of increased community engagement, safer school environments, and greater educational equity.

The Community School Coordinator (CSC)

A Vermont community school coordinator is defined as “a full-time or part-time staff member serving in an eligible school or in a school district or supervisory union with an eligible school and appointed per Vermont law; and is responsible for the identification, implementation, and coordination of community school programs, subject to the operational and reporting structure of the community school coordinator’s employer” (VT Act 67, 2021).

CSCs are seen as the linchpin of successful community schools, serving as essential bridge-builders who promote trusting relationships among multiple stakeholders.

CSCs manage linkages between schools and communities, act as cultural brokers, and mitigate stakeholder conflict to preserve collaboration.

Unlike School Social Workers who have caseloads and work with individual students and families to navigate systems and manage needs, **Community School Coordinators operate in a school-wide or district level manner and facilitate the connections between school and community to build programming, enhance safe/equitable school climates and cultures, and coordinate resources and opportunities that every student, families, and community members can participate in and benefit from.**

By being insulated from daily school operations, the CSC can maintain flexibility and focus...This structure prevents the Coordinator from being pulled into filling immediate school-level gaps, unlike peers based within schools.

While the SU-wide role allows for broad impact, there are trade-offs. A focus on a single school community might allow for deeper integration with one leadership structure, PTO, and local initiatives. For districts without school-based support staff or robust after-school programs, having a CS Coordinator develop those systems at the school level could be more effective. The decision to place the role at the SU or school level should align with the specific priorities and resources of the CS initiative.

Samantha Stevens, Community School Coordinator, North Country Supervisory Union

Community Schools Resources & Tools

Community School Implementation Needs Assessment Toolkit, Binghamton University

VT Act 67: The Community Schools Act, The Vermont Agency of Education

Building a Community School System, Institute for Education leadership

Community Schools Playbook, Partnership for the Future of Learning

Staffing for School Transformation: The Role of the Community School Coordinator

Leading with Passion and Purpose: A Guide for Community School Directors, National Center for Community Schools

Return on Investment of a Community School Coordinator, A Case Study

Learn More About the

Catamount Community Schools Collaborative

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