Form B: Project Abstract
2023–24 California Community Schools Partnership Program
Newport-Mesa Unified School District-Implementation Grant, Cohort 3
District Code: 30-66597-0000000

Vision: Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) serves the neighboring communities of Newport Beach, Corona del Mar, and Costa Mesa in Orange County. There is extraordinary diversity across the district, as Newport-Mesa is home to small businesses and major corporations, wealthy families and those experiencing poverty and homelessness, and residents whose highest level of formal education spans grade school to advanced degrees. In a commitment to serving all students within our community, NMUSD's school board outlines a vision of excellence in student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates by responding collaboratively to students, families, staff, and the community while honoring and embracing the rich tapestry and diversity of the cultural backgrounds in NMUSD.

NMUSD's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) provides a strategic blueprint for the district, highlighting our dedication to nurturing every student's learning and development. The LCAP reflects a cooperative planning approach, incorporating feedback from parents, students, administrators, community members, and certificated and classified staff through surveys and public forums. This approach of collective decision-making aligns with the CCSPP's foundational principle of promoting inclusive and participatory decision-making.

NMUSD's community school initiative leverages complementary state efforts and investments to support a whole-child approach to teaching and learning, and builds on NMUSD's LCAP, aiming to coordinate community resources better, improve student outcomes, and foster a nurturing educational setting. Recognizing the strength of existing resources and initiatives at NMUSD, this community school approach will refine and improve NMUSD programs, services, and partnerships to serve the unique needs of each school community. Our community school strategy promotes academic excellence, offers extensive student support, fosters robust youth and community development, and encourages active community involvement. The goal is to support every student to thrive, learn, and grow.

NMUSD LEA and proposed Community School School Sites: Following a thorough evaluation of the district's needs, resources, and readiness for implementation, NMUSD's inaugural Community School cohort will include four elementary schools, funded in part by a CCSPP implementation grant and approximately $1,662,500 in matching funds from NMUSD. The schools are Everett A. Rea, Pomona, Whitter, and Wilson Elementary, all in Costa Mesa. While each school represents a different census tract, they share similar challenges: higher levels of poverty, food insecurity, unmet physical and mental health needs, and high levels of chronic absenteeism.

In addition, our analysis of the Family Financial Stability Index (FFSI) – a data tool developed by-Parsons Consulting, Inc. for Orange County United Way in 2022, which examines income, employment, and housing data – underscores our focus on these four schools. The FFSI aims to identify neighborhoods with either recent or long-standing high levels of financial instability among families and areas with a significant trend of increasing or decreasing financial stability.

Such socioeconomic challenges often present barriers to learning that negatively impact students' social, emotional, and academic development – all four schools are characterized by SBAC scores that are significantly lower than the district and state averages.

Other local challenges reflect the persistent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student success, evident in 1) decreased proficiency levels in English Learner Arts (ELA) and Math Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) scores, and 2) high suspension and chronic absenteeism rates within the selected schools. The 2022-23 SBAC scores showed that the four selected schools have historically achieved lower levels of students meeting or exceeding ELA and Math standards, even more so between 2018-19 and 2021-22. The district observed that many under-resourced and English learner students had physical and mental health needs caused by or increased as a result of the pandemic.

Community Schools and Community Engagement: NMUSD district and site administration conducted a comprehensive local assessment of needs and assets with staff, families, students, and community members at the four school sites. The district's goals were to 1) identify the assets and strengths of each school, 2) identify gaps in programs, services, and resources that impact student achievement and community coherence, and 3) determine the community's priorities and suggestions for resource allocations. Using surveys and input meetings, we engaged staff, family members, students, and community members to build the foundation for a collaborative approach that promotes a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for positive outcomes consistent with the "whole child" approach. In addition, we analyzed other data sources, including reading scores, California Healthy Kids Survey, and attendance rates.

The collaborative effort with cooperating agencies and education partners in the community schools' initiative, such as Huntington Beach Adult School, Melinda Hoag Smith Center for Healthy Living, Share Our Selves, and Active Learning – incorporates a robust ongoing reflection and assessment system to strengthen school-wide continuous improvement. This ensures the initiative's effectiveness and adaptability to evolving needs, by using:

Regular Evaluation Meetings	Establish monthly meetings involving representatives from cooperating agencies, school administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders.

