UCLA Community School

Celebrating Language, Culture, and Community

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Executive Summary

Language and culture are central to learning and human development, as they shape the ways in which we all learn and grow together. Individuals learn as members of a community that values their participation and is respectful, productive, and inclusive. In neighborhoods with large immigrant populations where English is not the primary language spoken, most students have intersectional and multifaceted identities that reflect their race, ethnicity, language and immigration status, gender identity, and other characteristics. In these and other contexts, community schools that recognize and build on local cultural and linguistic assets are positioned to support deep and authentic learning.

This report tells the story of the UCLA Community School (UCLA-CS), a public school in central Los Angeles. Located in one of California's most densely populated neighborhoods, UCLA-CS serves a large immigrant population from transitional kindergarten through 12th grade. Of the school's 957 students, most (83%) are Latino/a; 8% are Asian American or Pacific Islander; 4% are Filipino; 2% are African American; and 2% are white. Ninety-five percent of students come from low-income families; 14% of students have disabilities; and 32% of students are currently classified as English learners. Ninety-five percent of students report that they use a language other than English to communicate with their families.

Established in 2007, UCLA-CS honors the role students play in constructing their own learning and developing their knowledge, skills, and passions—processes facilitated by caring adults, other students, and engaging educational experiences inside and beyond the classroom. The percentage of graduates who meet the sequence of course requirements (called the A–G courses) for admission to the University of California or California State University systems has steadily climbed over the years, rising to 81% in 2021. This is higher than both the district average for all students and the average for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds statewide. The 4-year cohort graduation rate mirrors this trend, growing from 69% in 2012 to 90% in 2022, now higher than both the state and district averages.

This report draws from a portfolio of research–practice partnerships at UCLA-CS, and it documents the norms, structures, and practices present on campus. By providing practitioners with an example of a community school that prioritizes the needs of students in immigrant communities, this report demonstrates an approach that can serve all students.

The study of UCLA-CS indicates that the following six key practices at the school contribute to its success. UCLA Community School:

1. Knows and builds on a community's history, assets, and culture.
2. Develops and articulates desired core competencies for students.
3. Nurtures shared leadership and collective agency.
4. Creates space for collaborative inquiry, professional autonomy, and teacher development.
5. Uses data and stories to elevate the school's vision and track progress.
6. Affirms the important role that everyone plays in a community school.

An Innovative Collaboration

Established in 2009, UCLA Community School (UCLA-CS) advances teaching, research, and service—merging the mission of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) with the core work of transitional kindergarten (TK) through grade 12 schooling. The school is an example of a powerful public cross-sector partnership that contributes resources to TK–12 schooling to both support and study innovative educational practices that are meant to disrupt historic inequities in underserved communities of color. It serves as a teaching school for future educators, counselors, teaching artists, social workers, librarians, researchers, and lawyers, creating a pipeline of equity-focused professionals for the school and the Los Angeles region. In 2015, then California Governor Jerry Brown recognized UCLA-CS with an Award for Innovation in Higher Education based on early evidence that this school–university partnership was creating a more effective pipeline to college and career success for first-generation college-going students.[1]

The UCLA-CS faculty is diverse and accomplished. Most faculty members are bilingual teachers of color who bring a wealth of cultural knowledge to their work with students and families. Students, for their part, come from mostly working-class households in which family members often have different immigration statuses (both documented and undocumented residents) and English is not the primary language spoken. UCLA-CS recognizes students' intersectional and multifaceted identities that reflect their race, ethnicity, language and immigration status, gender identity, and other characteristics. The school builds on these assets through a variety of structures, practices, and programs that undergird the school's innovative TK–12 multilingual curriculum and its commitment to culturally and community-relevant teaching and learning. Time and attention are paid to developing deep and trusting relationships that support a strong sense of community and are foundational to the many rich partnerships that tap into students' and families' assets and address their needs and interests. School staff and partners collaborate to ensure that the school's many supports, services, and opportunities are leveraged effectively to benefit students and families.

UCLA Community School at a Glance

UCLA Community School (UCLA-CS) is a transitional kindergarten through grade 12 community school serving the central Los Angeles neighborhoods of Koreatown and Pico-Union. UCLA-CS opened in 2009 as part of a grassroots campaign to relieve overcrowding at neighboring schools. The school is one of six community schools that compose the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools, located on the former site of the historic Ambassador Hotel. In the 2022–23 school year, UCLA-CS serves 957 students. Most students (83%) are Latino/a; 8% are Asian American or Pacific Islander; 4% are Filipino; 2% are African American; and 2% are white. Ninety-five percent of students come from low-income families; 14% of students have disabilities; and 32% are currently classified as English learners. Almost all students (95%) report that they use a language other than English to communicate with their families.

