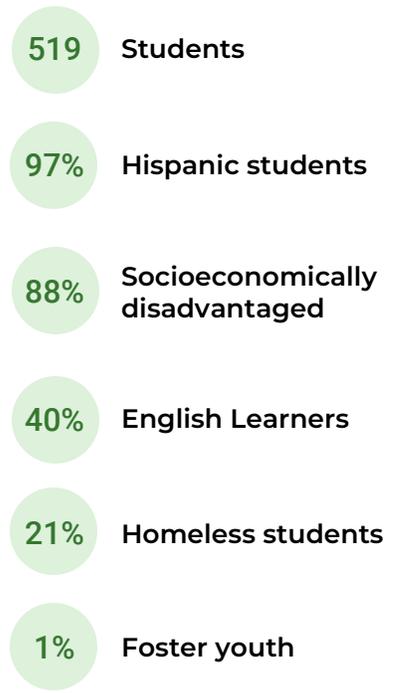




Scholarship Prep

In 2020, the Scholarship Prep received a two-year California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) grant, funded through Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, for its charter school site in Santa Ana. In the 2021–22 school year, Scholarship Prep Santa Ana (SPSA) served 519 students in kindergarten through grade eight (K–8).¹ The student body was majority Hispanic (97%) and socioeconomically disadvantaged (88%), with over one-third classified as English language learners (40%). SPSA provides an enrollment preference for homeless and foster youth; one-fifth of students were classified as homeless (21%) and a small percentage were foster youth (1%).

This case study, which aims to highlight progress made through the ESSER-funded CCSPP grant, focuses on data collected through a single-day site visit and relevant documentation. As part of the site visit, WestEd conducted focus groups with the following community school partners: school leadership, staff in community and family engagement roles, behavioral health providers, and teachers. SPSA is a fairly new school, opening in 2016. The ESSER-funded CCSPP grant enabled the school to bolster *integrated student supports and practices* by expanding its existing resource offerings and case management services to students and families, as well as enhancing its trauma-informed practices and social and emotional learning (SEL) programming. Although this case study brief organizes activities based on the Community Schools pillar most aligned with the work, it is important to acknowledge that in many cases, a single activity could support progress under multiple pillars.



Integrated Student Supports



Resource Centers

SPSA has a strong focus on building trust with families and maintaining consistent support in a judgment-free way. SPSA publicizes the availability of resources throughout the year, from enrollment and welcome-back packets to the principal’s weekly newsletter, and has a Family Resource Center on campus with clothing and food on hand for students and families. With CCSPP ESSER funding, SPSA provided and maintained resource carts filled with snacks, hygiene supplies, and other materials in each classroom, leading teachers to extol the availability of these resources for their students. One teacher shared that the resource carts are empowering for students, as they are encouraged to take supplies as needed without having to ask. The ease and convenience of these items help to reduce stress for both teachers and students. Another teacher mentioned how the resources help build connections with students, “When [students] arrive late, I would say, ‘Are you hungry? You can have a snack.’ The first interaction was me helping them.”

¹ Beginning fall 2022, SPSA branched into two campuses, separating transitional kindergarten through grade three (TK–3) and grades four through eight (4–8).



Case Management

SPSA used CCSP ESSER funds to develop a partnership with Project Hope Alliance and hire a case manager dedicated to the thirty highest-need students and their families. The Director of Behavioral Health at Project Hope Alliance emphasized the strength and value of their organization’s mission aligning with that of the school. They highlighted that SPSA is strongly invested in trauma-informed practices and that everyone on campus shares the common goal of filling the gaps of educational inequity, “I’ve never seen a school like this, where the entire mission is to support the students, not just academically but behaviorally, socially, and emotionally. Also, the school trusts me and the recommendations I make [. . .] It is a group effort here.”

Project Hope Alliance provided an array of services to SPSA families, such as 24-hour crisis response, resources, and transportation. The resources provided are individualized for each student—for example, students and their families can pick out their own shoes or food items. In addition, Project Hope Alliance takes families on field trips, such as to the beach, theme parks, and public parks, to make families aware and comfortable with their regional surroundings. The case manager shared a parent’s expression of gratitude, “I feel safe with you. Thank you for exposing me to my own community and my own neighborhood.”

The case manager participates in ongoing meetings with staff to become integrated into the school culture and ensure teachers are comfortable acting as first responders. Although the case manager is focused on the highest-need cases, teachers shared that the case manager is still available to provide support for all students. The case manager makes their presence known throughout the campus, and their rapport has reduced the stigma attached with reaching out to talk or ask for help. One teacher spoke about how the case manager has helped strengthen teacher-parent relationships by serving as a neutral observer of student behavior.

