

# Essentials for Community School Implementation Plan

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## Why do we need a Community School Implementation Plan?

This tool was developed to support Community School Leadership Teams (CSLT)—often called advisories—as they move from identifying [community assets and needs](#) to design clear, actionable strategies for improvement. While asset mapping and needs assessments are critical first steps, meaningful transformation happens when this information is translated into a focused plan that guides collective action.

Developing a Community School Implementation Plan helps create a cohesive strategy for your community school. The plan is designed to align existing initiatives, partnerships, and resources while grounding decision-making in comprehensive data that reflects the strengths, priorities, and experiences of students, families, educators, and the broader community. By bringing these elements together, the implementation plan helps ensure that efforts across the school are coordinated and working toward shared outcomes.

The questions in this tool are intended to guide Community School Leadership Teams in developing a comprehensive implementation plan grounded in the [Essentials for Community School Transformation](#)<sup>1</sup> and informed by the Community Schools Forward [Theory of Action](#). Through this process, teams identify priorities, determine strategies, and outline how progress will be measured and improved over time.<sup>2</sup>

The guiding questions for this process are:

- 1- How are we doing?
- 2- What is the data telling us?
- 3- Who are the partners we need to make change?
- 4- What works to make change?
- 5- What is our action plan?

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<sup>1</sup> Community Schools Forward (2023). Framework: Essentials for Community School Transformation. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>.

<sup>2</sup> This process can also be understood as part of a results-based accountability approach to community schools. Results-Based Accountability (RBA), developed by Mark Friedman, is a framework that uses data, reflection, and continuous improvement to help organizations focus on meaningful outcomes for children, families, and communities. (outlined in this [short guide](#))

## How to use this tool

This plan is designed for established community schools that have already completed an assets and needs assessment. It is a plan that should be developed over 3-5 meetings; each meeting should focus on one section of the implementation plan. You will begin developing your community school’s implementation plan by revisiting the findings from the A & N assessment with your Community School Leadership Team (CSLT). It is recommended that you complete one section during each meeting.

Some conversations may require more time, especially when discussing complex or sensitive topics. However, aim to spend approximately 30–45 minutes on each chart. Below is a recommended meeting sequence:

Meeting 1	Address Questions 1 and 2: How are we doing?” and “What is the data telling us?
Meeting 2	Question 3: Who are the partners we need to make a change?
Meeting 3	Question 4: What works to make a change?
Meeting 4	Question 5: What is our action plan?
Meeting 5	Review draft of implementation plan and develop next steps

This document uses the same example throughout each step to illustrate how to apply the process.

### *How to prioritize enabling conditions?*

Change efforts can stall when the enabling conditions needed for success are not fully considered. As part of the implementation planning process, it is helpful for the Community School Leadership Team to reflect on these conditions and assess how well they are currently supporting the work. *For each step, we will include questions to strengthen the enabling conditions through this process. Definitions of the four enabling conditions are outlined below:*

**Trusting Relationships:** Reciprocal relationships between students, families, educators, and community partners are built through transparency, reliability, and mutual care. In community schools, trusting relationships create the foundation for meaningful and

effective collaboration, engagement, and shared responsibility for student success. Without trusting relationships, the other enabling conditions are difficult to develop.

**Inclusive Decision Making:** Building consistent decision-making structures that embed the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of students, families, educators, and community partners ensures that the priorities, strategies, and solutions that drive implementation are grounded in community input while building collective ownership. In this way, every perspective is valued, and outcomes are a shared responsibility.

**Shared Vision:** A collectively developed and clearly articulated understanding of the school community's goals, values, and desired outcomes for students and families. In community schools, a shared vision aligns interest holders around a common purpose, and guides coordinated action.

**Actionable Data:** Relevant, timely, and accessible data that can be directly used to inform decisions, improve practice, and monitor progress. In community schools, actionable data includes academic, attendance, behavioral, and well-being indicators, as well as qualitative insights from students, families, and other interest holders, and is used to drive continuous improvement.