Positive Outcomes and Community Partnerships

The impact of these collective efforts can be seen in the level of satisfaction reported by teachers, students, and families.[2] Almost all teachers report that the school is a supportive and inviting place to work that promotes trust and collegiality, as well as shared decision-making.[3] Teacher retention rates continue to be higher than the national average for urban schools with high levels of poverty, with 90% of teachers retained between the 2019–20 and 2020–21 school years.[4] Students report that they are happy at the school, have a voice in decision-making, and feel part of the school at higher rates than do students districtwide.[5] Similarly, parents report at higher-than-average rates that the school provides high-quality instruction.[6]

UCLA joins with many other partners from the community to live the school's motto: "Where we grow together." The school has established structures to support collaboration, professional inquiry, relationship building, and the collective agency needed to challenge structural racism and inequity.[7] (See "Cultivating Shared Leadership and Power.") Together, staff, students, families, and partners call on the community's rich legacy of activism to ensure the school is a site of resistance and community power. In 2018, on the 50th anniversary of Cesar Chavez's historic fast to call attention to the plight of farmworkers, leader Dolores Huerta visited the school and shared about her experience working with both Chavez and Robert F. Kennedy in the fight for farmworkers' rights and social justice. She ended with a familiar chant that resonated with the community: "*Sí se puede!*"

What Is a Community School?

Community schools are a place-based strategy for providing whole child supports deeply rooted in the local context—that is, they consider the needs, assets, hopes, and dreams of students, families, educators, and community partners. Community schools leverage a complex web of partnerships and relationships that help them deliver on a shared vision by providing health and social service supports; expanded and enriched learning opportunities; powerful family and community engagement; rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction; shared power through collaborative leadership; and a culture of belonging, safety, and care. As we have seen time and again, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, these services and supports—provided in the context of trusting and caring relationships—can be life-changing and mean the difference between academic success and struggles for students and families.

Community schools typically have a community school manager (sometimes called a community school coordinator or director). This individual is often part of the school leadership team and is responsible for coordinating partnerships and leveraging school- and community-based resources to support and engage students and families. Community schools are grounded in an evidence base that shows the schools lead to improvement in student outcomes such as attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps. Community schools are also associated with some improvements in school climate and disciplinary rates.

Sources: Partnership for the Future of Learning. (2018). *Community schools playbook*. Learning Policy Institute; Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2020, July 7). *In the fallout of the pandemic, community schools show a way forward for education* [Blog post]. Learning Policy Institute; Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence.* Learning Policy Institute; RAND Corporation. (2020). I*llustrating the promise of community schools: An assessment of the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative.*

A University-Assisted Community School

In 2007, UCLA convened community, union, and district partners to codesign UCLA-CS, which would embrace a collective vision for social transformation. UCLA is part of a larger national network committed to helping university-assisted community schools become mutually beneficial partnerships that improve the quality of life and learning in local schools and communities while simultaneously advancing university research, teaching, and service.[8]

UCLA-CS was designed as a teaching school where residents from UCLA's Center X Teacher Education Program learn and teach alongside mentor faculty and with the support of UCLA's teacher educators. The arrangement benefits both UCLA-CS and the aspiring educators. The school often hires residents as teachers, confident that these new faculty members understand and are aligned with the school's culture and practices. Jihyun Park was one such resident. She immigrated to the United States at 19 and knows firsthand the challenges of learning English and navigating a new city and country. Her passion to educate emergent bilingual students blossomed when she worked with new students at UCLA-CS as a UCLA undergraduate intern in 2014.

"That is when," she reflected in a later interview, "I decided that I wanted to work at UCLA-CS, where they gather every single resource to accommodate newcomers [so they can] achieve success and feel welcomed and wanted." After Park graduated from UCLA in 2014, she worked at the school as a community representative and supervision aide and then as a substitute teacher. She later enrolled in UCLA's Teacher Education Program and learned as a resident teacher in the elementary grades. In June 2019, Park walked the stage to receive her Master of Education. Shortly thereafter, she was honored with the Los Angeles Unified School District's 2019 Rookie of the Year award.

To increase the number of supportive adults on campus, UCLA's Visual and Performing Arts Education Program places teaching artists in classrooms, and students from the UCLA School of Law provide consultations and services through the on-campus Immigrant Family Legal Clinic. To show the range of professionals who support a community school, UCLA also places aspiring social workers, counselors, and librarians at the school to learn firsthand what it takes to build deep and lasting partnerships with families and the community.

UCLA researchers partner with teachers, students, and parents to ensure that the community's voice and teaching expertise are centered in the knowledge base produced about the school's practices.[9] A research committee composed of multiple stakeholders meets monthly to oversee and support a portfolio of research–practice partnerships, then reports back to the School Governance Council. Founding English Lead Teacher Beth Trinchero has been a member of the research committee since the school opened and explains, "It's about owning our schoolwide data and, instead of being afraid of it, being curious and seeking to problem-solve around things that are important to the school."[10]

One Campus, Six Schools

UCLA Community School (UCLA-CS) is one of six schools on the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools campus on the former site of the Ambassador Hotel. Located on Wilshire Boulevard in the heart of the city, the historic hotel welcomed dignitaries and hosted the Academy Awards, and its Cocoanut Grove nightclub featured Ava Gardner, Sammy Davis Jr., and other prominent entertainers. In 1968, the Ambassador was also the site of Robert F. Kennedy's tragic assassination.

In 2006, when planning for the campus began, there was an urgent community need for additional classroom space. For 30 years, students as young as 5 years old had been bused out of their community, and others attended overcrowded year-round schools.[a] The original plan called for one large school for kindergarten through Grade 12, with separate elementary, middle, and high school buildings (with small learning communities for high schoolers within the high school). A study tour of the Julia Richman Educational Complex in New York City informed a new direction: a shared campus of several small schools, governed by a Building Council that would include leaders from each school.

