

# SAFE, ENGAGED, & DEEPLY-ROOTED

*A Leadership Guide to Building Sustainable and  
Future-Ready Community Schools*



CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH  
FULL BLOOM GROUP



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# INTRODUCTION

Community schools achieve success by deliberately cultivating essential conditions for learning: environments that are safe and supportive, robust connections between families and the community, and enduring systems of support.

This toolkit aligns with the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) by offering leaders practical, operational instruments. It is designed to enhance learning environments through collaboration with students, families, and personnel. It guides leaders in integrating whole-child strategies, establishing strong family engagement, and coordinating comprehensive, continuous support.

In essence, it facilitates the harmonization of whole-child approaches, family partnership, and the mechanisms necessary for sustaining effective student supports over time.

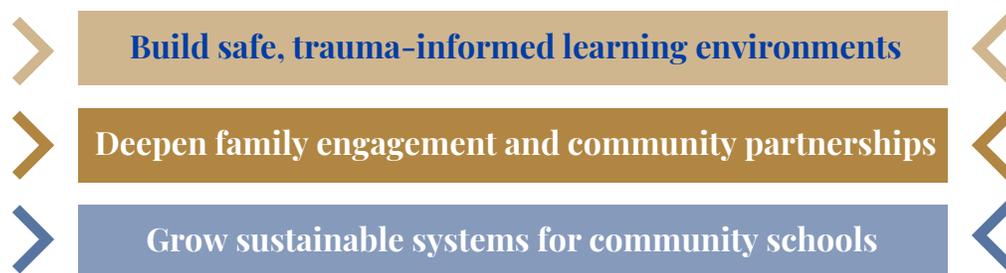
Grounded in the California Community Schools Partnership Program's (CCSPP) Key Conditions for Learning, this toolkit is organized around four interconnected conditions that are essential for student success:

The toolkit organizes these four conditions into three actionable sections that guide the implementation process.

## Four Key Conditions for Learning (CCSPP)

- Supportive Environmental Conditions – nurturing relationships, safety, belonging, and purpose.
- Productive Instructional Strategies – engaging, relevant, and well-scaffolded learning opportunities.
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) – skills, habits, and mindsets that support agency, resilience, and collaboration.
- Systems of Support – integrated academic, health, and social resources that remove barriers and respond to student needs.

**Based on these conditions for learning, these three key sections will be addressed:**



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# STRENGTHENING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

## STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR CURRENT CLIMATE

Take stock of the learning environment by examining both needs and assets. Gather feedback from students, families, and staff to understand what fosters safety, belonging, engagement, and sustainability and where barriers remain. Use the [S-TAC Needs & Assets Assessment](#) to plan a collaborative, community-driven inquiry that surfaces school and community strengths alongside gaps.

**OUTCOMES:**  
Identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities

## STEP 2: SELECT A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

Choose one of the three focus areas—safe spaces, family partnerships, or sustainability—where immediate progress is possible. Introduce 1–2 simple, high-impact practices that can be used consistently. As you choose your focus, ensure it aligns with site priorities like the LCAP or SPSA so your efforts are both meaningful and integrated into the school’s long-term vision.

**OUTCOMES:**  
Launch high-leverage, aligned actions

## STEP 3: MONITOR, REFLECT, AND GROW

Use data, stories, and feedback to see what’s working. Celebrate small wins, adjust where needed, and expand into other areas. Each cycle deepens the foundation for safe, connected, and thriving schools.

