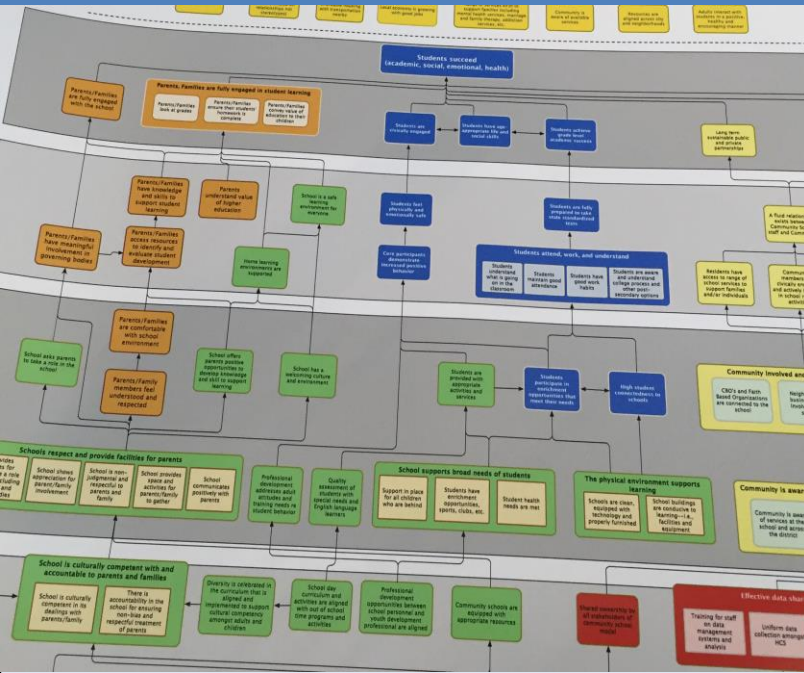


# Paterson Public Schools Full Service Community Schools Evaluation Report 2021-2022

## Final Report



### AUTHORS

*Helène Clark, Peter Metsopoulos, Misra Iltus*

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## Executive Summary

This is a final report of the evaluation conducted by ActKnowledge of a Federal Full Service Community Schools Grant received by the Paterson Public School District for year school year 2021 -2022. The year saw a major transition as students returned to in-school learning after a year of online learning during the pandemic shutdown. School 2, and JFK High School are the focus of the evaluation funding. However, the role of Paterson's full service community school program in all its community schools was tested as they confronted the trauma, loss, fear, anxiety and learning loss from lockdown. While learning loss and restoring performance levels was paramount in everyone's minds, the community school leadership and staff saw firsthand that students could not learn if they were experiencing trauma, had behavioral issues, severe anxiety and poor attendance.

With many emotional/social issues, family losses, and learning loss from Covid, the role of the community school and its outreach, services, and care became sharply apparent. Community schools around the country had a chance to demonstrate that they are needed in order for students to have the stability, health and engagement to learn.

We have used an approach to planning and evaluation called "Theory of Change" with Paterson Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) for many years, as we and others around the country recognized the importance of having clear goals and understanding the context, constraints and opportunities that influence the designing of interventions to meet goals.

The Theory of Change for Paterson schools, as for most schools, has always had a long-term goal of good academic achievement. This means grades, graduation, successful transition to the next level of school, and ultimately good post high school choices and opportunities for further education or good jobs. What the community school movement has always understood is that these goals are only attainable if students attend school, are engaged in learning, can understand the language, and have a school and teaching environment that supports them. But more is needed. In under-resourced neighborhoods, students live in families that may be working several jobs, have health issues, and other stresses. Students need to have enough to eat, opportunities to do homework, and be safe from violence in their neighborhood or sometimes even at home. Community schools provide services that strive to achieve good health and stability for students. Paterson has excellent health services, and social workers and behavioral specialists, plus parent coordinators and other support staff.

In Theory of Change terms, Paterson community schools have long recognized that health, stability, and support for behavioral issues, trauma and anxiety are necessary prerequisites to

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being able to learn. At no time since the start of the community school movement have these supports been more needed than during and post lockdown.

This year, FSCS staff and leadership have changed their main focus to helping students and families readjust to being back in school and dealing with trauma. They are as concerned as ever with academic achievement, but with students having fallen behind during the online learning year, providing the necessary prerequisites to learning is more important than ever.

In fact, after two years of suspending testing, June 2022 reinstated reading and math tests. We found that students showed significant decline in both reading and math from the 2019 tests; the last given. This is in addition to the large number of students who already were not at their grade level.

Across the board, our interviews and site visits resounded with the overwhelming need students had to deal with issues at home and issues with being back in school. Students reported being very happy to be back, but readjustment in this first year has been difficult for many. Community school coordinators have increased their programs and staff to work on trauma and behavior issues.

We observed and were made aware of an increase in services for students and families. The toll on community school staff was significant as well, as they were inundated with students needing help.