Today, Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools enrolls approximately 4,000 students across six schools, with some starting in transitional kindergarten (TK): Ambassador School of Global Education (TK–5); Ambassador School of Global Leadership (6–12); UCLA-CS (TK–12); New Open World Academy (TK–12); Los Angeles High School of the Arts (9–12); and School for the Visual Arts and Humanities (9–12). All of the schools are community schools and partner with a variety of organizations—for example, Los Angeles High School of the Arts is a Linked Learning site that offers work-based learning opportunities with local theater and arts groups.[b] The six schools are also known as Pilot Schools, created as part of an in-district, union- and community-based reform to support innovation by giving a set of schools autonomy over their budget, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and school calendar in exchange for increased accountability.[c]

The shared campus allows students and the local community to access sports fields, a swimming pool, playgrounds, two libraries, two gymnasiums, a world-class auditorium, a legal clinic, and public art (displayed in 26 murals that decorate the 24-acre campus). Each school has contiguous space to create its own school culture, and the Building Council ensures that access to the shared spaces is equitable and coordinated. The schools share a common social justice vision and collaborate on Bobcat sports teams and community events.

The schools also pull together in times of need. For example, students across the schools mobilized to create a sanctuary school protocol[d] following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and more recently they created a grab-and-go site for meals and other essentials to offer to the community when schools shifted to distance learning in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[a] Martínez, R. A., & Quartz, K. H. (2012). Zoned for change: A historical case study of the Belmont Zone of Choice. *Teachers College Record*, *114*(10), 1–40.

[b] Linked Learning Alliance & UCLA Center for Community Schooling. (2021). *Linked Learning and community schools*.

[c] LAUSD Pilot Schools, Center for Powerful Public Schools, & UCLA Center for Community Schooling. (2018). *A decade of innovation: How the LAUSD Pilot School movement is advancing equitable and personalized education* [Brief].

[d] Quartz, K. H., Rabin, N., Murillo, M. A., & Garcia, L. (2021). Sanctuary schooling: A promising model for supporting immigrant students. In P. Gándara & J. Ee (Eds.), *Schools under siege: The impact of immigration enforcement on educational equity*. Harvard Education Press.

Fostering a Culture of Belonging, Safety, and Care in Service of Meaningful Learning

UCLA-CS was designed as a school for students in transitional kindergarten through Grade 12 (TK–12) that would foster close and sustained relationships with families. One of only four noncharter TK–12 schools in Los Angeles Unified School District, the school is pioneering structures for multi-age learning. Students progress through the elementary grades in three multi-age "dens," staying with the same teacher and classmates for 2 years—a practice known as looping, which is designed to create a strong, supportive community for children and enables teachers to personalize learning.

As students transition from the lower grades, the middle school continues to provide a nurturing, student-centered learning community through both a formal advisory system and the intentional grouping of students and teachers. In 6th grade, students have two core content teachers (math/science and the humanities), who also serve as their advisors. In 7th and 8th grades, students rotate across core classes and seminars, receiving support from the same advisor for 2 years. At the end of 8th grade, students transition to high school and are joined by a new cohort of students who enter from neighboring middle schools, doubling the size of the grade-level student cohorts from 60 in TK–8 to approximately 120 students in 9th through 12th grades. High school students learn in an 8-period rotating block schedule designed to support the longer time needed for active, inquiry-based learning. An advisory program anchors the high school, with students staying with the same advisor for 4 years, which helps them build strong, caring relationships.

Core Beliefs and Competencies Guide Teaching and Learning

Three core beliefs guide all activities at the UCLA Community School:

1. Language and culture are central to learning and human development.
2. Individuals learn as members of a community that values their participation and is respectful, productive, and inclusive.
3. The purpose of schooling is to guide all learners, both students and adults, to think critically about the world around them, engage as agents of social change, and promote democratic practices.

These beliefs translate into a set of four core competencies that define learning for all members of the school community. Developed in collaboration with multiple stakeholders during the school design process, the four core student competencies state that each student should become:

1. A self-directed, passionate learner
2. A master of academic content and skills
3. An individual who is bilingual, biliterate, and multicultural
4. An active and critical participant in society

Each year, these competencies drive inquiry and improvement for students and staff alike. For example, preparing all students to be college ready goes far beyond the academic press for mastery. It involves cultivating students' interests, passions, and agency; giving them opportunities to use more than one language; and teaching them how to work with others to advance change. Keeping all of these competencies front and center also guards against the narrowing of the curriculum and affirms the value of rich and diverse educational experiences.

Supporting Multilingual and Multicultural Learning

UCLA-CS is a dual-language school, offering content instruction in Spanish, Korean, and English. Recognizing that its students also use a variety of other languages to communicate (including American Sign Language, Arabic, Bengali, Bisaya, Chinese, Dutch, Filipino, French, German, Irish Gaelic, Japanese, Mongolian, Russian, Tagalog, Urdu, and Zapotec), the school approaches language as dynamic and context dependent. Students are encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoire, translating and code switching when needed.

