

Student Supports: Getting the Most out of Your LCFF Investment

WHY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS MATTER

Children need stability in their lives at home in order to do their best at school. Research has shown that academic resources alone cannot compensate when children have unmet basic needs or their families are in crisis.¹

Low-income students are more likely to experience family instability, with accompanying emotional, mental, and physical health barriers to learning. Many, or even most, of these barriers can be a direct result of financial, housing, legal, and transportation issues; disruptions in family relationships; or a lack of social support systems.

Instability weighs heavily on a student's ability to learn, but schools are generally not well equipped to handle all of these issues on their own. Thankfully, they do not have to.

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are community-based organizations that provide comprehensive family-support services to help children and their families overcome challenges. FRCs help students who are struggling socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and/or academically by working to strengthen the whole family. They are uniquely able to connect families with community and government agencies, social workers, childcare providers, and afterschool programs that can provide needed support.

When a school district partners with its local FRC, the FRC can help schools identify students and families who need extra support or resources, and connect them to existing community assets. Working in close partnership, schools and FRCs can get to the root of students' struggles and facilitate lasting personal and academic growth.

Working in deep partnership, schools and Family Resource Centers can get to the root of students' struggles and facilitate lasting personal and academic growth.

Schools don't have to do it alone: Family Resource Centers are already working in most communities and are ready to help.



Family Resource Centers: Key Facts

There are thousands of FRCs across California embedded in communities to serve children and families.

- ◆ In many low-income communities, FRCs function as indispensable partners for schools by providing a full complement of supports for students and their families.
- ◆ FRCs bring an approach that builds on the strengths of students and their families.
- ◆ By successfully removing barriers to learning, FRCs help schools improve attendance, school climate, and student success

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR PARTNERING WITH FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

The key to success for a school-center partnership is consistent communication and robust integration of FRC staff into school operations. The specific services and supports provided by the FRC depend on the individual community and the unique needs of students and families, but there are best practices that all partnerships between school districts and FRCs should follow to be successful:

FRCs are integrated into the everyday functioning of schools.

District and school leaders work in partnership with the FRC to build a comprehensive support system that families can access seamlessly through schools. This connection strengthens the ability of both the community and its schools to offer timely support to families, with an eye to prevention and early intervention.

FRC case managers work with school staff in teams.

At school sites, FRC case managers connect directly with school staff by sitting on multidisciplinary teams such as CARE Teams and Coordination of Services Teams (COST). As team members, FRC staff help link the school-site team's efforts with other critical systems and partners such as Child Welfare Services, county workers who determine eligibility for food and healthcare assistance programs, and other referral and community-based support agencies.

FRCs contribute expertise for a preventive, strengths-based approach.

FRC staff bring family-strengthening expertise, helping schools develop and use proven asset-based approaches when working with students and their families. Instead of focusing only on the individual 'problem' behaviors of students, FRCs use a holistic, strengths-based approach as a foundation for working with students and their families. Identifying and building upon each family's strengths is the starting point for meaningful change.

FRC staff expertise with this strengths-based approach is fully leveraged when schools involve FRCs in school improvement planning and systems building at both the district and school site level. FRCs can play a pivotal role in planning, implementing, and evaluating processes designed to improve student attendance, family engagement, and school climate. FRC staff can also offer critical professional consultation to teachers and other school staff. For example, they can support both parent and teacher capacity building around parent-teacher conferences – including helping to improve conference design.





FRCs play a central role in reaching out to and supporting families.

FRCs have an extensive network of relationships with community partners offering families meaningful resources, referrals, services, and supports. The FRC can bring these resources to the school, helping to draw families to the school site. For example, FRCs often provide ESL classes where parents can gain skills, participate in learning, connect to other parents, and establish a positive connection to the school.

Center staff can also act as liaisons with the school when necessary to promote stability and support families' involvement in their students' education. FRCs can take the lead in reaching out to families when students are at risk of chronic absence or truancy. FRC staff are well suited to reach families through home visits and parent meetings, and to work with the family and student to overcome attendance challenges long before legal action is necessary.

The FRC can facilitate, train, and supervise a parent leaders' group (parent cabinet) or parent volunteer program to align available parent partners with school needs. In this role, the FRC may play a central role in supporting parent involvement in the School Site Council or in developing a formal Parent Teacher Organization.

It is important to note that while FRCs can play an important role in reaching out to families, providing family support services is not a substitute for ensuring that partnerships are built between teachers and families. Successful teacher-family partnerships require training and support for teachers as well as families. (See [chapter on Family Engagement](#).)