An ongoing and increasing problem is a mismatch between goals and resources, and between the goals and the communication and policies of the Paterson School District. The district has performance measure targets, but very little of a means to meet the targets. This is, of course, in part due to lack of resources, not lack of will. Nonetheless, communication between FSCS and the district has not led to a joint “Theory” - or doable plan to meet specific goals – between the two entities.

As the federal FSCS funding comes to a close in June 2023, we strongly recombined a long-term plan for both sustainability and joint planning with the district.

## 1. Introduction

In the midst of school shutdowns in March of 2020 as the Covid pandemic began to rage, concerns about the educational impact on students were background noise compared to the nation's fears for the health of its citizens, young and old. With the federal government taking a passive stance with regard to balancing schooling vs. adults working vs. everyone exercising a 'freedom' to continue visiting their local bar and salon, schools and parents decided to protect our youngest the only way they felt they could reliably discern: keep them on lockdown. Full service Community Schools, have helped to support students, families, and learning throughout the pandemic. This past year, as the nation passed the second anniversary of those days and then, last fall, saw an almost complete return to the classroom with very few mandated health restrictions, the nation's public schools began to get a clearer view of the cost of it all in lost learning and other challenges that will require innovative strategies and deep-pocketed resources to even begin to address.

During and after the first stumbling transition from in-person schooling to the first attempts at fully online learning—and then the hybrid school year of 2020-21, there were some educational scholars who saw this tragedy as a possible way for education to “emerge stronger than before COVID-19”. The Brookings Institute [report](#) published in September of 2020 noted that the silver lining of the pandemic might be that we had a renewed understanding of the importance of public schooling—for its “caretaking,” its developmental support of “students’ well-being”, and its structurally central role as a location and a mechanism for “for delivering essential services from food to education to health care.” With this newly and nearly universal understanding of schools’ importance in every person’s life, the report argues for grabbing the “opportunity to leapfrog toward powered-up schools”:

A powered-up school could be one that puts a strong public school at the center of a community and leverages the most effective partnerships, including those that have emerged during COVID-19, to help learners grow and develop a broad range of competencies and skills in and out of school. For example, such a school would crowd in supports, including technology, that would allow for allies in the community from parents to employers to reinforce, complement, and bring to life learning experiences in and outside the classroom. It would recognize and adapt to the learning that takes place beyond its walls, regularly assessing students’ skills and tailoring learning opportunities to meet students at their skill level. These new allies in children’s learning would complement and support teachers and could support children’s healthy mental and physical development. It quite literally is the school at the center of the community that powers student learning and development using every path possible.

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This notion of the school being “at the center of the community” is complementary to the way a Community School operates. The community schools model, first defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), seeks to draw together the elements of communities needed for the widest range of students possible to thrive and uses schools as the point of coordination for those services.

By the summer of 2021, nearly a year later, as McKinsey noted “rising vaccination rates, outdoor in-person graduations, and access to at least some in-person learning for 98 percent of students” but was also reporting:

The impact of the pandemic on K–12 student learning was significant, leaving students on average five months behind in mathematics and four months behind in reading by the end of the school year. The pandemic widened preexisting opportunity and achievement gaps, hitting historically disadvantaged students hardest. In math, students in majority Black schools ended the year with six months of unfinished learning, students in low-income schools with seven. High schoolers have become more likely to drop out of school, and high school seniors, especially those from low-income families, are less likely to go on to post-secondary education. And the crisis had an impact on not just academics but also the broader health and well-being of students, with more than 35 percent of parents very or extremely concerned about their children’s mental health.

One more year later—two years after the start of that first full pandemic school year when, as just one example Brookings noted in 2020, “more than 1 million children did not enroll in local schools,” there has been no national leapfrogging, no national movement toward “powered up” schools. Rather, schools have become political scapegoats for a culture war, teachers have left the profession in droves, and the state of education is often seen as more precarious than ever.

The Washington Times reported that “Thomas Kane, of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University, told NPR this year that students in high-poverty areas missed the equivalent of 22 weeks of in-person math instruction during the 2020-2021 school year versus about 13 weeks for students in low-poverty areas, who tended to return to physical classrooms sooner.” At the same time, after this first full pandemic school year, the National Center for Educational Statistics data shows that the return to physical classrooms has not been smooth; students’ behavioral development has been affected by COVID:

Specifically, respondents attributed increased incidents of classroom disruptions from student misconduct (56 percent), rowdiness outside of the classroom (49 percent), acts of disrespect towards teachers and staff (48 percent), and prohibited

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use of electronic devices (42 percent) to the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects.

Students thrive in an environment with effective social, emotional, and behavioral support,” said NCES Commissioner Peggy G. Carr. “So when we see 72 percent of our public schools report an increase in chronic absenteeism among our students, it poses an opportunity for education leaders to act quickly using tested approaches that work. It is our responsibility at NCES to disseminate data describing the severity of the situation.