## Guiding Questions

### 1 - How are we doing?

The Assets and Needs (A&N) process is designed to help answer this question. If you have not yet completed this process, the National Center offers a [comprehensive protocol](#) that teams can use; elements of this protocol are referenced throughout this guide. At a minimum, an A&N process should incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data. The results should identify clear priorities—areas where the data indicates a need for deeper investigation and focused attention.

With your CSLT, revisit the 3 top priorities from your assets and needs assessment. Are they clear goals? This process will help you get specific about clear partners to support change and how you will measure impact.

**Enabling conditions review:**

The following question should be discussed with your CSLT to prioritize strong enabling conditions.

- How do these priorities relate to your larger school vision?
- How do they align with other improvement plans that are guiding your school or district?
- What interest groups were not consulted in identifying these priorities?

**2 - What is the data telling us?**

Once three priorities have been identified through your Assets and Needs (A&N) process, you should curate relevant historical data to spark discovery. However, imperfect data should not stall progress. If the group feels additional information is needed, this can be an opportunity to generate data experientially, ask strategic questions, and incorporate street data.<sup>3</sup>

Too much data can often create confusion, so the facilitator of the community school leadership team (CSLT) should thoughtfully curate the information for working groups examining each priority. Coordinators frequently find it helpful to partner with district data analysts, researchers, or collective impact organizations to support this stage of analysis.

**Bring together a group to discuss each of your priorities, review all the data to date, and complete this chart in subgroups based on priority.**

Priority 1: What is the data telling us about this priority?	
Limiting factors – what are the barriers to improving and their root causes?	Contributing factors – What current practices are in place that have been addressing and positively impacting this priority?
Priority 2: What is the data telling us about this priority?	
Limiting factors – What are the barriers to improving and their root causes?	Contributing factors – What current practices are in place that have been addressing and positively impacting this priority?

<sup>3</sup> Safir, Shane, S., Dugan, J. & Wilson, C. (2022). Street data: a next generation model for equity, pedagogy, and school transformation. (First edition. ) Corwin.

Priority 3: What is the data telling us about this priority?	
Limiting factors – what are the barriers to improving and their root causes?	Contributing factors – What current practices are in place that have been addressing and positively impacting this priority?

### Enabling conditions review:

Once each subgroup has completed the chart and shared identified root causes, limiting and contributing factors. The group should discuss the following questions:

- What trends emerge as we examine root causes?
- Who else should inform our understanding of these root causes?
- How do these limiting and contributing factors reflect our vision?
- How is trust impacting our understanding of underlying factors?

### 3- Who are the partners who can help you implement your action plan?

You have developed a story and identified priorities through the assets and needs process and identified the root causes behind these priorities. As you explore each root cause, there may be a need for additional partnership and brainpower. These are key questions to consider:

- *How do we ensure the voices of each interest group will influence this plan? How do we ensure a common understanding of this plan?* The Building Your Team component from the assets and needs assessment can be helpful here
- *Does the team have appropriate decision-making power to set and monitor priorities for your school, guide partnerships and gain access to all data?*

As a team, revisit the root causes identified in the previous step. Are there partners that can support action? The group should discuss both external partners and existing teams within the school. A team mapping activity can support this process. Additionally, your group should consider how this partner will work within the school’s ecosystem. Does this partner need to join the CSLT or will they occasionally touch base with the coordinator?

Priority:		
Root cause	Potential partner (s) - they can be internal and external individuals, teams or organizations	How might we engage this partner(s)? (CSLT, CSC, onboarding, data sharing, etc)

**Enabling conditions review:** Use the following questions for a whole group discussion once the subgroups have identified partners.

- How do you orient new partners to the school’s vision and priorities?
- What data will we share with partners and how?
- How will partner needs be represented and by whom?

#### 4 - What will work to make significant change?

Now that the right partners are at the table, the team can work together to generate solutions. For each priority, you can use the following process to brainstorm and rank possible solutions.