**OUTCOMES:**  
Strengthen fidelity, scale success, and improve conditions

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

**CCSPP:** California Community Schools Partnership Program

**SEL:** Social and Emotional Learning

**LCAP:** Local Control and Accountability Plan

**SPSA:** School Plan for Student Achievement

**S-TAC:** State Transformational Assistance Center

**TFI:** Tiered Fidelity Inventory

**PBIS:** Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

**MTSS:** Multi-Tiered System of Supports

**TIC/RP:** Trauma-Informed Care/Restorative Practices

**PDSA:** Plan-Do-Study-Act

**CICO:** Check In/Check Out

**FOCUS:** Families OverComing Under Stress

**SBHWC:** School-Based Health or Wellness Center

**RCOE:** Riverside County Office of Education

**PESD:** Perris Elementary School District

**RUSD:** Riverside Unified School District

**CHW:** Community Health Worker

**SDOH:** Social Determinants of Health

**CYBHI:** Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (Contextual meaning based on funding/billing sections)

**UACS:** University Assisted Community Schools

**ROI:** Return on Investment

# SECTION ONE

## *Build Safe, Trauma-Informed Learning Environments*

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### **WHY THIS MATTERS:**

Students learn best when they feel emotionally safe, connected, and supported. Creating trauma-informed, restorative environments reduces barriers to learning and strengthens belonging for every child.

### **LCAP AND SPSA PRIORITIES**

- Reduce suspensions and expulsions
- Improve attendance and engagement
- Create safe, restorative, and supportive school climates



**STEP 1:**  
Understand your  
current climate



**STEP 2:**  
Select a high-  
impact practice



**STEP 3:**  
Monitor, grow  
and reflect

# STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR CURRENT CLIMATE

Begin by gathering a clear picture of how students and staff experience safety, belonging, and relationships across your school. This should include both quantitative indicators (attendance, referrals, climate survey data) and qualitative insights (student voice, family stories, classroom observations) to identify strengths and surface areas needing attention.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Belonging Map</a>	Visual tool where students mark where they feel most and least safe on a school map. Patterns in responses help schools assess climate and target interventions.
<a href="#">Conversation Starter Tools</a>	Seven participatory tools to gather community perspectives, build trust, and strengthen family–school–community engagement.
<a href="#">Empathy Interviews</a>	Empathy Interviews go beyond surface-level check-ins to elevate student voice and uncover their true needs and strengths. Insights gathered guide intentional classroom and schoolwide actions.
<a href="#">Relationship Mapping Protocol</a>	Staff identify which students they know well or check in with regularly; highlights students who may be disconnected
<a href="#">Restorative Practices Continuum</a>	Measures depth of Restorative Practices, from informal (e.g., affective statements) to formal conferencing
<a href="#">SEL Walkthrough Rubrics (e.g., CASEL)</a>	Observational rubrics or teacher checklists on visible SEL practices
<a href="#">Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI)</a>	Measures school-wide implementation of MTSS/PBIS. Items focus on student voice, equity, and Tier 1 systems to infer connection and safety.
<a href="#">Trauma-Informed Schools Organizational Readiness Assessment</a>	Helps school teams evaluate their readiness to implement trauma-informed practices, including 16 items across three domains—general capacity, specific capacity, and motivation.

## STEP 2: SELECT A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#"><u>2x10 Relationship Building</u></a>	Builds connection and trust over correction
<a href="#"><u>4 at the Door + 1 More</u></a>	Routine-based connection and co-regulation
<a href="#"><u>School Attendance Incentives</u></a>	Behavior reinforcement, attendance-focused
<a href="#"><u>Bear Belly Breathing</u></a>	Regulation strategy for stress/trauma
<a href="#"><u>Behavior Improvement Plan</u></a>	Focuses on function of behavior and trauma-responsive elements
<a href="#"><u>Calm Corners / Spaces</u></a>	Trauma-sensitive self-regulation spaces
<a href="#"><u>Check In, Check Out (CICO)</u></a>	Behavior plan with adult connection and feedback loop
<a href="#"><u>Co-creating Classroom Agreements and Goals</u></a>	A structured approach to collaboratively establish classroom norms and goals.
<a href="#"><u>Community-Building Circles</u></a>	Practice that builds community and safety
<a href="#"><u>Concentric Circles</u></a>	Strengthen connections with their peers by sharing small details about themselves in paired discussion
<a href="#"><u>Daily Dedications</u></a>	In a classroom setting, a daily dedication is a short, intentional message or reflection that sets a positive tone for the day.
<a href="#"><u>FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress)</u></a>	Teaches emotional regulation, communication, goal-setting, and problem-solving skills, with a variety of delivery modalities.
<a href="#"><u>Gateway to Restorative Practices</u></a>	Printable handouts and guides that support restorative practices for educators, administrators, students, and caregivers.