In addition to student behavior in school, school leaders were asked about student chronic absenteeism—defined as those missing at least 10 percent of the school year. School leaders reported increased student absenteeism as a COVID-19-related problem consistently across a wide range of school types, including in elementary schools (75 percent), schools with lower student poverty rates (73 percent), and rural schools (71 percent).

Additionally, problems that stemmed from teachers being absent more often were exacerbated by the fact that 77 percent of public schools also reported that finding substitute teachers has become more difficult during the pandemic. Compared to the 2020–21 school year, 61 percent of public schools reported that finding substitute teachers is difficult.

As schools endeavored to take those 2020-2021 (along with the 2021-2022) school year experiences into account, the fall of 2022 has been another proving ground for public schools. In New Jersey, non-profit educational news outlet The 74 Million noted in June of this year that traditional public school enrollments declined by 18,086 students from two years prior, or “1.4% over the last two years [while] the decrease from the prior two-year period was 0.02%”, which is often seen as having been driven more by declining birth rates. Interestingly, “the drop in enrollment at traditional public schools came as charter schools saw enrollment rise almost 6%, from 55,604 in October 2019 to 58,777 last October” and a larger number of families indicated they had turned toward homeschooling. Even more directly worrying, in terms of enrollment, the New York Times reported in August the fact that more than 1 million kindergarten-aged children did not enroll in school nationally since the pandemic began—and many of them were “the most vulnerable: 5 year olds in low-income neighborhoods.” The approach in New York City, as reported in September of this year, is striving to meet the facts of what’s been left unfinished in children’s education:

Data on how New York City students are faring academically has been scarce. The state has not yet released the last school year’s test results, and the city has not made public data on how

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students performed on tests it administered during the school year. But a survey of more than 100 New York City teachers found that the vast majority believe students are behind academically compared with how they fared before the pandemic. And national test results released Sept. 1 found that 9-year-olds fell far behind students who took the test in years past.

“What I’ve seen is astonishing,” said Aaron Worley, a social worker at P.S. 243 and P.S. 262 in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. “Kids in fifth grade that are struggling with their reading, their writing, their sentence comprehension — it’s alarming.”

The schools chancellor, David C. Banks, joined the mayor on Thursday at P.S. 161, the site of one of the city’s new dyslexia programs. He described the issue as a central piece of a larger challenge: “the fundamental way in which we teach our kids how to read.”

The city will begin leaning into “a really different approach to teaching reading,” he said, moving away from so-called balanced literacy methods — and emphasizing a phonetic approach.

In nearby Paterson, New Jersey, the district released data on the standardized tests taken in March of 2022—the first such tests since 2019 because of COVID. At the Paterson Board of Education meeting, Superintendent of Schools Eileen Shafer said:

Prior to March 2020, when our school buildings had to close due to the pandemic, Paterson Public Schools had established upward trends in the number of students reading at or above grade level, earning college credit eligibility on Advanced Placement exams, and meeting expectations on state assessments. The national studies that were highlighted in tonight’s presentation show that the pandemic shutdown negatively impacted students throughout the nation, and even more so in districts like ours. The good news is that for more than a year we have had intervention measures in place to help students recover from the pandemic’s impact on their learning, and we have been providing our teaching staff with professional development support, as well. The success of these measures will depend on how well all of us – staff, administrators, and parents – work together.

The presentation also detailed some of the ways that the district is taken to return the district’s schools to those same levels of success—including professional development on using data to adjust pacing in the classroom and social-emotional learning, as well as summer enrichment programs, a Saturday STEAM Academy, and an After-School Program for K-8 students.



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While some like Janice K. Jackson—who led the Chicago Public Schools until last year and is now a board member of Chiefs for Change, which represents state education and school district leaders—have called for a “Marshall Plan” similar to the American plan and massive funding that helped to rebuild Europe after World War II, others like Martin West, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a member of the National Assessment Governing Board that oversees the test that found the unfinished learning in 9 year-olds, say there is no “silver bullet [...] beyond finding a way to increase instructional time.” There are, then, basic solutions that will be tremendously challenging to enact, and what seems like massive funding may not even be close to enough. The Times goes on to note that “The federal government has budgeted \$122 billion to help students recover, the largest single investment in American schools, and at least 20 percent of that money must be spent on academic catch-up. Yet some schools have had difficulty hiring teachers, let alone tutors, and others may need to spend far more than 20 percent of their money to close big gaps.”

Experts like Dr. West have pointed out that “low-performing students simply needed to spend more time learning, whether it was in the form of tutoring, extended school days or summer school,” and some schools that have seen promising results have done so by leaning into tutoring—and by betting on the school day as the only sure-fire block of time that students will be in school. In Meriden, Connecticut, a new math protocol introduced at one school over the past few years seeks to squeeze every moment of instructional time out of class time.

District officials had repurposed a half-hour meant for extra help on various subjects — either from teachers or through work sheets — and put that time into math.