Districts and FRCs build a centralized information system and evaluation process.

As both a district and school partner, the FRC plays a central role in building the information and evaluation systems behind comprehensive student and family supports. By using one centralized system aligned with the school district's, the FRC can receive and track referrals, provide timely status updates to the referrer, observe trends and patterns over time, and help bring in additional resources to address major issues. By tracking information across multiple sites through one centralized system, the FRC can help continuously monitor the needs of the community and work with schools to accommodate changing priorities.

For individual case management, systems and processes should be in place to protect privacy. The agreed upon protocols should be documented formally in an MOU between the district and the FRC. That said, the FRC has important information to contribute to teams using aggregate data for school improvement and student support systems-building.



FRCs have a strong presence on school sites.

A typical FRC operates as a standalone non-profit agency, serving a whole community with multiple points of access, or 'satellite sites'. When a district collaborates with its local FRC, schools make excellent places to reach families early. An FRC can be housed directly on a school site either full or part-time. Alternatively, it can deliver most programs and services off-campus with FRC personnel visiting the school site regularly for team meetings, programs, and events. Either way, an investment in systems-building and coordination is critical to achieving full integration and effectiveness. School districts often co-fund a position with the FRC specifically to provide coordination.



PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS SUPPORT PROGRESS ON THE LCFF PRIORITIES

Throughout California, school districts partnering with Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are demonstrating positive impacts for students, parents, teachers, and staff. These improvements map directly to the areas the state has identified as priorities for which schools are accountable under the LCFF funding system.



Student Achievement

FRCs can help remove barriers to learning and boost student achievement. This includes linking families to pre-K and school readiness programs, helping students get all appropriate vaccinations and medical check-ups, offering tutoring and afterschool enrichment, and helping families access adequate school supplies.



Student Engagement

FRCs help students and their families feel more connected with their school community. Early interventions with parents such as home visits and parent meetings, participation on School Attendance Review Teams (and the School Attendance Review Board), facilitating positive behavior programs, and offering an array of engaging enrichment activities help to build a sense of safety and connectedness.



School Climate

FRCs can help improve school climate with strengths-based approaches to student and family support. This includes offering on-site counseling and clinics, participating in Student Success Teams and IEP meetings, School Safety Committees, and other educational and support activities that can help address issues long before disciplinary action is necessary.



Parent Involvement

FRCs help schools reach out to families and create a welcoming place, offering parent education activities such as ESL and computer classes, translation and mentoring at school meetings, engaging parents as volunteers by facilitating a parent cabinet or peer support group, and participating in family engagement planning and improvement teams.



FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

By partnering with Family Resource Centers, school districts can readily access a multitude of existing community services and resources, rather than pay to replicate them. To ensure full integration of the FRC into its schools, the district should invest in a staff position charged with coordinating the efforts of the FRC, the district, and the schools.

The district can also make a leveraged contribution to the partnership by funding or co-funding positions at school sites specifically to provide coordination between school and center staffs – e.g. to run CARE Teams and COSTs, to support and organize the work of School Site Councils, lead family engagement action teams, plan and provide parent education classes, and reach out to families regarding student attendance and other concerns.

In short, a district can make a relatively modest investment of LCFF funds to pay for staff charged with coordination and in turn gain access to a wealth of resources for its students and families.

School District Investment

Before committing LCFF funds to services or coordinating positions, the district should fully leverage available funding streams, including:

- Title I funds
- School-based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA)
- LEA Billing Option (Medi-Cal) (this is the Medi-Cal Collaborative)
- Grants, such as Safe and Supportive Schools and School Safety and Violence Prevention.

When putting together a financing strategy for these staff positions, braiding funding and reducing redundancy in roles are key. As an example, FRCs are already set up to assist families experiencing homelessness. Rather than duplicating these efforts, school districts can use their McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance funds to help pay for a staff position responsible for coordinating the efforts of the district - FRC partnership.

Finally, schools can provide space for the FRC, either by dedicating office space on a part-time basis or full-time for more seamless integration.

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Partner Agency Contributions

Partnerships are central to the way FRCs are funded and operate. Many FRCs function as a standalone non-profit agency, while others work with a fiscal sponsor. They coordinate delivery of an array of direct services, including those provided by other government agencies or community-based organizations – opening access to important public resources, such as Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, CalFresh (Food Stamps), childcare, and early education programs. Funding sources that the district is tapping into by partnering with an FRC may include:

- First 5
- County funding streams related to community health
- Mental health programs for prevention and early intervention, including Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)
- Targeted Case Management (TCM)
- Child welfare programs
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and other city funding

Additional Fundraising Potential

A well-articulated partnership between a school district and its local FRC makes a compelling case for potential impact when pursuing grants for funding both operations and programming. Most communities have local organizations (such as child abuse prevention councils) and private foundations which provide grant opportunities, champions, and other resources.