Having an additional staff member dedicated to the highest-need families also freed up time and resources for the Coordinator of Student Services to serve more students. The Coordinator of Student Services provides regular check-ins, on a daily to monthly basis depending on need, with the families of students who are homeless or in foster care. The Coordinator of Student Services works in conjunction with all SPSA staff to build a culture of care at the school.

Both the case manager and the Coordinator of Student Services described the importance of making warm handoffs for families when referring to other agencies. The staff member will make the first contact with community agencies to gather details about service offerings, eligibility requirements, and individual contact information. They then empower the families to reach out to the agencies on their own but provide additional help when needed. The Coordinator of Student Services shared, “I don’t want to be like 211. I want to make sure I know who the organization is, if it will benefit them, also making sure they know what the right questions are to ask, making sure they have educated themselves.”

“
The biggest change I’ve seen is the connections we build with the families, students, and the community; it’s not just the exceptional teachers. It’s every teacher here. When that’s happening year after year, then you’ve created the change, you get the buy-in, it’s just understanding that the teachers care. The school is here to help and support. People aren’t always comfortable asking for help but once they see that is what we do and it’s the norm, then you can actually provide it for more families and people in our community.
 ”

Teacher



Trauma-Informed Training and Practices

All staff at SPSA receive trauma-informed trainings on a consistent basis. Trauma-informed training is provided during the staff onboarding process and on a monthly basis, with dedicated topics for classified and certificated staff. Topics include adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), self-management, and the neuroscience behind trauma. Teachers, school leadership, and community partners all expressed that trauma-informed practices have become integrated into daily practices at SPSA. The ESSER-funded CCSPP grant allowed SPSA to extend its school hours, which enabled students to spend more time in a safe space during the day. Leadership believes that student outcomes have been positively impacted by the expanded trauma-informed practices, “A couple of data points have been impactful—fewer office referrals and suspensions. We also found a higher sense of belonging among staff and students and we think the trauma-informed training has a lot to do with that.”

Trauma-informed training includes presentations as well as several activities for staff. Staff have identified a bank of over a dozen potential scenarios that they practice acting out. As part of self-awareness, teachers were asked to develop and share an identity autobiography. This process aimed to promote self-healing and foster a collaborative support system among staff. A teacher shared, “The trauma professional development helped me reshape my thinking [. . .] I’ve tried to apply it to every part of my teaching. It helps to reframe our thoughts and look at things as an opportunity, not just a struggle.” Staff also shared that the trainings have impacted their approach to working with students and families. A teacher further emphasized, “I think parents can also sense that we care about our kids beyond what we provide in the classroom with the snacks and relationships. ‘This teacher is treating my child with love and respect and care. [. . .] We’re a team, I’m okay talking with the teacher about what is going on.’ That is our goal: we want our families and communities and us to work together to support the students.”



SEL

CCSPP ESSER funding also enabled SPSA to integrate new SEL programs and practices into the school day such as threshold

greetings, morning meetings, and the *Move This World* and *Sown to Grow* platforms. *Sown to Grow* is a resource for students to share their emotional well-being through rotating prompts. It serves as a universal screener to help staff proactively support students in need. *Move This World* is a platform with an SEL curriculum aligned to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) wheel that incorporates interactive videos, movement, and creative expression. Teachers shared that the *Move This World* videos are helpful to see how activities are presented and to hear different ways of speaking to students. Students learn a broad vocabulary for describing their emotions and how to advocate for themselves. Students are then able to communicate their emotions and needs more effectively, such as when they are having difficulty in academic subjects. Teachers reported that students are even taking the strategies home to teach to their parents.

Teachers underscored the effectiveness of SPSA’s cultural norm of sharing challenges and effective strategies used collaboratively among staff related to SEL. They highlighted the value of maintaining consistency in providing SEL supports. One teacher reiterated, “Stick with it because you’re not going to see those results in week one. This has been years in the making. For years we’ve been implementing this and living and breathing SEL, especially since the pandemic. It’s gotten to where we are because we’ve stuck with it.”

“**It’s hard to be willing to give up instructional time for academics, but it ends being more rewarding in the end. ‘But I could be doing math review in that 30 minutes.’ But once you can, let that go and set aside the time for SEL because these kids need it. If their needs aren’t met and they can’t communicate, you’re not going to be reaching them academically anyway.**”

Teacher