[Instead of teachers approaching math in their own way] Up and down the hallways at Franklin, math is now taught the same way: a short lesson, followed by group work. For 15 or 20 minutes, the teacher meets with some students, while others work in their own groups. Students who need extra help go with tutors, some of whom were paid for with federal pandemic relief funds.

At the ding of a chime or buzzer, students rotate.

The results have been promising, with Meriden students performing on par with the state average for proficiency in math despite per pupil funding that lags near the lowest compared to other districts in the state because funding is tied to property values. At the same time, any gains are hard to pin on a single initiative. Franklin is a smaller school, and Meriden returned students to in-person learning in 2020—these factors muddy the ability to set a single path forward.

At a time when the conversation about solving the conundrum of unfinished learning is, in part, about a renewed sense of cohesion and purpose around learning, the full-service community schools model is getting renewed attention because that sort of cohesion and purpose has

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always been at the center. Joel Knudson and Jennifer O’Day, at the American Institutes for Research and the California Collaborative on District Reform point out that community schools model what should be true for all schools:

The work of a school system should be built around a clear vision that reflects the priorities and realities of the district and its community. For example, if the district’s vision for student learning emphasizes social and emotional development alongside academics, then this integrated focus should be evident in curriculum and pedagogy, interaction patterns in classrooms and extracurricular activities, and in community partnerships.

Community schools have shown the sort of connective possibilities that were needed in the pandemic. M.D. Fox Elementary School, in Hartford Connecticut, was able to provide a food-and-necessities pantry for its families this past spring.

Lots of families were asking for help,” said LaToya Adgers, the site coordinator for the pre-K to fifth grade public school, which serves almost 500 students. “We sat down and asked families, ‘If this was on campus, would you come here? And what do you need?’”

It’s not that unusual for a school to have a food or clothes pantry for needy families. What is unusual is that Ms. Adgers works for a Hartford community services organization, the Village for Families and Children. And it was the Village that reached out to businesses and organizations to ask them to donate the goods.

The problems that educational systems are facing are, of course, affecting community schools as well. As of August, Eastpointe Community Schools in Michigan had openings for 21 teachers, six paraprofessionals and two social workers. The school is responding, in part, by forming a partnership with Northern Michigan University to use federal emergency relief funds to pay tuition for candidates to earn their teacher certification in exchange for those candidates teaching in the district for three years after they are certified. School safety and chronic absenteeism are issues that worry the school as well, but the leaders of the Eastpoint schools believe that collaboration and cooperation—central tenets of community schools—are the key to those challenges as well:

I want to create an organization where students, family and staff feel valued, respected and appreciated,” said Christina Gibson, the schools superintendent. “How do we help parents learn what they can do to be partners in their child’s learning? What can we do to provide service to our community? How can we help children to have continuity and consistency?”

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While there are several different articulations of the pillars of community schools, perhaps the most important feature is that the “community” nature of the program works both in terms of supports being delivered **to** communities and in terms of supports being defined by the specific needs **of** each community, ensuring community schools have the flexibility to be most effective **for** each community. The ESEA defines a full-service community school as “a public elementary or secondary school that:

- (a) Participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and
- (b) Provides access to such services in school to students, families, and the community, such as access during the school year (including before- and after-school hours and weekends), as well as during the summer.

As we have written previously, this model is seen as particularly effective and appropriate for those students (and their families) facing circumstances connected to poverty, and studies have shown its efficacy in those cases; with COVID, however, its applicability was seen to have a broader application, especially if education is going to remain public in the face of panicked efforts by those of means to supplement their own child’s education instead of revamping the system in their community. Certainly the pandemic showed that we are at a pivot point. The national conversation around the benefits of community schooling may be at a complementary tipping point—new federal funding for the Full-Service Community Schools grant program. The program “will award \$68 million to support community schools across the country, which will spur the planning and capacity-building, development, implementation, operation and coordination of effective services for children and families, particularly in areas with high rates of poverty. President Joe Biden asked Congress to increase funding for the FSCS program to \$468 million in his fiscal year 2023 budget.”

At the same time, strained budgets at the state and local level are a different sort of challenge. In New York City, there is an ongoing community schools funding conflict that began late May, when the City Council voted to reapportion funding more equitably for all organizations that work with schools across the five boroughs. The unintended consequence has been that community schools, which are rich in organizational partnerships, have seen deep funding cuts for the organizations that allow the schools to thrive in ways students and families need—some organizations lost nearly 50% of their funding. Ironically, the New York City community schools movement is seen as a particular success—this same new formula “also allows the city to expand the number of community schools, Caruso said. A department spokesperson said they plan to open about 100 more community schools by this fall.”

It seems the nation is seeing students, families, educators, and officials gather at the nexus of financial strain, educational challenges, and research-based approaches meant to help communities thrive. The future of our children hangs in the balance.