	These meetings serve as platforms for assessing the current status of the community schools' initiative discussing successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.
Data-Driven Analysis	Implement a data-driven approach, collecting,analyzing, and discussing relevant metrics such as academic performance, attendance rates, and community engagement. Utilize this data to identify trends, strengths, and areas that require attention, providing a foundation for informed decision-making.
Education Partner Feedback	Seek input from students, parents, teachers, and community members through surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings. Gather qualitative and “street-level” insights to understand the impact of the community schools' initiative on various stakeholders, incorporating their perspectives into improvement strategies.
Professional Development Opportunities	Offer continuous professional development for educators and collaborating agency staff to stay updated on best practices, emerging trends, and innovations in community-based education. This fosters a culture of shared learning and adaptation, ensuring that the initiative remains aligned with the evolving needs of the school community.
Adaptive Planning	Encourage a flexible and adaptive planning process at the school and district level to allow for adjustments based on assessment findings. Establish a feedback loop that enables quick responses to challenges and opportunities, ensuring the community schools initiative remains dynamic and responsive.
Celebrating Successes	Recognize and celebrate shared achievements and milestones, fostering a positive atmosphere and motivating education partners to stay engaged in the transformation process.
Documentation and Knowledge Sharing	Maintain comprehensive documentation of the initiative's journey, including successes, challenges, and lessons learned. Facilitate knowledge-sharing sessions to disseminate best practices and insights among collaborating agencies, school and district staff, and families/caregivers, ensuring a collective learning process.

By integrating these elements into the collaborative effort, NMUSD's Community School efforts not only transform the school environment but also establish a continuous improvement cycle that adapts to the evolving needs of the school and its community.

We identified several common themes based on the assessment of strengths and priorities, and the engagement of families and partners across the four elementary schools (Pomona, Rea, Whittier, Wilson). Addressing these shared priorities while leveraging the assets of each school will enhance the educational experience and community cohesion in these schools.

Shared Strengths:

1. **Family and Community Engagement:** All schools reported high family involvement and community partnerships. Various educational partners commented on the success of reading programs for parents, parenting classes, and collaboration with community organizations. Parents value the family nights and PTA events. In addition, parents and staff highlighted the various community resources available to families, such as Melinda Hoag Center for Healthy Living and Grupo Crecer parenting classes.
2. **Extended Learning Time and Opportunities**: Educational initiatives such as support for reading, science, music, and art programs are highly regarded by parents, students, and staff alike. Furthermore, current extended day offerings, such as after-school care, are well-received by parents and caregivers.

Shared Needs:

1. **Family and Community Engagement:** There is a desire for more meaningful opportunities for parents and caregivers to engage in school activities and volunteer programs. Better communication between schools and families is needed, especially regarding students' academic progress and school events. Sixty-four percent (64%) of parents expressed interest in attending events or workshops that address bullying, cyberbullying, other activities that support behavioral wellness, and how to help their children at home. Lastly, we identified a need for more accessible resources like food banks, clothing, and educational materials.
2. **Extended Learning Time and Opportunities**: Requests for more diverse educational enrichment programs, including STEM, language classes, and specialized subjects like robotics, indicate a need for broader academic and enrichment options. Sixty-five percent (65%) of caregivers cited reading and math as the two greatest challenges their children face in school. There was also a recognized need for before-school care and/or enrichment programs at three of the four schools where such opportunities are currently unavailable.
3. **Professional Development for Staff:** Teachers and staff identified a need for more training and support, particularly in behavior management, student engagement strategies, practices that promote resilience, restorative practices, and supporting diverse learners.

NMUSD's Proposed Community Schools Programs and Services

Family and Community Engagement - The goal is to create a nurturing and inclusive educational environment by leveraging the strengths and resources of families, educators, and community members to ensure academic success and well-being for all students.

1. **Parents/Caregivers as Partners:** Efforts to involve parents/caregivers in their children's learning include in-person parenting classes and workshops on child development and learning strategies. Programs like the English as a Second Language support and parenting skills workshops will address cultural barriers and empower parents to support their children's education. Another strategy includes planning family nights with cultural, educational, and wellness themes. These activities aim to build a community of trust and shared responsibility for student success.
2. **Empowering Parents/Caregivers for Early Intervention:** The plans to develop: a) a *Learning Link* Program; b) a Kindergarten Readiness Series; and c) a PreK/TK recruitment plan will foster a dedication to early childhood education while enabling parents/caregivers to play a pivotal role in their children's early learning. By engaging families at the start of their children's educational journeys, the *Learning Link* also provides opportunity to build trusting relationships with NMUSD, helps NMUSD better understand and address the priorities of our earliest learners, and engage families as shared accountability partners who influence District and school priorities and decisions.The *Learning Link* targets children from birth to five years old and focuses on preparing children for kindergarten by engaging parents/caregivers as their first teachers. It emphasizes parental involvement in developing language, social, motor, and basic academic skills through activities that can be replicated at home. The program also includes developmental screenings and referrals as necessary. The Kindergarten Readiness Series aims to prepare children and families for the transition to kindergarten. Lastly, the Early Learning Recruitment Plan aims to increase community awareness and accessibility of educational opportunities for young children, including those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Extended Learning Time and Opportunities - The goal is to build upon existing expanded learning programs to increase access and holistically support students' academic, social, emotional, and physical development through a comprehensive approach beyond the traditional school day.