I. In small working groups, select one identified priority and review the related data, root causes, and contributing factors.

II. Brainstorm a comprehensive list of potential strategies to address this priority.

III. Prioritize these ideas by considering the following questions:

- **Leverage** – How much difference will the proposed action make to create the results we want to see?
- **Feasibility** – Can this be implemented within a reasonable timeframe using our current resources and capacity?
- **Specificity** – Is the idea specific enough to be implemented? Can we develop a clear timeline, roles, and budget to guide implementation?
- **Values** – Is this strategy aligned with the values of the school, partner organizations, and the broader community?
- **Cohesion** – Does this align with personal and community values? How does this strategy align with other strategic plans guiding the school and district?

IV. Rank the list of strategies based on your answers to the questions above by rating each strategy from 1 =most urgent priority and long-term plan and/or is not immediately actionable.

Priority:		
Strategy	Leverage, feasibility, specificity, value and cohesion	Rate 1-3 (1 is for urgent plans and 3 will be done at a later time)

**Enabling conditions review: Discuss the top-rated selections.** Use the following questions for a whole group debrief discussion.

- How were these decisions made? What was helpful in moving through this process?
- What opportunities exist to align with other strategic plans and priorities?

## 5 - What is your action plan?

After developing both long- and short-term strategies, you will want to map out their results, potential partners, strategies, and performance measures to monitor progress. They are defined as follows:

- **Partners:** This could be an organization, a team within your school, or an individual who has a clear understanding of this issue.
- **Strategies:** What works to improve these conditions?
- **Performance measures:** How do we know if the programs are working? Questions that can help us identify performance measures are: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?
- **Results:** The conditions we want for our children, families, and the community.

Priority:			
Strategy	Partners	Performance measures	Results

This chart is reviewed at each CSLT meeting. In each meeting, the group should share successes and barriers they are facing as data changes.

### Enabling conditions review:

- Which data points can be shared with the larger community and why?
- How do these results align with our larger vision?
- How does this data inform other improvement plans?

### Sharing your plan

Most assets and needs (A&N) protocols encourage sharing identified priorities with the broader community. As the CSLT continues to monitor data, it is equally important to share progress on these priorities with the larger community. High-level updates should be communicated with all partners, families, students, teachers, and staff. As a group, brainstorm the best way to engage each interest holder, consider what level of data should be shared, and progress should be regularly shared and celebrated.

### Implementation Example

The following will outline an example of how one hypothetical school went through this process. In the first meeting, the group revisited their assets and needs assessment to answer questions 1 and 2.

Q 1. How are we doing?

Implementation example

Maya May Middle School conducted an asset and needs assessment, they conducted a data review, developed comprehensive survey, interviews and focus group with teachers, the principal, family representatives, and community partners reviewed data together and shared stories from classrooms and hallways. As they talked, three patterns kept surfacing.

**1. Making Learning More Relevant and Community Connected**

Even when students were present, many seemed disconnected from work. Through discussion, the team realized that while teachers were working incredibly hard, instruction sometimes felt distant from students' experiences and interests. The school decided their priority would be making instruction more engaging, joyful, and relevant.

**2. Addressing Chronic Absenteeism**

As the team continued reviewing data, another concern stood out: chronic absenteeism had been steadily increasing. The numbers told one story, but families and staff knew there were deeper reasons behind them. Transportation challenges, family responsibilities, health concerns, and feelings of disconnection from school were all part of the picture.

**3. A Whole-School Approach to Student Support**

Another priority that emerged from the A&N was around how students were identified for enrichment and support. Teachers noticed that the systems in place were often designed to serve students at the extremes—those excelling far above grade level or those struggling the most. But many students in the middle were quietly falling through the cracks and missing key opportunities. The school realized they needed a more complete way to understand and support every learner, not just the highest and lowest performers. This became their third priority: creating a whole-school assessment, referral, and support system.