## **1.1 Overview of Paterson Public Schools (PPS) – Full Service Community Schools (FSCS)**

Paterson Public School District was successful in securing a Federal Full Service Community School grant in 2010, which led to the establishment of the Paterson Public Schools (PPS) – Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) initiative. The PPS FSCS initiative comprises five public schools, each of which is partnered with a lead community-based organization to plan, implement and sustain services to support the well-being and development of children, their families and the wider community. The first FSCS established under this initiative was School 5 in 2011, followed by Rev. Dr. Frank Napier School and New Roberto Clemente School in 2012, and Schools 6 and 15 in 2014.

Some schools received additional grants since the first grant in 2010. Napier in 2013, and NRC and School 6 in 2015, received School Improvement Grants (SIG). The SIG grant provides support for professional development and extended school day hours. Four schools experienced leadership change during this period with new principals appointed at Napier in 2014 and at Schools 5, 6 and NRC in 2015. Currently, School 6, School 2, School 15 and JFK have five year FSCS grants and are therefore funded for the current evaluation.

Beginning in March 2019 and extending until September 2021, the FSCS operated with online learning, a transition no one was ready to make. However, the community schools had the organization, staff commitment, understanding of their constituents and program adaptability to step in immediately to help students and parents adjust online learning. Nonetheless, they could only reach families that wanted to be reached.

This year, 2021 – 2022, brought students back to school. It was more than welcome for everyone, including students. But it brought new, urgent issues – some new and related to Covid loss and disruption and fear, and some old but amplified of instability, poverty, health care and even violence. This report is a description and interpretation of how the Paterson community schools responded to the transition in a still on-going crisis for students and families.

## **1.2 The Community School in Second Year Back to In-School Attendance**

Full-service community schools operate from a simple central concept: learning does not and cannot happen in a vacuum. Students who are hungry cannot concentrate in their classes; those who are homeless cannot do homework. Families who experience periods of food scarcity or lack electricity because of financial instabilities cannot support their children in their learning to the extent that will allow those children to thrive—and neither can families who are grappling with drug addiction, incarceration, or the threat of deportations. The community schools model, first defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), seeks to draw together the elements of communities needed for the widest range of students

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possible to thrive and uses schools as the point of coordination for those services. That adaptive responsiveness has positioned full-service community schools to be a vital part of school systems' ability to provide what much larger swaths of communities have found they need in the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding for the American Rescue Plan specifically targets community schools. Clearly, the pandemic has highlighted the systemic inequities built into our educational systems; with that starker understanding of community needs has come a complementary understanding of which programs scale best to meet the needs of the community now and, ideally, moving forward into whatever 'new normal' different segments of our society might experience in the coming years.

The full-service community school model is seen as particularly effective and appropriate for those students (and their families) facing circumstances connected to poverty. Copious studies, including the Department of Education's longitudinal evaluation of Title I schools, MDRC's look at two years of case management at 24 low-income urban schools, and the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation's study of East Allegheny, PA middle schools—have shown the model's efficacy in those circumstances. Most recently, the Department of Education noted that:

according to a 2020 RAND Corporation Study of New York City community schools (the study uses the term "community school" rather than "full-service community school"), the approach had a positive impact on student attendance in elementary, middle, and high schools and across all three years that outcomes were measured (2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018). The study also found positive and significant impacts on elementary and middle school students' on-time grade progression and suggested a reduction in disciplinary incidents for elementary and middle school students. The study found that the community schools had a positive impact on students' mathematics achievement in the final year of the study. Further, based on a comprehensive analysis of 143 studies, 6 the Learning Policy Institute concluded that well-implemented community schools lead to improvement in student and school outcomes and contribute to meeting the educational needs of struggling students in schools with high poverty rates.

With the COVID epidemic and the economic shutdown that has accompanied our national response, schools have found that the community school approaches are now needed to help an even wider spectrum of students and families—and community schools have been "particularly well-positioned to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by working closely with partner organizations to address community needs." ([DOE](#)) That need is leading schools – from the REACH Academy elementary school in the Oakland, California, Unified School District, to Peoria, Illinois, public schools, and Asheville City Schools in North Carolina—to embrace the model as a more foundational building block in terms of strategies and partnerships; the success of their efforts points the way toward a more connected and empathetic approach to how schools can coordinate and deliver the services every student and every family deserves.

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While there are several different articulations of the pillars of community schools, perhaps the most important feature is that the “community” nature of the program works both in terms of supports being delivered **to** communities and in terms of supports being defined by the specific needs **of** each community, ensuring community schools have the flexibility to be most effective **for** each community. The [ESEA defines](#) a full-service community school as “a public elementary or secondary school that:

- (a) Participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community based organizations and public and private partnerships; and
- (b) Provides access to such services in school to students, families, and the community, such as access during the school year (including before- and after-school hours and weekends), as well as during the summer.