## STEP 2: SELECT A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE CONT.

Choose one or two practices that can strengthen emotional safety and connection right away. Focus on simple, high-leverage routines—such as circles, co-regulation strategies, or relationship-building check-ins—that can be used consistently across classrooms and aligned to site priorities.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Good Behavior Game</a>	Classroom strategy that promotes on-task behavior.
<a href="#">Healing Journal</a>	Space for reflection, resilience, and personal growth
<a href="#">Lunch Bunch</a>	Small-group support, SEL skill building
<a href="#">Peer Mentoring</a>	Builds peer connection, empowerment
<a href="#">Positive Reinforcement</a>	Increases desired behaviors, supports safety
<a href="#">Professional Development: NAMI In Sight</a>	Free, self-paced, comprehensive training to enhance trauma awareness for professionals working with youth.
<a href="#">Professional Development: Recognize, Respond, Connect</a>	50-minute online training for all school staff (grades 7–12) that builds capacity to support students’ social, emotional, and physical well-being, aligned with California Education Code
<a href="#">Professional Development: Safe Spaces</a>	Helps adults recognize and respond to traumatic stress in children using culturally responsive, healing-centered
<a href="#">Responsive Classroom</a>	Helps students link their personal goals to classroom expectations by guiding them through setting SMART goals.
<a href="#">Restorative Solutions</a>	Handouts to support the evolution of restorative communities, justice values, principles, and practices.
<a href="#">Restorative Think Slip</a>	Builds reflection and accountability by helping students repair harm and strengthen community rather than focusing on punishment.
<a href="#">Rose, Bud, Thorn</a>	Reflective practice that builds emotional awareness
<a href="#">School-Based Health or Wellness Center (SBHWC)</a>	Toolkit for starting an SBHWC, with guidance on planning, staffing, funding, operations, evaluation, and sample resources.
<a href="#">Self-Monitoring</a>	Promotes independence and self-awareness
<a href="#">WOOP</a>	Builds hope, agency, and problem-solving

## STEP 3: MONITOR, REFLECT, AND GROW

Once high-impact practices are in place, create regular opportunities to review impact and refine implementation.

Look at climate data, observe classroom routines, and elevate student and staff stories to understand what's working. Use these insights to strengthen consistency, celebrate progress, and guide next steps.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Data-Driven Impact Story</a>	Three-act structure to help you craft clear, data-driven impact stories, with an optional call-to-action ending
<a href="#">Data Reflection Protocols</a>	Monthly leadership or staff meetings where data is reviewed with an equity lens
<a href="#">Data Equity Walks</a>	Conduct structured walkthroughs to see if TIC/RP practices are visible across classrooms
<a href="#">Equity Audits</a>	Identify pain points throughout the school or district and analyze next steps intended to support all students
<a href="#">Iterative Action Cycles</a>	Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to test small changes, assess impact, and refine
<a href="#">Restorative Practices Fidelity Checks</a>	Quick checklists or peer observations to track consistency in using circles, affective language, and restorative responses
<a href="#">Student Climate &amp; Belonging Surveys</a>	Short surveys quarterly to measure whether students feel safe, respected, and connected

# REFLECTIONS AND EXAMPLES

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:

- Are students reporting increased feelings of safety, connection, and belonging across campus?
- How have attendance, suspension, referral, or classroom behavior patterns shifted since implementing these practices?
- Where do we see consistency in trauma-informed and restorative practices across classrooms, and where are gaps or variation emerging?
- What stories, observations, or feedback from students, families, or staff illustrate the impact of safe-space practices?
- How can these insights shape next steps or inform updates to LCAP/SPSA goals related to school climate and student engagement?

