

# Strategies for Braiding Funds Under the “Every Student Succeeds Act” to Support Community School Development



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## Table of Contents

Resource Coordination and Access to Supports.....	3
School-Site Coordinators.....	3
Resource Coordinator .....	4
Partnerships to Promote Student Mental Health .....	4
Wraparound Services .....	4
Positive Youth Development .....	4
Family and Community Engagement .....	5
Needs Assessments .....	5
School-Based Resource Centers.....	5
Parent Leadership Teams .....	5
Parent Health Promoters .....	5
Bilingual Family Liaisons.....	6
Profession Learning and Family Engagement.....	6
School Climate and Culture.....	6
Positive School Climate .....	6
Cultural Competency Training.....	7
Trauma-Informed Professional Development .....	7
Strengthening Transitions.....	7

**In December 2015**, the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, was signed into law, replacing No Child Left Behind. ESSA offers a comprehensive view of the learning supports, resources, and strategies that may be needed to help students overcome barriers to academic success. Among these are an emphasis on whole-child support and development, opportunities to include school climate and culture in school quality indicators, and a new focus on meaningfully engaging families and the community in school improvement planning processes. ESSA provides opportunities to braid funds to support providing a range of services to students and families taking a community school approach. This includes funding wraparound supports through Titles I and IV, and using flexibility offered by Title I funds for school-wide improvement initiatives. Title IV funds are intended for student enrichment efforts across three domains: well-rounded education, safe and healthy students, and the effective use of technology. Creative and intentional blending of funding across these titles can support community schools to create a more comprehensive vision of success for youth.

While it may not be feasible to implement all of these recommendations in the short-term, it is important to think strategically about leveraging funding so as to promote success among all students. The intention of this paper is to outline the opportunities that ESSA provides to meet the needs of students in community schools. The recommendations below are outlines across five domains of community schools: resource coordination and access to supports, family and community engagement, positive youth development (including afterschool programs) and school climate and culture.

## *Resource Coordination and Access to Supports*

The following recommendations outline opportunities for community schools to enhance the alignment of services and supports that reduce nonacademic barriers to academic success.

### School-Site Coordinators

What ESSA funding sources can be braided to support school-site coordinators?

Title I

Title IV

**Recommendation: Blend Title I, Title III, and Title IV funding to hire a school-site coordinator to support the integration of services for families and engage parents in school improvement plans.**

Schools should coordinate and integrate Title I funding with other funding at the local level (21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center funding, philanthropic dollars) to hire school site coordinators who can support the integration of services in the community and at schools. Family engagement in schools is of-

ten infrequent and unpredictable, as educators may not have the necessary tools and training to engage meaningfully with families and communities. These challenges can be addressed through a strong infrastructure for community participation and support. Leveraging funds in this way would promote comprehensive, efficient, and collaborative programming for students and families.

## Resource Coordinator

**Recommendation: Community schools should use Title IV funding to hire a resource coordinator who can work intentionally to align these supports and build shared leadership structures.**

A Resource Coordinator plays an instrumental role in engaging families in school and leveraging community resources to promote student success and enrichment. Resource Coordinators serve as a backbone of support for community schools, leading the way in building community partnerships, fostering access to services for youth and families, and creating structures for family engagement and leadership. This coordination cannot simply be tacked on to a principal or teacher’s existing responsibilities; for schools to transform into hubs of support for youth and families, Resource Coordinators must be an essential part of the strategy. Title IV also provides opportunities to fund this important piece of community school development.

## Partnerships to Promote Student Mental Health

**Recommendation: Use Title IV, Part A funds to build partnerships between school-based mental health programs and public or private mental health organizations. These partnerships can support community schools in addressing issues related to school conditions for student learning, such as safety, peer interaction, and chronic absenteeism.**

Districts and schools can also tap into Title IV funds to implement collective impact strategies and develop more efficient and effective access to supports at the community level, including mental and behavioral health supports.

## Wraparound Services

**Recommendation: Apply for the Title IV Full Service Community School grant program to provide comprehensive wraparound services for students and their families.**

Full-service community schools promote student achievement by providing wraparound services to youth and community members alike and working to build safe, supportive, and engaged neighborhoods. Full-service community schools might offer primary and dental services, adult literacy initiatives, nutrition and physical fitness programs, and service learning opportunities. These community schools also use grant funding to align academic supports with after-school activities such as mentoring and tutoring. Community schools can apply for Full-Service Community School grants the Department of Education. The national Coalition for Community Schools website offers a host of resources that support schools in applying for this funding.

## *Positive Youth Development*

ESSA offers opportunities for states to provide a well-rounded and supportive education to students by designing programs that support youth development and enrichment during out-of-school time. Such opportunities prepare young people for college and career success and support them in positively impacting their communities.

**Recommendation: Blend Title I and Title IV funding (i.e., 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers) to create learning out-of-school time learning opportunities aimed at promoting positive youth development, such as urban gardening, mentorship programs, and internships and workforce training.**

**Recommendation: Use Title I, Title II, and Title IV funding to strengthen curricula by incorporating service learning and work-based learning into the classroom.**

Schools can design professional development aimed at creating opportunities for contextual and applied learning and preparing students for post-secondary education and training. These goals can also be advanced through collaboration with local businesses partners.