Incoming elementary students enroll in either the Spanish–English or Korean–English dual-language programs. From transitional kindergarten through 3rd grade, students in the Spanish–English program receive instruction mostly in Spanish. For the Korean–English program, students receive instruction mostly in English, with one day each week dedicated to learning Korean, an approach that was developed in collaboration with Korean-speaking parents and caregivers.

Teachers use a combination of classroom-developed and standardized assessments to capture students' biliteracy development. Each fall, students in 2nd through 5th grades take the Reader Identity Self-Assessment (RISA), which involves analyzing their Spanish and English reading data, setting reading goals, describing the reading practices needed to realize their goals, and reflecting on their "bilingual or multilingual reader selves."[11] For example, Emily, a 4th-grader, shares, "My goal is to learn more [Spanish] vocabulary because I don't understand what my mom says. And I want to learn more Spanish vocabulary to understand words in books. I want to read with stamina because I don't want to be distracted with things, and [I want] to raise my level so I can read more."

In the winter, students monitor their progress, and in the spring, they update their longitudinal bar graphs by adding their spring reading levels in both languages. Students then reflect on their progress by describing why they met (or did not meet) their reading goals and how they managed obstacles—a practice that supports their agency and voice. Students share these powerful plans and reflections with their families during parent–teacher conferences, which helps ensure students have a team of support to meet their goals and affirm their multilingual reader selves.

Starting in 6th grade, students who have completed the elementary dual-language Spanish program receive Spanish instruction in social studies and Spanish while continuing the rest of their education in English. Teachers in all classes make use of translanguaging practices such as translating, providing materials in two languages, and welcoming students' use of other languages in projects and learning.[12] These practices help eliminate separation between the two languages.

In Grades 9–12, both new and continuing students enroll in the pathway of Spanish courses: Spanish 1–4, Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish Language, and AP Spanish Literature. Students who have chosen Korean as their second language of study take courses offered at the local community college to further develop their Korean language skills. About 4 in 10 students complete the requirements to earn the California State Seal of Biliteracy upon graduation.

Through Multilingual Interdisciplinary Social Action projects during middle and high school, teachers guide students in using their cultural and linguistic assets to investigate various social issues at the local and national levels. In 2018, for example, 8th-grade students explored the social issues of houselessness in Koreatown as the community was debating whether to build a shelter for unhoused individuals half a mile from the school.[13] As part of the project, students heard from experts from different community organizations and collected data in multiple languages about the community's perspectives on houselessness. Some students also participated in local rallies and protests in support of the proposed shelter.

Students presented their projects to their peers, families, and partners in the school's library, then assessed their learning and language use, as well as how the experience helped shape their identities.[14] Teachers evaluated student work across multiple dimensions using a rubric aligned with the school's four core competencies.[15] Reflecting on one of the identity questions, Alex, an 8th-grader, said, "I think that no matter what I become, I will always try to help out people. I think that this topic talks about different ways we can help homeless people. If we keep on thinking this way, we will think of ways we can help out our communities. This knowledge has helped me realize that I like helping out people."

Through multilingual and project-based instruction, the school is advancing rigorous community-connected classroom instruction as well as fostering students' voices and feelings of agency—two key community school practices.

Expanding and Deepening Learning Opportunities

Guided by data and the vision embedded in the school's core competencies, UCLA-CS leverages its partnerships and teachers' skills and passions to create engaging opportunities for students. In accordance with the key community school practice of expanding and enriching learning, these opportunities help students discover new interests, passions, and skills that will prepare them for college, the workforce, and active civic participation.

Computer science pathway

In conjunction with the UCLA Computer Science Equity Project, UCLA-CS offers Exploring Computer Science, the introductory course in a pathway of computer science courses and expanded learning opportunities. For example, in 2014, the school created a K–12 learning community in response to the Hour of Code challenge to introduce students to coding. Seven high school students worked with a math teacher to prepare 21 of their peers to teach nearly all K–8 students how to count in binary and code using Taken Charge, a game-based learning platform.

Jennifer Martinez was one of the student leaders who also helped create Girls in Motion, an after-school club that developed apps and competed at hackathons. As a result of these and other opportunities, the school received the College Board's AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award. Martinez, who later graduated with a degree in computer science from Columbia University and currently works as a DevOps and site reliability engineer at IBM in North Carolina, received a National Center for Women and Information Technology Aspirations in Computing award.

Passion-based seminar program

The school uses its seminar program as an innovative way to expand course offerings for students, despite the school's small size and limited staff. Seminars cover a number of topics, ranging from robotics to Latin American film. Teachers' passions drive the program, and partners pitch in where needed and based on their availability. Adding a course to a teacher's workload can be a challenge, yet many teachers find the seminar to be their favorite teaching experience. The learning extends personal hobbies, interests, and areas that students and teachers alike want to explore. Science teacher Carlos Acosta leads a bicycle mechanics seminar with partners from Bicycle Kitchen, and the number of students riding to school has increased as a result of this collaboration. Former history teacher Wendy Salcedo-Fierro worked with partners from EmpowHer Institute, a local nonprofit organization, to lead a girls-only seminar that developed students' social-emotional skills, social justice expertise, and other competencies that can serve them in college and career. Claire Keating, high school history teacher, has turned the reins over to students to lead a seminar on Japanese history and culture.

