

# LEVERAGING COMMUNITY SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS TO BOOST STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

In May 2024, the Biden-Harris Administration held its [Every Day Counts Summit](#), focused on evidence-based strategies to improve student attendance and engagement, including: increasing effective communication with families, making schools more engaging for students, and meeting students' needs by investing in community schools. Building on this work, this resource highlights how the U.S. Department of Education's (Department's) [Full-Service Community Schools](#) (FSCS) program can be leveraged as a whole child, place-based strategy to improve student attendance, engagement, and success.

## Chronic Absenteeism and Community Schools

One of the many negative impacts of chronic absenteeism is student achievement. Students who are chronically absent are [much less likely](#) to read at grade level and graduate high school. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of chronically absent students [nearly doubled](#) to more than 14 million students nationwide. External reports on the [2022-23](#) and [2023-24](#) school years indicate these rates remain high for all students, and disproportionately impact students of color, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness.

The Administration is taking action to promote regular school attendance, including making record level investments in the FSCS program, which provides funding to eligible entities to establish or expand community schools at the State, regional, or local level. Community schools collaborate with local nonprofits, health providers, private partners, and other agencies to coordinate and deliver services, such as health care, mental health supports, nutrition services, afterschool and summer programming, and high-quality early learning programs. These partnerships create expanded learning opportunities and [integrated systems of support](#), where schools target supports, connect students with tutoring, mentoring, and physical and mental health services and other resources—which can help [improve attendance](#), achievement, and overall well-being

The Administration has worked with Congress to secure a five-fold increase in funding for the FSCS program (from \$25 million in fiscal year (FY) 2020 to \$150 million in FY 2024) to expand community schools into more communities. Since 2020, the total number of FSCS grantees has more than doubled, from 42 grantees to 105 active grantees in 2024. This funding is at work in communities across the nation to support more than 2,000 community schools across the United States.

## Reasons Students Miss School

Chronic absence is a multi-faceted challenge. There are four main reasons why students may consistently miss school:

1. *Barriers to Attendance*: illness, trauma, poor transportation, food insecurity, housing instability, community violence.
2. *Aversion*: struggling academically, unwelcoming school climate and/or disciplinary practices, social and peer challenges.

3. *Disengagement*: boredom; disinterest; and/or lack of academic supports, challenging instruction, or meaningful relationships at school.
4. *Misconceptions*: for example, students and parents may assume missing two days per month does not impact learning.

### **Leveraging Community Schools as a Strategy to Reduce Chronic Absence**

Research shows community schools as a promising approach to increase attendance in schools. [A RAND Corporation evaluation](#) of the New York City Community Schools Initiative and a [review of 143 studies](#) indicate that community schools can increase attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism, decrease suspensions, improve school climate and academic achievement, lead to higher graduation rates, and improve peer and adult relationships. These studies also provide evidence that community schools can help to close achievement gaps for students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities. U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona recently lifted up this research in a March 2024 [Dear Colleague letter](#) to Chief State School Officers, encouraging them to pursue FSCS grants to improve regular school attendance.

### **Examples of Community School Programs Working to Address Chronic Absence**

[New York City's Community Schools Initiative \(NYC-CS\)](#) launched in 2014. The RAND Corporation evaluated the impacts of NYC-CS throughout the 2017-18 school year and found a myriad of positive results, including improved attendance for all students in all grades throughout three years of the study. NYC-CS implemented services across all four pillars of community schools. For example, NYC-CS offered mental health, vision services, mentoring, and other services for youth experiencing homelessness. As a result of this robust implementation of community schools, between 2014 and 2018, chronic absenteeism fell by around 10 percent for elementary, middle, and high school students. More recently, New York City invested \$10 million in American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds to expand the number of community schools from [266 to 406](#) sites.

[Albuquerque Public Schools, Las Cruces Public Schools, and Santa Fe Public Schools](#) in New Mexico are implementing a community school strategy and are having success. A study by the State's legislative education committee of community schools that had been in existence for at least five years noted that many of these schools had higher attendance rates and provided more opportunities for their students to learn than schools that were not using the community school model. Albuquerque and Las Cruces are continuing to build on their impact through federal [FSCS grants](#).

[Buena Vista Horace Mann Community School](#) in San Francisco reduced chronic absenteeism by eight percentage points from the 2021-22 to 2022-23 school years. The school achieved these results by providing comprehensive supports to a predominantly Latino student body facing significant obstacles to learning, including students experiencing homelessness. The school's supports include mental health services, tutoring, afterschool programs, and housing programs. These services helped the school outpace similar improvements in attendance by other non-

community schools at the State and city levels and [increased test scores](#). Buena Vista Horace Mann Community School is supported by a federal [Promise Neighborhood grant](#).

## **Resources to Support Implementation of Full-Service Community Schools and Improve Attendance**

[\*Federal Resources to Support Community Schools Toolkit\*](#) – The Administration released this resource in January 2023, highlighting how federal programs can support the implementation of the four pillars of community schools. The toolkit also includes information for potential grantees on how they can apply and access technical assistance.

[\*National Partnership for Student Success\*](#) – The NPSS is a research-based, locally driven public-private partnership between the Department, AmeriCorps, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University that helps schools, districts, nonprofits, and State and local governments create, expand, and improve programs that support the academic recovery, mental health, and overall well-being of students.

[\*National Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center\*](#) – This center is run out of the Department and focuses on disseminating evidence-based practices and building and facilitating communities of practice to help students attend school every day, be engaged in school, and succeed academically. The Center’s website offers webinars from national leaders and resources to implement early warning systems, implement student supports, and incorporate success mentors into schools.

[\*Attendance Playbook: Smart Solutions for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the Covid Era\*](#) – This playbook from FutureEd and Attendance Works describes strategies to improve attendance, including Tier I strategies for schoolwide prevention, Tier II strategies that provide targeted support for small groups of students, and Tier III strategies that focus on intensive support for individual students.

[\*The Power of Community Schools to Reduce Chronic Absence\*](#) – The National Center for Community Schools has many resources on how to implement community schools, including this webinar showing how they can be used as a tool for improving attendance.

[\*Advancing Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence: Community Schools\*](#) – This webpage from Attendance Works documents four case studies from New York City, NY; Baltimore, MD; Grand Rapids, MI; and Oakland, CA, showing how they used community schools to track and improve attendance.

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