## *Family and Community Engagement*

ESSA offers opportunities for schools, communities and families to work together to improve academic achievement and ensure that all youth are accessing supports that they need to succeed in school and beyond. In addition to requiring that schools work in partnership with communities and families on school improvement plans, ESSA also provides some ways that schools and districts can look to structure and support these partnerships.

### Needs Assessments

**Recommendation: Use Title IV and Title II funds to engage the community in needs assessments and asset mapping for programs.**

Schools should also work strategically to promote authentic family and community participation in school improvement efforts and avoid duplication of programming.

### School-Based Resource Centers

**Recommendation: Use Title IV, part E funds to create school-based resource centers for families.**

Community schools should work in partnership with their state leadership to take advantage of grant opportunities available through Title IV, Part E of ESSA to establish a state-wide system of school-based resource centers for youth and families. States could look to model a state-wide resource center initiative after Kentucky’s Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, which were established in 852 schools across the state following the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990.

### Parent Leadership Teams

**Recommendation: Use Title II funds to create Parent Leadership Teams that work with educators and administrators to improve student outcomes. Community schools should aim to recruit families from diverse subgroups (such as ELL students, special education students, and foster youth) to analyze school-wide data and take part in school improvement decision-making.**

ESSA offers new opportunities for schools to engage in shared leadership and decision-making with families and communities. Recognizing that students are a part of family systems, schools can leverage Title II funds to engage families in education and create positive conditions for learning.

### Parent Health Promoters

**Recommendation: Use Title II funds to hire part-time parent health promoters to build health communities in schools. Parent health promoters could coordinate health trainings and health assessments and organize parent health committees to identify community health needs.**

## Bilingual Family Liaisons

**Recommendation:** Schools should leverage Title III funds to hire a bilingual family liaison that would assist with ELL parent engagement activities and coordinate supports. Schools could also use this funding stream to develop bilingual family literacy trainings and ESL classes for parents.

## Profession Learning and Family Engagement

What ESSA funding sources can be braided to support professional learning?

Title I

Title II

**Recommendation:** Blend Title I and Title II funds to develop professional learning that supports teachers and principals in engaging parents and communities as partners in education.

Districts should prioritize professional learning opportunities that support teachers in engaging parents and communities as partners in education. Principals also need professional development that builds their capacity in developing cross-community partnerships and creating a

structure of shared decision-making with parents and community members. Community schools can tap into these funding streams to build professional development opportunities that would accomplish these goals.

## School Climate and Culture

ESSA includes a new focus on school climate and culture measures as indicators of school quality, and as crucial parts of supporting whole-child development.

### Positive School Climate

**Recommendation:** Use Title IV funds to promote healthy learning environments and provide mentoring and counseling to all students.

Schools should invest in programs that provide students with the social and emotional support they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. Mental health services, bullying prevention initiatives, and evidence-based drug and alcohol prevention activities all offer opportunities for schools to promote health and wellness among students.

Resource Coordinators can play a crucial role in creating and managing partnerships between schools and community organizations to implement services for students. For example, a school-site coordinator might establish a relationship with a local high school to provide volunteer tutoring services for a nearby elementary school. High school students receive a community service opportunity, while elementary students forge relationships with older students they may view as role models while receiving additional academic support. Without designated school-site coordinators, the staffing needed to establish community partnerships to strengthen student supports may suffer.

## Cultural Competency Training

**Recommendation:** Blend Title II and Title III funds to create professional development experiences related to cultural competency and family engagement.

These professional learning opportunities can support teachers and staff to partner with parents and build relational trust between schools and communities. Moreover, professional development in this area engages educators in designing and implementing culturally relevant curricula for students.

## Trauma-Informed Professional Development

**Recommendation:** Use Title II funding to support professional development activities that train school personnel in supporting students affected by trauma or at risk of mental illness and referring them to appropriate services.

Schools can reduce non-academic barriers to academic success by training educators to be trauma-informed. The Partnership for Resilience is leading the way in this work by supporting schools to build inter-professional partnerships with counselors and health care professionals. These strategic partnerships enable schools to address the social determinants of health and help to build strong and healthy communities.

## Strengthening Transitions

What ESSA funding sources can be braided to support kindergarten transition programs?

Title I

Title II

**Recommendation:** Blend Title I and Title II funds to strengthen early childhood learning by engaging parents, students, and educators in the transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten.

Schools should design Kindergarten transition programs that are held in the summer prior to students entering elementary school. This investment would help both students’ and parents’ transition into primary grades and set students up for academic and social/emotional success.

This parent engagement also allows schools to build on the family engagement that naturally occurs in the Pre-K setting. Continued parent and family engagement with community schools is important for encouraging student success in early childhood and beyond.

[www.childrenshomeandaid.org](http://www.childrenshomeandaid.org)

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In 2006, the Federation for Community Schools was born out of the vision of the Chicago Campaign to Expand Community Schools and the Chicago Coalition for Community Schools in order to share best practices and advocate for community schools in Illinois.

Today the Federation represents nearly 200 community schools and 100 partner organizations in Illinois through its 1300+ members who engage with us to support the advancement of community schools. We have developed a vibrant professional learning community for our members by providing trainings and resources that increase their capacity to implement the community school strategy so as to best support students and families.