Q2. What is the data telling us?

At Maya May Middle, the community school leadership team broke into 3 subgroups and reviewed the accumulated data on each priority identified from the assets and needs.

**Priority 1: Develop more relevant learning experiences for all children**

What is the data telling us about this priority? Reviewing youth and family feedback student experience with instruction is inconsistent, some topics were dynamic while others fell flat, teachers wanted more support and partnership to bring difficult content alive and felt

Limiting factors – what are the barriers to improving and their root causes?

- Teachers did not have adequate planning time
- Student voice and feedback was not guiding learning experiences
- Students with IEPs report highest levels of disengagement

Contributing factors – What current practices are in place that have been addressing and positively impacting this priority?

- A group of teachers has been supporting each other in implementing project-based learning
- School has many community-based trips and internships
- Dynamic summer programming is provided in partnership with local museum and library

<p>Priority 2: Chronic absence has increased What is the data telling us about this priority? How did we get to where we are today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group reviewed chronic absence rates year to date for the last four years; they also reviewed data by grade, classroom, race/ethnicity, and looked at rates for students with IEPs, based on SES, and emergent bilinguals.</li> </ul>	
<p>Limiting factors – what are the barriers to improving and their root causes?</p>	<p>Contributing factors – What current practices are in place that have been addressing and positively impacting this priority?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ICE/Immigration concerns – students and families are afraid to leave the house</li> <li>Transportation struggles – students who miss the bus are too far to attend later in the day</li> <li>Unclear attendance policies – families are unclear when to keep students' home when sick</li> <li>Chronic asthma – families navigating broken health systems and don't see school as partner in health</li> <li>Students reporting feeling unconnected to adults within the school – teacher report not having time to build relationships with every child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance team provides home visits to students with a history of chronic absences</li> <li>Whole school awareness of attendance importance</li> <li>Strong attendance data systems in place</li> </ul>
<p>Priority 3: Need a whole school approach to student success What is the data telling us about this priority? MTSS meetings and attendance teams are focusing on students who are consistently struggling. A relationship mapping exercise with the teaching staff identified there were several students in each grade who did not have relationships with an adult in the school.</p>	
<p>Limiting factors – what are the barriers to improving and their root causes?</p>	<p>Contributing factors – What current practices are in place that have been addressing and positively impacting this priority?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronically absent students are hard to reach</li> <li>Many students in temporary housing</li> <li>Student with complex trauma and high need require intense support</li> <li>Enrichment activities are being utilized by highly motivated students, and not all kids are engaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated social work team works closely with families to provide support</li> <li>Food bank available for community members in need</li> <li>Clothing closet is available for students and families</li> </ul>

In meeting 2, the group began to identify partners answer Q 3- Who are the partners we need to make a change?

<p>Implementation example</p> <p>After examining their priorities, the team at Maya May Middle School realized they needed to engage a few new partners to support their work. In addition to several core partners who joined the Community School Leadership Team (CSLT), the school invited additional partners to support specific priorities. For example, the Learning Lab was contracted to train the entire school community in restorative practices to strengthen school climate and relationships. Through this partner-mapping process, the team also identified the need for additional expertise related to student well-being. As a result, a local mental health provider and representatives from a nearby hospital joined the CSLT as thought partners to support key priorities.</p> <p>This example demonstrates how schools can align partnerships with their priorities to strengthen implementation.</p> <p>For each of the priorities they completed this chart, here is what the developed for chronic absence.</p>		
<p>Priority: Chronic absence</p>		
Root cause	Potential partner (s) - they can be internal and external individuals, teams or organizations	How to engage?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ICE/Immigration concerns – students and families are afraid to leave the house</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District leadership</li> <li>Legal Aid</li> <li>Immigration rights group</li> <li>MTSS team (in school)</li> <li>Attendance team (in school)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner for staff training (CSC will onboard)</li> <li></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transportation struggles – students who miss the bus are too far to attend later in the day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City council</li> <li>Strivetogether network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with network for advocacy (Strivetogether rep will join CSLT)</li> <li>Coordinator outreach to transportation department</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic asthma – families navigating broken health systems and don't see school as partner in health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local hospital community outreach</li> <li>School nurse</li> <li>Attendance team (in school)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Worker will coordinate with nurse to set up health plans</li> <li>Invite hospital representative to participate in CSLT</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students reporting feeling unconnected to adults within the school – teacher report not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local nonprofit with social emotional learning focus (Learning Lab)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning Lab (LL) will provide training on restorative practices (CSC will serve as point</li> </ul>

