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Viewpoints: Education, local control and what our communities need to do

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Children and youth in lower-income communities face a range of challenges outside of school, and often don't have access to opportunities that can enrich and strengthen their educational experience – opportunities that are critical to developing the knowledge and skills required in the workplace. The persistence of the [achievement gap](#) and high dropout rates are sure signs that simply providing traditional public education is no longer enough.

Economic stagnation, cuts to public services and the shrinking middle class have created conditions for many of our students that make school success a high hurdle to clear. If we want all students to have the opportunity to achieve in school and life, we must address all their needs as well as cultivate the talents and interests that students bring with them to school.

The recently approved Local Control Funding Formula is a step in the right direction. This important change to how our state finances education will enable schools to innovate and invest based on local challenges and needs. We now have new opportunities to build on strategies that have proven effective.

“Community Schools” is one such proven strategy. In a Community Schools approach, school districts partner with local government and community organizations to align local resources and expertise behind student success, opening access for students and their families to a wide range of services and programs.

With local resources strategically aligned, communities can offer more effective services and supports for students and their families so young people arrive at school ready to learn, families can better support their students and connect to school staff, and teachers are able to focus on teaching. This is not simply about the co-location of services on a school site but rather the integration of services so city and county agencies work with schools to ensure that no child is overlooked or left behind.

Community Schools maximize existing resources. Through the Healthy Start program, California school districts demonstrated that community-school partnerships make a positive difference. On average, Healthy Start schools saw a 3 to 1 return on their investment; for every \$1 a school district spent on Healthy Start activities, they would see a return of \$3 in additional funding and/or in-

kind services.

In [Alameda County](#), for example, the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities partners with schools to reach tens of thousands of students and families in more than 160 schools every year who otherwise wouldn't have access to [health care](#), [mental health services](#) or other youth and family supports. The Center for Healthy Schools and Communities recognizes the critical connection between health and academic success. Alameda County's \$16million investment in Community Schools strategies leverages more than \$80million in public, nonprofit and private funds to maximize services to these students.

This type of collaboration requires an investment. Fortunately this is the first year since 2008 that school districts aren't experiencing budget cuts. While there is a lot of ground to be made up, the Local Control Funding Formula provides the opportunity to think differently about how to support students. We all play a role in the success of our children and youth – and the sooner we build upon each other's resources, the better off all our children will be.

Now is the time. We can't let the opportunity of new funding and flexibility for our students turn into more of the same. We need new ways of thinking and working together, customized to our unique local community needs.

Collaboration isn't the easiest approach; working together never is. But if we really want to improve student outcomes, we have to build on what we know works. Every child should have the educational, health and social support she or he needs to succeed in school and life.

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Read more here: <http://www.sacbee.com/2013/10/12/5814875/viewpoints-education-local-control.html#storylink=cpy>