1. **Enhanced Collaboration for Programmatic Alignment:** There will be increased collaboration between school day and expanded learning staff. This effort aims to strengthen a seamless integration and coordination of whole-child and academic support, optimizing the learning and development opportunities throughout their day.
2. **"Strong Start" Before-School Enrichment:** This program, already offered at Whittier Elementary, offers a mix of academic and independent learning

opportunities such as reading, arts and crafts, STEM projects, alongside fitness activities. The plan is to expand it to Pomona, Rea, and Wilson.

3. **Enrichment Classes Based on Student and Family Feedback:** Responding to a demonstrated need and desire, the four elementary schools (Pomona, Rea, Whittier, Wilson) plan to introduce enrichment classes in music, art, sports, and STEM provided by outside community partners such as Active Learning. The objective is to make these programs accessible to all students, especially those who could benefit most, by addressing participation barriers and tailoring the programs to meet diverse needs.

Collaborative Leadership and Practices - NMUSD is committed to fostering collaboration, professional growth, mutual trust, and shared responsibility among educators, students, families, and community members, with an emphasis on strengthening and expanding the active involvement of our current shared leadership groups: School Site Council, English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), and Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This commitment aims to enhance educational outcomes and student success through a series of focused initiatives that primarily focus on strengthening the trusting relationships that provide a strong foundation for collaboration and shared decision-making:

1. **A Dual-Capacity Building Approach to Promoting Teacher Efficacy:** NMUSD will implement a professional development program designed to enhance teachers' communication skills with parents, using both direct methods and the various technology platforms. The program will provide teachers and staff with tools, strategies, and support—such as regular meetings, mentoring programs, social events, and access to resources—to foster relationships and promote a community mentality focused on supporting all students.
2. **Resilience and Cultivating Curiosity Training**: Offer professional development opportunities to all staff (teachers, counselors, classified, early learning, Expanded Learning) to connect the latest research on resilience to foster a positive environment in classrooms and schools. Teachers will learn how to develop students' learning-how-to-learn skills, refine their instructional practices, inspire students with project-based learning, and provide academic and social support that allows students to thrive. By empowering educators with the tools to integrate strategies that nurture resilience and engage caregivers, we can create supportive and engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, training will build the capacity of staff and administrators to strengthen current PBIS practices and infuse trauma-informed strategies.

In addition, the NMUSD's Community Schools Advisory Council will build upon our existing community engagement and shared decision-making structures. The Advisory Council will bring together the voices of youth and families whose perspectives and priorities have been harder to meaningfully engage, alongside District, school, and community leaders. Together, we seek to create an educational environment where every member of the school and district community can work together to support holistic student development and achievement, ensuring a well-rounded education for all, including those with special educational needs.

The Community School Implementation Plans for each school present a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to transforming the school climate, deepening relationships, and implementing student-centered instruction. The holistic nature of these initiatives ensures that various aspects of a student's development are considered. A summary of our key strategies includes:

1. Enhanced Academic Performance and Engagement:
    - Tailored instruction based on teacher input and evidence-based programs.
    - Early intervention for academic behaviors and higher-level thinking skills.
2. Development of Key Skills and Behaviors:
    - Programs focusing on organization, study skills, communication, self-advocacy, and higher-level thinking.
3. Positive School Culture and Safety:
    - Evidence- and data-based strategies contributing to a safer and more positive school culture.
    - Promotion of inclusive and respectful learning environments, reducing incidents of disruptive behaviors.
4. Comprehensive Development:
    - Learning Link program enhancing school readiness and empowering parental involvement.
    - Extracurricular and before- and expanded learning programs for holistic student development.
    - Professional development for student-centered instruction tailored to individual needs.
5. Enhanced Communication and Cultural Understanding:
    - Bridging communication gaps with linguistically diverse communities.
    - Fostering understanding and respect for cultural differences.
    - Informed parents and involved community agencies for effective collaboration.

In conclusion, these initiatives collectively contribute to a holistic, inclusive, and effective educational environment. The emphasis on academic achievement, emotional well-being, and community assets will undoubtedly foster stronger relationships within the community, creating a more student-centered approach and strengthening the overall efficacy of the NMUSD.