The National Education Association (NEA) takes the further step of defining six “pillars” it feels are key: 1) strong and culturally relevant curriculum; 2) high quality teaching and learning; 3) inclusive leadership; 4) positive behavior practices (including restorative justice); 5) family and community partnerships; 6) coordinated and integrated wraparound community support services. Each of those pillars is to be keyed to the needs of the community through a community school coordinator, school stakeholder problem solving teams, and a community school stakeholder/partner committee. Using the data from a needs and assets assessment, that triad is able to understand what the students and families in their school need and then work to provide it. Those priorities might lean toward English language learning for students and for parents, college and career readiness, nutrition services, community service, social / emotional health, or supports for students who are chronically absent, suspended, or expelled—all depending on what the particular needs are.

Our children’s’ needs have been revealed in particularly stark terms over the past two years because of the COVID pandemic. The ways in which inequities have been revealed by the pandemic, in 2020, “more than 1 million children did not enroll in local schools.” Unsurprisingly, many of those children were 5-year-olds in low-income neighborhoods – some of our society’s most vulnerable members. And as the country moved toward unending Zoom meetings, the digital divide hit students of need more strikingly than at any other time: “Nearly one in five students between kindergarten and 12th grade do not have computers or speedy Web connections, according to data compiled by the Pew Research Center in 2018, the latest available, which said this “homework gap” disproportionately plagues low-income families and people of color.” The Learning Policy Institute notes that “School buildings are closed for nearly all of the country’s 50.8 million public school students, and those being hit the hardest are the nation’s most marginalized students—more than 52% in 2016–17. For these students, school closures can mean the loss not only of precious learning time but also of essential services such as meals and medical and mental health services that mitigate the stresses of poverty.” This is an inequity that might be papered over in normal times; in the COVID era, however, this has left students literally shut off from both academic instruction and social-emotional support that schools offer.

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Community schools, fortunately, have shown that their structures are scalable in the face of larger disruptions, so these approaches and partnerships may offer a more comprehensive vision for the years ahead. These schools have been able to use their coordinators and their understanding of the students, families, and staff, to build support structures to design strategies for moving instruction online, building meaningful professional development, and helping counselors reach absent students. As the pandemic and school closures have worn on, schools have been able to work toward closing the learning gaps from that lost time through multi-tiered systems of support. In addition, community schools have been working to maintain that sense of connectedness to school, whether that be in terms of helping families to get computers and internet service, finding new ways to engage parents, providing continuing counseling, or providing connections to health care. The Berea Independent School District's Full-Service Community Schools in Berea, Kentucky have provided "evidence-based interventions" to respond to students' social and emotional needs. Other schools have set up food deliveries from food pantries to families that did not have transportation, set up socially-distanced home visits, and identified families that had not reached out to teachers or logged into technology platforms.

All of these strategies build on the family information that community schools see as their most valuable resource in supporting the students and families so that learning happens. In addition, these strategies build on the belief that learning cannot happen in a vacuum—for any child—and that the strategies deployed for our most vulnerable students can work for our society at large. As a [PACE policy brief](#) from early in the pandemic reasons:

Given the extreme variability in how students and families have been affected by COVID-19, educators must be made aware that educational disparities will be inevitably exacerbated. This means that seemingly established practices of teaching—for example, assessments and grading—must be reexamined, not to prioritize standardized efficiency but to understand meaningfully the learning goals and success criteria for each student. The most responsive community schools develop "individualized learning plans" or "personalized learning plans" for each of their students—borrowing from the standard requirements for students qualifying for special education services—to identify specific learning goals with students and their families, and to use the plan to guide instruction, specialized support, partnerships, and evaluation of progress.

The American Rescue Plan's \$122b investment in K-12 school relief—which specifically allows the money to be used for community schools—shows that the current administration agrees that community schools are a model for the bumpy road ahead. In addition, the administration is calling for \$443m in next budget years for the same program. Community schools point the way toward a better future: a united and purposeful approach for all students and families to get the support they deserve.

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Public schools, according to American educational reformer Horace Mann, can be “the great equalizer”--spaces in which students from different socio-economic backgrounds encounter one another and thrive, setting each student and, subsequently, that student’s extended community, on a path toward success. The operating reality has, of course, been far short of that mark; schools are one of the many places in our society where we have seen widening inequality between those with socioeconomic resources and those without. In the Covid era, those inequalities have become more obvious and more severe, given the ways in which disadvantaged students rely on schools as a source for their food and health care, not to mention all of their educational needs; on top of that, the choice of whether and when to return to schools, along with the nature of hybrid or virtual schooling, set up a dynamic that has increased the insecurities of disadvantaged students while students of means have not suffered those losses.

Systemic evidence of this increased inequality can be seen in the workings of those companies that provide the services most needed in disadvantaged communities. Revolution Foods distributes over 2 million meals per week to public school students in 400 U.S. cities; 75% of those students qualify for free and reduced lunch programs. CEO and co-founder Kristin Richmond [says](#):

One of my biggest fears is that as systems are closed and schools are disrupted, that creates a disproportionate burden on families who are most vulnerable: workers who depend on shifts, workers who live for each paycheck. It’s all one circle because these are the parents of the kids that we’re serving in schools.