## EXAMPLES IN ACTION:

### Perris Elementary School District (PESD)

A powerful case study in creating safe, trauma-informed, restorative school environments. Through its Community Schools model, PESD integrates wellbeing teams, daily restorative circles, Zen Zones, wellbeing centers, family advocacy, and essential services like laundry and clothing support. Together, these practices foster belonging, emotional regulation, and strong community partnerships that help students feel seen, supported, and ready to learn.

### RCOE CAREspace Wellness Centers

The Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) operates CAREspace, a network of 11 wellness center locations offering mental health and related support to students, families, and staff. Because these centers are integrated into the county's ecosystem, they are a strong example of sustainable systems and how wellness supports can be embedded across schools and communities.

# SECTION TWO

## *Deepen Family Engagement & Community Partnership*

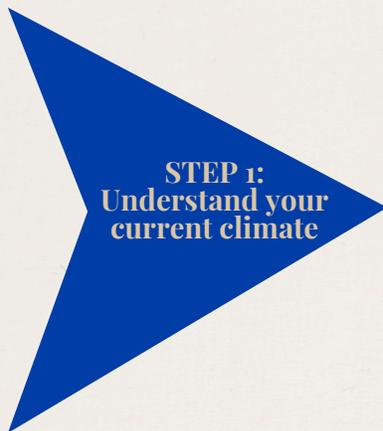
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### **WHY THIS MATTERS:**

Family partnership is one of the strongest predictors of student success. When families feel welcomed, valued, and included in decision-making, schools become more equitable, responsive, and resilient.

### **LCAP AND SPSA PRIORITIES**

- Increase parent engagement and leadership
- Expand access to resources and supports
- Build stronger home-school connections that support student success



# STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR CURRENT CLIMATE

Start by listening deeply to families to understand their experiences, strengths, needs, and barriers to engagement. Use participation data, surveys, empathy interviews, and informal conversations to build a full picture of how families currently connect with the school community.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Health-Related Needs Screening Tool</a>	Searchable tools to understand factors affecting health and education, including questions on food, housing, transportation, and family dynamics
<a href="#">Family Survey</a>	Survey to collect data about what services and supports families would like to see at their school, tailored to what supports the school can provide.

## STEP 2: SELECT A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

Identify one or two engagement strategies—such as home visits, intentional gatherings, or culturally affirming events—that can build trust and connection quickly. Choose practices that reflect community strengths, honor family voice, and create meaningful opportunities for shared dialogue.

High-Impact Practice	Description
<a href="#"><u>Affinity Group Family Dinners</u></a>	Create a culturally welcoming space for families who may feel marginalized.
<a href="#"><u>Communications Practices For Family Engagement</u></a>	Use communication strategies, tools, and timelines to help build awareness and strengthen family engagement year-round.
<a href="#"><u>Establish a Family Engagement Team</u></a>	Integrate family engagement activities with your goals for student learning in your district/school plans.
<a href="#"><u>Family Engagement Month (November)</u></a>	Celebration showcasing family–school partnership with proclamations, social media, calendars, etc.
<a href="#"><u>Family Partnerships in Support of SEL</u></a>	SEL team engages families in learning about, supporting, and promoting SEL.
<a href="#"><u>Find Help</u></a>	Search for free/low cost food, basic needs, housing assistance, etc.
<a href="#"><u>FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress)</u></a>	Teaches emotional regulation, communication, goal-setting, and problem-solving skills, with a variety of delivery modalities.
<a href="#"><u>Home Visits</u></a>	Implement relationship-based, culturally responsive home visiting
<a href="#"><u>Icebreakers &amp; Fun Activities</u></a>	Fun and engaging activities at the beginning of gatherings, meetings, and activities.
<a href="#"><u>Intentional Family Gatherings</u></a>	Plan purposeful, culturally relevant events with a clear “why,” a focused theme, and intentional outcomes.
<a href="#"><u>Parent Passport</u></a>	Tool for families to use throughout the year to track their engagement
<a href="#"><u>Positive Parenting, Thriving Kids</u></a>	Series of free videos and resources with practical, evidence-based information and skills to address common parenting challenges.