Science teacher Catalina Herrera created a seminar based on her passion for entomology. On a typical day, students learned about an insect, identified the insects they captured, and created an insect collection, which they added to during fieldwork. Once a week, students could be seen hovering over patches of grass, examining plants, or inspecting holes in the ground to find an insect. "My seminar teacher seems so passionate about this topic," remarked one student. "She gets excited when we go on field trips, and she just seems excited to teach this topic. I would like to be like her when learning about my passion; I want to feel excited."

The seminar program also provides a way to add new courses to the matrix and develop infrastructure that can nurture students' agency.[16] For example, the class Exploring Computer Science started as a seminar. The school's academic decathlon team meets as a seminar. And most recently, founding English Lead Teacher Beth Trinchero added the AP Capstone Program into the seminar space—building a pathway of courses that support student-directed research. Partners from UCLA serve as expert mentors to high school students working on AP Research projects. For example, Alex Alejo and Melissa Benitez, two seniors who entered the school in kindergarten, worked with a UCLA graduate student in sociology to study the effects of K–12 schools on students' learning and well-being.

Senior internships

The seminar program focuses on connecting students with mentors outside the school, a practice that culminates in a senior internship, taught within the seminar space as an applied economics course to contextualize students' experiences—from working at a downtown investment bank to interning at the Korean Immigrant Workers Alliance. The internship foregrounds the value of students' aspirational capital—their hopes and dreams for the future—and enables students to research and interview at

different sites.[17] For example, a student interning at a theater group advised, "If you chose this internship, there was, hopefully, a reason behind your choice. I was chosen for my passion in my music, my love for the whole art behind music. My mentor, Candace, noticed how I lit up talking about music."

Mentors like Candace share their college and career pathways with students. As one mentor commented, "I always try to use myself as an example, not necessarily [because] they have to do what I did, but just [to] let them know how I did things." These exchanges provide insights into attending college, navigating a work environment, and making career decisions. Mentors are often tapped for letters of recommendation, and most students include their internship as part of their college applications. Internship sites extend across the city, with several taking place on the UCLA campus. Students interning at the UCLA Broadcast Studio created a video documenting the college-going experiences of alumni from the school—lifting up the stories of first-generation students in the process.[18]

A college-going culture

The school has developed a robust data infrastructure to study, support, and track college access and persistence for all of its students, including a commitment to student agency, choice, and identity development.[19] Although almost all UCLA-CS graduates (97%) leave the school with a plan to enroll in a 4-year or community college, the immediate college enrollment rate dips to 82%, which is still more than 20 percentage points higher than the national rates for similar schools. The persistence rate from first to second year in college is also higher than the national average. Longitudinal data following five cohorts of students reveal the enormous challenges facing first-generation students of color as they seek to graduate from college; these data add to the extensive existing evidence of this problem. This issue is an area in need of ongoing inquiry and growth for the school as well as the university.[20]