In California, the organization Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) has documented student learning losses and, therefore, growing inequities. Looking at students in language arts and math, [their study showed](#) the most significant learning lag in grades 4-6 –a lag of between 5% and 25% behind when compared to a typical year. Those figures, however, reveal even more devastating evidence of lags when they are broken down by income level: lower-income students in most grades are further behind than higher-income students—and in some grades lower-income students have fallen behind while the learning of higher-income students has accelerated. Students who are currently learning English, moreover, are showing substantially more learning lag (30%) than students who are native English speaking (10%). The impact is most certainly larger than can be measured—k-12 public school enrollment has declined by 3%-five times more than the recent pre-Covid annual rate of enrollment decline. Given what’s known about the instability of living conditions experienced by under-resourced communities, it is likely that students of need comprise a much larger part of that 3% (or 160,000 students). These findings are echoed in a nationwide [study](#) looking at data from almost every k-12 public school in the United States tracking in-person visits by students from January 2019 to December 2020: “Our findings reveal that school closures from September to December 2020 were more common in schools with lower third-grade math scores and higher shares of students from racial/ethnic minorities, who experience homelessness, have limited English proficiency and are eligible for free/reduced-price school lunches. The findings portend rising inequalities in learning outcomes.”



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Older students, meanwhile, have struggled with mental health and isolation, leading to greater disengagement and consequences:

- In [Sacramento City](#) Unified School District, 10 times more students are significantly disengaged compared to last year. And in [Los Angeles Unified](#), the number of Ds and Fs in grades 9-12 increased by 8.7 percentage points in the fall compared to the same time period last year, with greater increases among Black (23.2%) and Latino (24.9%) students.
- “There is something wonderful in being in contact with other humans, having a human who tells you, ‘It’s great to see you. How are things going at home?’” Fernando Reimers (Ford Foundation Professor of the Practice in International Education and director of Harvard GSE’s Global Education Innovation Initiative and International Education Policy Program) [said](#). “I’ve done 35 case studies of innovative practices around the world. They all prioritize social, emotional well-being. Checking in with the kids. Making sure there is a touchpoint every day between a teacher and a student.” Given that many more young students of color live in remote-only districts, these effects are then seen as part of the racial inequities propagated in US school systems.
- Harvard Graduate School of Education (GSE) Dean Bridget Long [reports](#) that “Teachers are doing a phenomenal job connecting with students [online]...But they’ve lost the whole system — access to counselors, access to additional staff members and support. They’ve lost access to information. One clue is that the reporting of child abuse going down. It’s not that we think that child abuse is actually going down, but because you don’t have a set of adults watching and being with kids, it’s not being reported.”

The factory model of public school, with its “one-size-fits-all approach [...] wasn’t working very well before, and it’s working less well now,” [observes](#) Paul Reville, Harvard GSE, pointing toward the need for community solutions to meet students’ needs by understanding “where students are” in terms of the needs society expects schools to take on. The solutions, say Reville, “are going to come from our community. This is a civic problem.”

This is a long quoted segment from the same article which highlights community supports, but these are, I believe, NOT community schools’ efforts – I wanted you to see them and confirm that they are not where we want to go:

He applauded one example, the [Somerville, Mass., public library](#) program of outdoor Wi-Fi “pop ups,” which allow 24/7 access either through their own or library Chromebooks. “That’s the kind of imagination we need,” he said.

On a national level, he points to the creation of so-called “Children’s Cabinets.” Already in place in 30 states, these nonpartisan groups bring together leaders at the city, town, and state levels to address children’s needs through schools, libraries, and health centers. A July 2019 [“Children’s Cabinet Toolkit”](#) on the Education Redesign Lab site offers guidance for

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communities looking to form their own, with sample mission statements from Denver, Minneapolis, and Fairfax, Va.

Already the Education Redesign Lab is working on even more wide-reaching approaches. In Tennessee, for example, the Metro Nashville Public Schools has launched an innovative program, designed to provide each student with a personalized education plan. By pairing these students with school “navigators” — including teachers, librarians, and instructional coaches — the program aims to address each student’s particular needs.

In conclusion, the United States is facing a situation in which the educational effects of the pandemic may have been inflicted in a bounded period of time, but the will be felt for generations by those least able to afford them. One [long-range study](#) by Yale economist Fabrizio Zilibotti, for example, “predicts that one year of school closures will cost ninth graders in the poorest communities a 25% decrease in their post-educational earning potential, even if it is followed by three years of normal schooling. By contrast, their model shows no substantial losses for students from the richest 20% of neighborhoods.”

### 1.3 The Evolving Theory of Change for Paterson Community Schools

The evaluation methodology, as described above, is based on a foundation of understanding and clarifying the desired goals of the school. What these goals are, stating them clearly and articulating how they are expected to be achieved is referred to as the Theory of Change. As illustrated below (Figure 1), a Theory of Change consists of pathways of outcomes that need to be achieved to reach a long-term goal. For example, it is usually the consensus that good attendance is needed to achieve good academic outcomes, and good attendance needs parents to be committed to getting their youth up and out on time.