## STEP 3: MONITOR, REFLECT, AND GROW

Once engagement efforts are underway, establish simple ways to track participation, collect feedback, and gather family stories. Pair data with qualitative insights to understand what deepens connection and where adjustments are needed. Use this learning to strengthen alignment to LCAP/SPSA family engagement goals.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Family Feedback Forms</a>	Short surveys (paper or digital) after gatherings to capture how welcomed, heard, and connected families felt.
<a href="#">Family Quotes &amp; Stories</a>	Collect narratives during or after events to highlight impact in newsletters, reports, or staff meetings. The link provided includes “Equity Questions” that can help capture meaningful stories.
<a href="#">Gallery Walk Reflections</a>	Invite families at the end of a gathering to work together in small groups to share ideas and respond to meaningful questions, documents, or images.
<a href="#">Iterative Action Cycles</a>	Apply a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle: test small changes in how you run gatherings, study results, and adjust for next time.
<a href="#">Participation Tracking</a>	Monitor not just attendance numbers but who is showing up (e.g., demographics, grade levels, language groups).

# REFLECTIONS AND EXAMPLES

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:

- Are families reporting stronger feelings of trust, welcome, and partnership with the school?
- How have participation patterns shifted across different family groups, languages, or grade levels?
- Where are family engagement practices consistent across the site, and where are there opportunities to deepen or expand them?
- What stories or feedback from families reflect the impact of gatherings, communication strategies, or family-led activities?
- How can these insights inform LCAP/SPSA goals around parent involvement and family-school collaboration?

## EXAMPLES IN ACTION:

### Val Verde Unified School District Family Engagement Center

Val Verde's Family Engagement Center demonstrates how a district can deepen trust and partnership by positioning families as equal, empowered leaders in their children's education. Grounded in a mission to honor families' cultural strengths, the center creates welcoming spaces where families feel valued, connected, and able to influence school priorities. Through leadership development, culturally affirming practices, and ongoing collaboration between staff and families, Val Verde shows how a community-centered approach can strengthen relationships, promote educational equity, and improve outcomes for all students.

### Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) Family Resource Center & Engagement

RUSD's Family Resource Center integrates services (registration help, wellness supports, community resources) and offers family workshops, technology support, and leadership development programs. This is a concrete example of connecting families into holistic supports and building capacity for engagement.