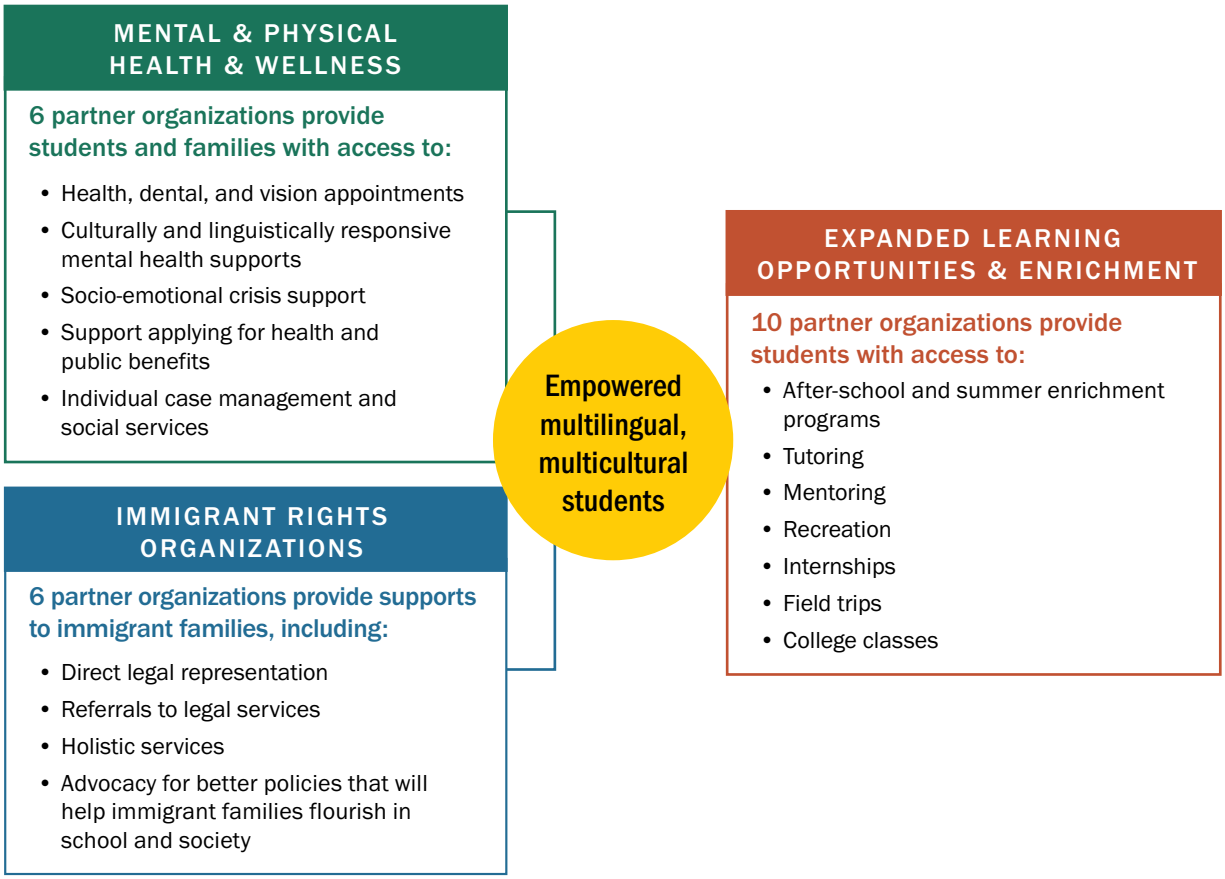
Supporting Students Is a Team Effort

The work of identifying and integrating the school's many supports and services is a team effort that includes school staff and partners, including UCLA staff and faculty. Working with more than 20 partner organizations (see Figure 1), three teams rely on established structures to support collaboration and integrate a variety of resources into the school.[21]

The **School Support team** is led by four school administrators, two of whom are focused on special education students. Team members include a school psychologist, a psychiatric social worker, a community representative (i.e., a liaison to families and the surrounding community), three counselors, an intervention coordinator, and an instructional coach. Team members communicate regularly and meet weekly to check on students who receive a variety of school- and community-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 health and social services, using a multi-tiered system of support framework.

The **Community Resource team** is led by a full-time community representative and an office clerk. The team organizes events on campus, such as workshops from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, and helps families access local food resources, free tax preparation, job training, and a women's empowerment program, among other resources. Team members work out of a centrally located and welcoming Parent and Community Center and collaborate with support staff and parent aides.

Figure 1: Partnerships at UCLA Community School



Mental & Physical Health & Wellness

1. Amanecer
2. Children's Institute
3. Grupo Crecer (family education)
4. Kaleidoscope (LGBTQ+ youth)
5. Koreatown Youth and Community Center (KYCC)
6. LAUSD Wellness Clinics (referrals, glasses, dental)

Immigrant Rights Organizations

1. Bet Tzedek
2. Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)
3. Cielo
4. Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
5. National Day Laborer Organizing Network
6. UCLA–RFK Immigrant Family Legal Clinic

Expanded Learning Opportunities & Enrichment

1. EduCare Afterschool Program (Upper School)
2. Internship Program mentors from UCLA and community organizations (e.g., UCLA Game Lab, KYCC)
3. Korean Education Center in Los Angeles
4. LA Community College (on-site college courses)
5. UCLA Afterschool Program (Lower School)
6. UCLA BruinCorps Tutors
7. UCLA Design for Sharing – Teaching Artists programs
8. UCLA Multigenerational After-School Arts Program (MASA)
9. UCLA UniCamp (summer residential camp)
10. Upper School Seminar Program Partners (e.g., EmpowHer, UCLA music students)

Source: Information provided by UCLA Community School staff. (2023).

The **UCLA Partnership team** is co-led by the school's principal and the director of the UCLA Center for Community Schooling. The team connects the school with university students, faculty, and resources in ways that benefit both UCLA and UCLA-CS, such as by placing student teachers, lawyers, artists, and graduate student researchers within UCLA-CS.

To facilitate resource coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic, the school partnered with UCLA's Life Course Intervention Research Network to create a Community Integrated Data System (CIDS) that helps the three teams as well as the school's faculty and staff communicate about each student's needs and strengths. As high school math teacher Maria Nakis shared in an interview, "I appreciated having access to CIDS and to information that can help shed light on [a student's] prior challenges so that I knew the context within which I was working and could easily communicate that I needed additional assistance that was above and beyond my scope in the classroom."

Strengthening Ties to the Community

Opportunities for multi-age learning strengthen the school's sense of community and help foster trusting relationships across grade levels. For example, to honor their immigrant status and support their English language development, newcomer high school students are asked to write and illustrate a children's book about their migration journey during a semester-long instructional unit. Months of work culminate with a book presentation to 4th- and 5th-grade students, who offer supportive and critical feedback and make recommendations about the story's flow and ways to enhance the illustrations. Many younger students share that they have family members with similar migration stories. This activity is one example of the school's many practices that intentionally address immigration—affirming the school's status as a sanctuary school, with a strong culture of safety and belonging.[22]

The arts further strengthen the school's sense of community. In 2016, a public art project invited celebrated artists such as Shepard Fairey, Hueman, and David Flores to create 26 new murals across the 24-acre campus.[23] These colorful and dynamic images of civil rights leaders, multicultural icons, engaged children, and powerful adolescents tower over students. A three-story mural of a high school student is overlaid with poetry: "I see you. I am you. We are one."

