

A Snapshot of Complementary Learning Systems

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Introduction

Complementary learning systems (CLS) are systems of education that benefit both learners and their communities through integrated and holistic programming. Two essential principles define CLS. First, CLS offers both school and nonschool supports to learners and their families; and second, these supports complement one another (Weiss et al. 2005, 2–3). Research has shown that most complementary learning programs that successfully prepare learners for higher education include similar types of support. These supports, identified by Bouffard, Goss, and Weiss (2008,4), *include*:

- *Effective schools*
- *Supportive families and opportunities for family engagement*
- *Early childhood programs*
- *Out-of-school time activities*
- *Health and social services*
- *Community-based institutions*
- *Colleges and universities*

Potential for Complementary Learning

The research on CLS has clearly demonstrated that complementary programs are more effective in achieving positive learner outcomes than programs that operate independently of each other (see web.multco.us/sun, www.alignmentnashville.org, and www.hcz.org/our-results). Complementary learning responds comprehensively to multiple learner needs through a cohesive, community-centered network of programs that are tailored to address the specific needs faced by learners in different communities. Forming a comprehensive network of programs that encourages active participation and fosters the creation of educational opportunities by learners and communities is optimal because it allows learners to build on the synergistic benefits from multiple services in their network.

Complementary Learning and Kamehameha Schools

Kamehameha Schools' Ka Pua Initiative is an example of a CLS approach in formation. More broadly, Kamehameha Schools offers a wide range of campus and community programs that serve both Hawaiian learners and their families. The Ka Pua Initiative is aimed at collectively promoting a healthy and vibrant Native Hawaiian community through education (see: www.ksbe.edu/kapua/about). The initiative provides a framework for realizing this goal using a CLS approach. In the case of Ka Pua, this means comprehensively linking partnerships and collaborations such as social, health, and education services together within a P–20 continuum stretching from cradle to career (Kamehameha Schools 2010). “We believe that by building the strength of community schools and other educational providers, we not only serve Hawaiian families, but we also help lift the entire level of education and well-being for the community. That’s what our Ka Pua Initiative is all about” (Dee Jay Mailer as quoted in Kamehameha Schools 2010).

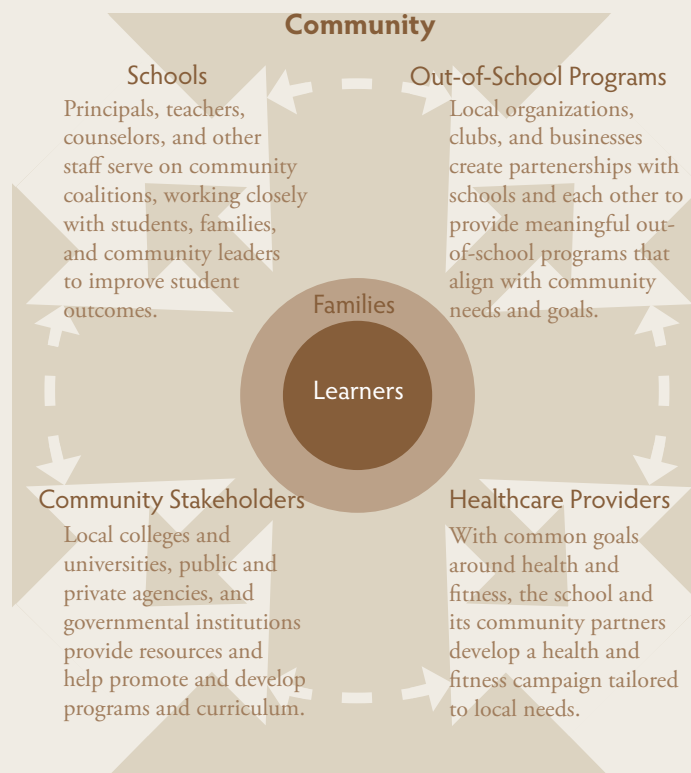


Figure 1. An illustrated example of a CLS based on Bouffard et al. (2008)

Ensuring Success

Research have shown that there are certain factors which contribute to the success of CLS. Supports such as early childhood education, family support and involvement at home and in school, and after school programs are fundamental to CLS (Weiss et al. 2005, 2). In addition, Bouffard, Goss, and Weiss (2008, 4) state that specific practices ensure that multiple complementary programs operate in synchrony. These practices *include*:

- *Establishing strong leadership*
- *Leveraging existing efforts, resources, and partnerships*
- *Engaging families*
- *Building communication within initiatives*
- *Learning from and building on research and evaluation*

Sources

1. Bouffard, S., C. B. Goss, and H. Weiss. 2008. Complementary learning: Emerging strategies, evolving ideas—Harvard Family Research Project.
2. Kamehameha Schools. 2010. About Ka Pua. <http://www.ksbe.edu/kapua/about>
3. Weiss, H. B., J. Coffman, M. Post, S. Bouffard, and P. Little. 2005. Beyond the classroom: complementary learning to improve achievement outcomes. *The Evaluation Exchange* XI (1).
4. See also: *An overview of complementary learning systems or Comprehensive/complementary education systems* (www.ksbe.edu/spi/reports).