# SECTION THREE

## *Grow Sustainable Systems for Community Schools*

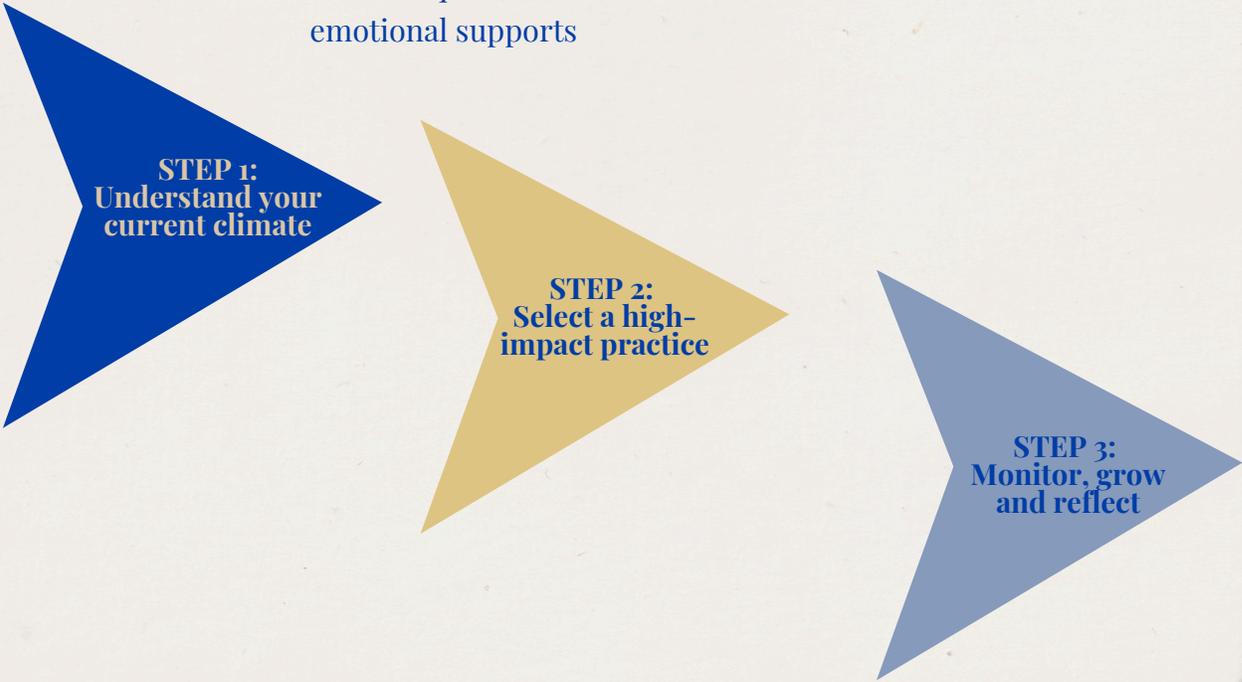
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### **WHY THIS MATTERS:**

Sustainable systems ensure that supports for students and families do not disappear when grants expire. Building long-term capacity strengthens the whole ecosystem of a community school and secures lasting impact.

### **LCAP AND SPSA PRIORITIES**

- Maintain and expand mental health and wellness services
- Support whole-child development through MTSS and wraparound services
- Ensure equitable access to academic and social-emotional supports



**STEP 1:**  
Understand your  
current climate

**STEP 2:**  
Select a high-  
impact practice

**STEP 3:**  
Monitor, grow  
and reflect

# STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR CURRENT CLIMATE

Review your current services, staffing, partnerships, and funding streams to understand how well they support whole-child development. Combine fiscal data, service inventories, and stakeholder input to identify what is working well and where gaps or duplication exist.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Coherence Mapping</a>	Review what services are currently being offered, who provides them, and how they are funded. Identify overlap, gaps, and missed opportunities for integration.
<a href="#">Financial Scan</a>	Use the CA State Investments Crosswalk to gather information on current funding streams and how they support student wellness.
<a href="#">Stakeholder Input</a>	Engage students, families, and staff to identify what supports feel essential, where needs are not being met, and where sustainability is most urgent.
<a href="#">Sustainability Self-Assessment</a>	Place your school or district on the Sustainability Ladder (emerging » developing » scaling » sustaining) to identify strengths and growth areas.

## STEP 2: SELECT A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

Choose one sustainability strategy—such as launching CYBHI billing, braiding existing funds, or expanding the wellness workforce—that can strengthen long-term capacity. Focus on strategies that create immediate efficiencies and build toward a stable, coherent system of supports.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#"><u>Braiding &amp; Blending Funds</u></a>	Align Title I, Title IV-A, Medi-Cal, and CYBHI to expand student supports and reduce siloed funding.
<a href="#"><u>Certified Wellness Coaches</u></a>	Hire Certified Wellness Coaches to expand capacity for whole-child supports.
<a href="#"><u>Community Health Worker (CHW)</u></a>	Create or adopt a CHW certificate program, credential existing staff, and sustain CCSPP-funded roles by billing for CHW services like SDOH support, navigation, and health education—expanding the workforce pipeline and offering districts a long-term sustainability strategy.
<a href="#"><u>CYBHI Fee Schedule Program Cohort</u></a>	Apply for the next cohort to receive reimbursement for preventive services, creating sustainable funding to stabilize and expand staff, reduce reliance on grants, and reinvest in more equitable student supports.
<a href="#"><u>Participatory Budgeting</u></a>	Use participatory budgeting to share decision-making power and advance equity, with step-by-step guidance to turn democratic practices into actionable budgeting.
<a href="#"><u>Strategic Partnerships</u></a>	Establish community partnerships to expand a school’s capacity to meet diverse student needs and promote equity.
<a href="#"><u>Utilize Untapped Medi-Cal Funds</u></a>	Utilize untapped Medi-Cal funds by identifying partners and billing roles, assessing Medi-Cal-eligible revenue, designing services supported by those funds, and reinvesting dollars to strengthen student well-being.
<a href="#"><u>University Assisted Community Schools (UACS)</u></a>	Adopt a UACS approach to mobilize university resources, create school–community hubs, and expand supports for children and families through democratic, antiracist, equity-driven partnerships.