The school's Multigenerational After-School Arts (MASA) program engages parents, grandparents, and students of all ages in making culturally sustaining art. MASA centers the curricula in the experiences of families and provides opportunities for the families' leadership and development.[24] For example, parent Marie Luz led the MASA community in a series of projects using intricate weaving and embroidery, two art forms she practiced as a child in Mexico. Her preteen son served as translator and cofacilitator. As she reflected on the experience, Luz shared, "Well, in Mexico I did all these things. Here, because of work, or whatever it is, I did not have the opportunity to do so. Now, in MASA, I've been able to do these things again. … And I see that other people like what I do, and I feel happy because … it is a kind of art that no one else can do like me, or not many know how to." MASA elevates family members' expertise, and in doing so this program works to disrupt traditional power dynamics, nurture cultural practices, and build stronger relationships among students, families, and staff.

A Community Response to COVID-19 and Racial Injustice

In March 2020, UCLA Community School (UCLA-CS) responded to the abrupt move to online learning by strengthening its systems of support for students and families. Along with preparing and distributing 5,000 meals each day, the school provided laptops, tablets, and hot spots and set up training sessions to ensure students and families could get online and stay connected. The school's legal clinic went virtual and offered workshops and services related to tenants' and workers' rights and other issues the school's immigrant families were facing. The school tapped social service agencies to help with housing and crisis management and established a mutual aid fund to provide gift cards for grocery stores and other necessities. The entire school staff worked hard to keep track of students, reaching out via text, phone, and in-person conversations to make sure students and families were safe. By the fifth week after the shift to remote learning, the school had successfully connected with 98% of students.

In summer 2020, the faculty took stock of their initial remote learning experience while also discussing how to respond to the protests around racial justice that followed the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Teams met online to discuss Bettina Love's writing on abolitionist teaching and Shawn Ginwright's work on healing-centered engagement. The 2020–21 school year launched with individual Zoom meetings between teachers and each student and their family. Using a structured protocol, teachers checked in with families to assess how they were managing and what supports they needed. Check-ins continued throughout the year, supported by the school's new Community Integrated Data System. In response to the growing national debate about learning loss, the school's research committee collaborated with the leadership team on the Counter-Narrative Project to document what and how students were learning during the pandemic.[25]

Students engaged in their own research about what it meant to learn in a pandemic, then shared their findings with the school community and more broadly, including with local and statewide news outlets and with members of the UCLA research community. Six students shared a commentary on their findings: "This year has been far from ideal, but it has not been lost. We have learned so much about ourselves and our school community. We have learned that our voices matter and that we have the power to gather information, communicate it, and make things better—for us and the entire school. These are lessons that will stay with us for life."[26] When the 2021–22 school year began with in-person classes, students continued their inquiry about how it felt to return to school during a time of uncertainty.

Others shared their findings in a podcast.[27] High school senior Nareli Lopez introduced the students' research: "We interviewed students from 1st to 12th grade, and we noticed that, overall, students wanted to come back. Students felt online learning was really hard, whether that was because they had internet issues or didn't have the supplies needed to do their work. Being back is a relief."

Asked to reflect on what they learned throughout the 2020–21 school year, educators consistently cited the depth of the relationships they forged during the pandemic. "We stayed connected to each other through a very challenging time," said one teacher. Another teacher reflected, "We learned to be creative and flexible and to build better relationships with students and colleagues." Virtual teaching brought them greater insight into students' home lives, which many teachers found enriching. One teacher described this time as "humanizing the education experience by holding more grace for our students, colleagues, and ourselves."

Cultivating Shared Leadership and Power: A Principal's Reflection

Written by Leyda Garcia, Principal of UCLA Community School from 2012 to 2022. She now helps lead the State Transformational Assistance Center for the California Community Schools Partnership Program as Associate Director for Professional Learning at the UCLA Center for Community Schooling.

Over the last 10 years, my journey as a school leader has been about crafting spaces where genuine shared leadership can flourish. Since its beginning, UCLA Community School has protected spaces for teacher leadership through teams that lead the instructional and operational work of the school. Lead teachers for grade levels and departments spearhead our collective learning and support the professional development of colleagues every year. Our collaborative spaces center instruction that is culturally affirming and transformative; together, we delve deep into how to apply abolitionist teaching practices and inclusive community-building approaches. Educators who practice abolitionist teaching advocate for freedom from oppression and "uplifting humanity … [to be] at the center of all decisions."[a]

For parents and families, the shared leadership takes place within formal and informal decision-making bodies, like our School Governance Council, which ensures programs are connected to the core mission of our school. More informal connections occur during Coffee With the Parents, when parents can give feedback, offer recommendations, and ask questions about what is happening at the school.