PARTNERING WITH FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS: GETTING STARTED

Districts interested in developing a high impact partnership with a Family Resource Center should begin by assessing their current needs and community assets. Sharing resources and data with your local FRC is key to the success of this partnership, which can have a significant impact for students who may be struggling. Below are a list of questions and a brief roadmap to help you get started.

Critical Questions:

- ? Are there Family Resource Centers in our city or near our schools?
- ? Are there Family Resource Centers already working on our school sites? Can the work of the FRC(s) and our schools be better coordinated?
- ? What structures need to be in place to ensure a connection between our teachers, school staff, and the FRC?
- ? Are our existing FRC partners involved in designing systems and improvement processes as well as implementing programs and services to ensure all student needs are met?
- ? How do we best measure success together?



Roadmap of Tasks Ahead:

- ➔ Research and get to know the existing centers in your district or city. Reach out to [California Family Resource Association \(CFRA\)](#), your County Office of Education, and your county's First 5 Commission to learn about local collaborative and family support programs.
- ➔ Create a planning team including district staff and FRC leadership, and incorporate input from community partners, parents, and students to set a shared vision and goals.
- ➔ Identify champions and survey the community for needs and assets.
- ➔ Identify local neighborhood and community partners, healthcare providers, food banks, county health and human services, mental health services, youth programs, faith-based resources, etc. NOTE: Your FRC is likely to have connections with these entities already.
- ➔ Explore potential staffing and structure. Consider whether on-campus space could be made available for full centers or satellite sites. Consider whether the district might co-fund a position dedicated to linking the school community to the Family Resource Center.
- ➔ Agree on organizational practices for referrals, communication, parent outreach, etc.
- ➔ Develop a concrete action plan and training for teachers and staff about how to utilize and coordinate with the FRC.
- ➔ Refer to [Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support](#) for training and tools to track the continuum of quality elements identified by the [California Network of Family Strengthening Networks](#): family centered, family-strengthening, community-building, embracing diversity, and evaluation.

CONCLUSION

An intentional collaboration between a school district and its Family Resource Center can open access to a comprehensive and coordinated array of resources and supports for students and their families. To avoid duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources, school districts should pursue a working relationship with their FRC before attempting to build support systems on their own. If the district determines that its community is not already being served by an FRC, the district can establish a new center. (See Additional Resources for more information about establishing a district-run FRC.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ For support in establishing or enhancing your relationship with a Family Resource Center, contact the California Family Resource Association (CFRA) at www.californiafamilyresource.org.
- ▶ If there are no Family Resource Centers in your community, [CFRA](#) can help you with information about basic infrastructure and financing, and connect you with other school districts that run their own centers.
- ▶ For more information on Care Teams and how they work, see *The Care Team Approach: A Problem-Solving Process for Effective School Change*, published by the National Catholic Charities Association, 2008.
- ▶ For more information about COST, see the presentation developed by the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities: [Introduction to COST: Building Communities of Care](#)



ENDNOTES

1. Sandstrom, Heather and Huerta, Sandra. "The Negative Effects of Instability on Child Development: A Research Synthesis." *Low-Income Working Families: Discussion Paper 3*. Urban Institute, September 2013.

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CHAPTER CO-AUTHORS:



California Family
Resource Association

The information in this chapter was primarily provided by the California Family Resource Association (CFRA). CFRA is a statewide membership association of over 300 organizations that serve children and families. CFRA supports capacity building of its members to impact policy change, partner with local government and community allies, and achieve sustainability.

www.californiafamilyresource.org



**PARTNERSHIP FOR
CHILDREN & YOUTH**

The Partnership for Children & Youth works to ensure that California's most underserved children and youth have access to high quality educational opportunities that prepare them for a successful future by bridging school districts, community organizations, and government agencies, helping them to attain the skills, resources, and partnerships needed to effectively serve low-income children and youth.

www.partnerforchildren.org

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Student Supports: Getting the Most out of Your LCFF Investment:
www.cacommunityschools.org

An initiative of the Partnership for Children and Youth and its partners, the California Community Schools Network is an informal group of community members, educators, and policymakers working together to share information and think comprehensively about supporting California's students.