## STEP 3: MONITOR, REFLECT, AND GROW

As sustainability efforts begin, establish clear routines for reviewing revenue, tracking implementation, and examining access to services. Use financial data alongside stories from students, families, and staff to understand the real impact. Let these insights guide reinvestment decisions, refine workflows, and inform updates to LCAP/SPSA.

Instrument / Method	Description
<a href="#">Community Schools Costing Tool</a>	Estimates of the costs of the additional resources required to transform a traditional school into a community school
<a href="#">Data for Equity Protocol</a>	Identify equity gaps in our system, reflect on the conditions that create and perpetuate them, and move forward with concrete steps for understanding and interrupting inequities
<a href="#">Iterative Action Cycles</a>	Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle: test small changes in how you run gatherings, study results, and adjust for next time
<a href="#">Return on Investment</a>	Examine, calculate, and share the return on investment (ROI) of a Community School Coordinator
<a href="#">Sharing Your Story Toolkit</a>	Turn data into clear, compelling stories to create and share impactful, action-driving narratives

# REFLECTIONS AND EXAMPLES

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS:

- Are we seeing clearer alignment between funding, staffing, and our whole-child priorities?
- How have access to services, referral patterns, or wellness supports shifted as sustainability strategies take root?
- Where do we see consistency in implementation of sustainable practices across sites, teams, or roles, and where is support still needed?
- What stories or data points illustrate progress toward long-term, stable systems of support?
- How can these insights guide LCAP/SPSA planning, resource allocation, or next steps on the Sustainability Ladder?

## EXAMPLES IN ACTION:

### Jurupa Unified School District - SET-4 Schools Early Intervention

A model of braided funding, this program partners with Riverside University Health System to provide early behavioral health screening and intervention (ages 0–5), integrating SEL, PBIS, and restorative practices to strengthen social-emotional development.

### Jurupa Unified School District - Social Worker Interns & Outreach Workers

Partnering with universities such as USC, La Sierra, CSUSB, Cal Baptist, and others, districts place BSW and MSW interns at schools to deliver counseling, case management, and referrals—an example of University-Assisted Community Schools in action that leverages site LCAP funding for supervision and expands behavioral health support.

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# CONTRIBUTE AND COLLABORATE

Strong community schools grow through shared learning. By exchanging tools, templates, and success stories, we build coherence, accelerate progress, and amplify impact statewide. You're invited to submit your own resources to the State Transformational Assistance Center (S-TAC) Digital Commons, a hub for collaboration among educators, county offices, and community partners. Your contributions—whether they're tools, templates, case studies, or promising practices—help others learn from what's working and strengthen California's collective effort to build thriving, sustainable community schools.

Submit your digital resource here:

[Digital Commons Resource Upload Form](#)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who helped create this toolkit!

This toolkit was created and revised with the support, feedback, and contributions of many dedicated practitioners in Riverside County. Thank you!

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### Organizations:

- Riverside County Office of Education- [Community Schools Partnership](#)
- [Full Bloom Group](#)