having time to build relationships with every child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC Mental health provider</li> <li>• Culture and climate team (in school)</li> </ul>	<p>person with LL and principal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator with ABC mental health provided to provide in school services and join CSLT</li> </ul>
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For meeting 3, the group answered Q 4 - What works to make the change?

<b>Implementation example</b>		
Maya May Middle brainstormed a list of strategies for each priority. They used the above questions to discuss and rate each priority. This is what they developed to support chronic absence.		
Priority: chronic absence		
Strategy	Leverage, feasibility, specificity, value and cohesion	Rate 1-3 (1 is for urgent plans and 3 will be done at a later time)
Legal aid provides know your rights training for school community	Feasible and value aligned but unsure of leverage	3
Primary person strategy with all students	Less feasible but high leverage, aligns with district plan	2
Nurse creates individual plans for all students with asthma	Feasible, easily administered in a reasonable timeframe, low or no cost	1
Purchase van for late student pick up	High value, high cost	3
Create safety plan with all older students if disconnected from families	Feasible, easily administered	1
Implement whole school approach to restorative practice	While value aligned, need more specificity, time for planning and training	3
Partner with mental health provide to provide in school counseling one day a week	Feasible, specific and values aligned, not part of other cohesive plan but meets an urgent need	1

For meeting 4, the group tackled Q 5 – What is our action plan?

<b>Implementation example</b>
Maya May Middle chose to focus on the strategies they rated as 1 and a couple they identified as level 2.
Priority: Chronic absence

Strategy	Partners	Performance measures	Results
Individual health plans for all students with chronic health issues	School nurse, coordinator	# of plans developed Improved attendance Decreased chronic absence Chronic absence rates for students with plans	Healthier students and community
Mental Health Services partnership to students identified for support	ABC mental health, social worker, CSC	# of sessions Improved attendance School climate survey Wellness self-report	Healthier students and community
Safety plan with 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> grade students	Family engagement specialist, CSC	# of plans Wellness self-report	Safer community
Primary person strategy with volunteers from the school	Culture and climate team, CSC, team of volunteers	# of chronically absent students assigned a primary person Decreased chronic absence	Healthier students and community

Finally, in meeting 5, they identified opportunities to share the plan and loop in other teams.

Maya May Middle's Community School Leadership Team (CSLT) meets monthly. For each meeting, the coordinator shares a dashboard that includes key data points such as overall chronic absence rates, identification of students with health plans, assigned primary contacts (including frequency of meetings), and students with safety plans.

The team also reviews updated climate data from the climate team, as well as information on the number of mental health (MH) sessions provided. Using this data, the CSLT engages in discussion about what is working well and where adjustments may be needed.

At the end of the first year, the team revisits and reflects on their long-term priorities.

They also discussed how to continuously share data and update the larger community; the school took steps to keep these priorities at the forefront.

At Maya May Middle, all three priorities identified through the A&N process are shared publicly throughout the school and with all partners. The team widely communicated their chronic absence priority. At family events, parents were educated on the importance of attendance, the overall improvement goal was shared, and progress was celebrated as attendance numbers improved. New partners are oriented to priorities as part of their onboarding process.

CSLT members are also responsible for sharing updates with other teams across the school. The coordinator provides regular updates on the attendance goal to both the attendance team and the culture and climate team, ensuring alignment and shared ownership of progress.