A key part of engaging families as leaders involves sharing critical information with them about how we are doing as a school community. Each year, with our UCLA partners, we capture our learning in an annual report that serves as a counternarrative to accountability frameworks that are narrow and often fail to lift up and celebrate the assets and learning of local communities. For example, in an effort to celebrate students' multilingual identities, the school began reporting data on biliteracy in 2010, at a time when California still had laws in place that repressed bilingualism. Though those laws have since been repealed, the school continues to collect this data in an effort to affirm students' multilingual assets. The faculty review and discuss this report as a back-to-school ritual each fall, ensuring that the school's history, vision, and data shape the school year ahead. I also print and share the data dashboards from our annual report on poster board and hang the posters in the courtyard to spark discussion at my monthly Coffee With the Parents events.

Over time, we have expanded the leadership role that parents and caregivers play to enable them to become true agents of change. Parent and caregiver activism and advocacy resulted in the school's funding of a full-time college counselor. Families conduct classroom observations and provide their feedback, which school leaders then share with the teachers and community. Additionally, parent and caregiver volunteers are a regular presence in our classrooms and hallways as they provide mentorship and assistance to students.

The last few years have also pushed us to reconsider the leadership role that students can play. Initially ignited by a research study, the establishment of a Student Advisory Board (SAB) during the pandemic proved to be an essential component of our response to community needs. SAB members

became researchers who documented the experiences of students and teachers during virtual learning. [b] The findings guided our school in providing a much more nuanced and individualized response to students and educators alike.

Students from the SAB space went on to create summer retreats for incoming high school students and later became part of the school's Student Worker Corps, whose role was to welcome families to the school in the morning and share information about safety protocols. Families and students appreciated seeing members of the Student Worker Corps welcoming them back to a shared in-person school experience.

Hearing students describe the hardships of their lived experience during the pandemic was eye-opening for our staff. Likewise, students were moved by hearing from teachers and appreciating the challenges they had experienced. Ultimately, we became a more unified community as we tackled the challenges of the pandemic together.

Our collective power is fully revealed when we can come to the table with parity and the knowledge that everyone's contributions will be appreciated and leveraged. I think that is one of the major benefits of democratic spaces and shared leadership. Leading alongside others is complex. Setting up and sustaining democratic spaces takes work and an unshakable belief in the power of communities to lead the way. For too long, minoritized and marginalized communities have not been allowed to genuinely participate in the project of schooling. By creating feedback cycles and holding honest conversations with one another, we are on the path to liberatory governance structures. [c]

[a] Love, B. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom.* Beacon Press, p. 89.

[b] Aguilar, G., Alejo, A., Laureano Carranza, G., Juco, J.-L., Juquilita Lopez, N., & Rios-Cruz, A. (2021, May 13). Finding our voices, and our research skills, during the pandemic. *EdSource.*

[c] Quartz, K. H. (2021). *UCLA Community School 2020–2021 annual report: Learning in the time of COVID and racial injustice*. UCLA Center for Community Schooling.

A Transformative Partnership

This report documents the norms, structures, and practices that helped the UCLA Community School (UCLA-CS) articulate and sustain its approach to community schooling. There are six key takeaways for practitioners based on the practices at UCLA-CS:

1. **Know and build on a community's history, assets, and culture.** UCLA-CS was designed to embrace its multilingual, multicultural community, which helped the school develop an innovative multilingual program and increase the percentage of graduates who earn the State Seal of Biliteracy.

2. **Develop and articulate desired core competencies for students.** The four core competencies of UCLA-CS inform and strengthen how the school approaches whole child learning and development.

3. **Nurture shared leadership and collective agency.** UCLA-CS has created spaces and opportunities for students, parents, community partners, teachers, and staff to be leaders and take action in support of the community.

4. **Create space for collaborative inquiry, professional autonomy, and teacher development.** UCLA-CS has high teacher-retention rates because the school is an intellectually exciting place to work, respects the work of teaching, and prioritizes teachers' opportunities to deepen and share their craft through practices such as teacher-led professional learning and research–practice partnerships.

5. **Use data and stories to elevate the school's vision and track progress.** The school's annual report is rich with examples that bring to life both the stimulating academics and the commitment to community engagement and shared leadership. The report also includes local outcome measures, such as biliteracy data and college persistence rates, that help the school track progress on its own terms and be accountable to the local community.

6. **Affirm the important role that everyone plays in a community school.** From the front-office staff to the parent aides, custodians, partners, teachers, and more, the success of UCLA-CS lies in the school community's collective spirit and respect for the contributions of each member.

As a powerful public, cross-sector partnership, UCLA-CS both supports and studies innovative educational practices that are meant to disrupt historic inequities in underserved communities of color. From lifting up parents' cultural wealth to honoring students' aspirational capital, the school celebrates the role that language, culture, and identity play in creating a strong sense of community. This strength, coupled with the support of college counselors and mentors, propels most students to be the first in their family to attend college. It also encourages teachers to stay at the school and do their best work—supported by collaborative norms and structures for learning and professional growth.

Similar to other community schools with a primary partner, the school's partnership with UCLA is mutually transformative and relies on a commitment to long-term collaboration. As anchor institutions, the school and the university engage together in the struggle to preserve high-quality public education that enables individuals to have bright futures and our society to maintain a robust, multiracial democracy. Students are prepared to communicate in multiple languages, think computationally, conduct research, and enter the political economy of work. Aspiring teachers, lawyers, librarians, social workers, and artists have the opportunity to develop their vocations. Together, the school and the university have created a community that is reimagining the future of education.

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