District Launching Community Schools to Better Meet Needs of Students and Their Families

Fresno Unified has begun transitioning five of its highest-needs schools into community schools, neighborhood hubs where families can access a wide range of services to help students thrive academically and emotionally. The schools are Birney, Holland, Norseman and Thomas elementary schools and Fort Miller Middle School.

The overarching goals of the community schools strategy are to improve students’ academic achievement and social-emotional well-being; help parents and family members to better support their students in all areas; help teachers, staff and administrators to better address the needs of students; and enhance and expand opportunities beyond the regular school day to reinforce learning and target specific student needs.

Fresno Unified received a $7.1 million grant from the California Community Schools Partnership Program to be used over the next five years to serve students’ needs beyond the classroom at the five selected schools. The district will invite additional schools to apply for the next round of grant funding.

The five schools are in federally designated geographic areas that contain some of the most impoverished communities in the nation. Neighborhoods surrounding the five schools also score in the bottom 1% of a Fresno County health dashboard; most of the students at the schools score
significantly below grade level in math and English language arts; and students at the schools have poor behavioral outcomes, including high suspension rates and chronic absenteeism double the state average.

Community schools will have advisory councils made up of teachers, parents, community members, students and community-based organizations that collaborate alongside school leadership to make decisions to improve student outcomes.

“We want our community schools to be vibrant focal points for their neighborhoods, a one-stop hub where families can access academic, physical, social-emotional and mental health supports. These schools will have true partnerships with their families,” said Superintendent Bob Nelson.

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