The goals vary depending on whether one talks to a community school coordinator, a health provider, a teacher, a parent, a principal or the school district leaders. Each year of this evaluation, we convene the staff of the community school, the FSCS partners, and FSCS leadership, to discuss in a participatory way, what their goals for the upcoming year are.

In 2019, this convening was done in person, as was usual. In 2020 and 2021, it was done by Zoom, with follow-up individual interviews. The zoom meetings sometimes had a few participants and sometimes just one participant. From these meetings and interviews, the evaluation team developed the Theory of Change. The resulting theories, per school, were not as rich as those developed in workshops with dialogue and many participants with different perspectives, but they did reflect the major change from pre-pandemic goals to online learning to first year back goals.

In this year, 2022, the Theory of Change reflects goals after the first year back to school for the upcoming year 2022 – 2023. There were no workshops in 2022, so the Theory of Change was updated and further developed based on staff surveys, interviews and site visits. The theory (with the set of short, medium and long-term outcomes needed to reach the long-term goal) is richer this year. We surmise that after the difficulties and uncertainties of knowing what to expect last year, the coordinators, staff and partners have a much better idea of what they are facing.

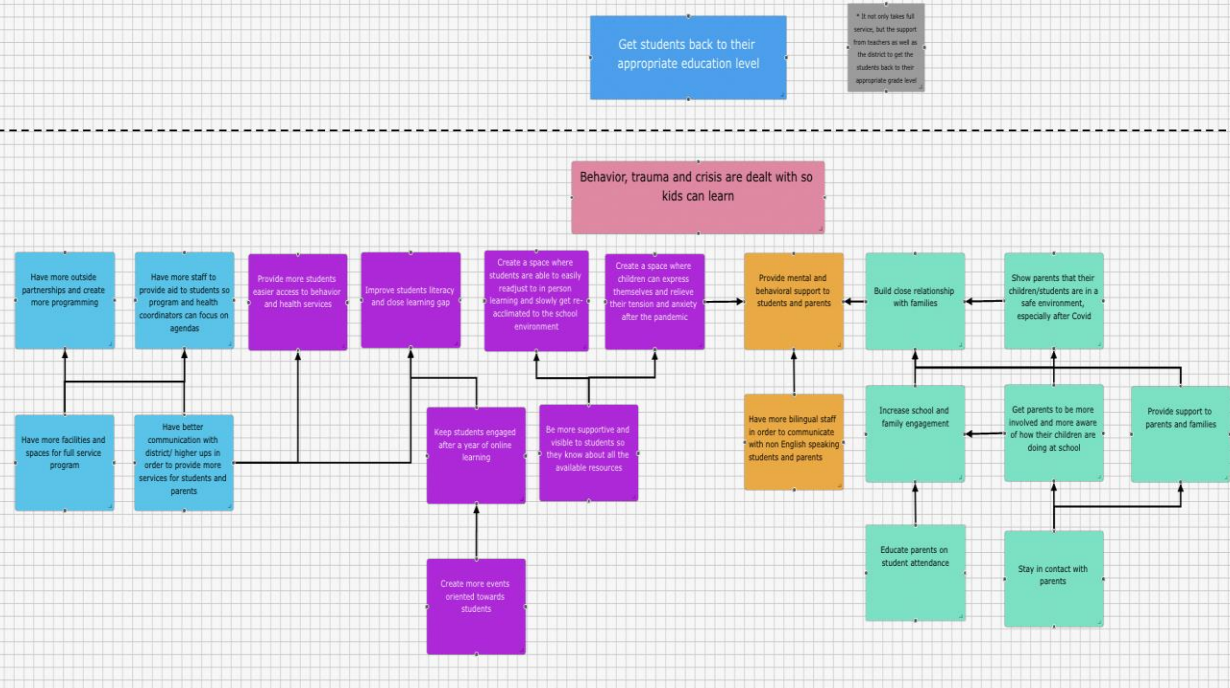
There are quite a few different factors that are different when comparing this year's ToC framework to previous years (see Figure 4 for the 2019 Theory of Change). For example, this is the first year back from online/ virtual learning. With students getting reacclimated and readjusted to in-person learning, there are many concerns for the students' well-being. Behavioral challenges have increased, which include shorter tempers, depression and anxiety. There are more goals that are geared towards providing a safe and non-stressful environment than there were in previous years.

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In all the schools evaluated, students have declined in their education level during the pandemic and online learning. With both the families and students having been emotionally and physically strained from the pandemic, the site and health coordinators want to provide more awareness about the services they offer and reach more students overall. The adjustment for site coordinators is still as difficult. There is a lack of communication with the district which is an ongoing concern.

However, certain relationships between coordinators and principals have been getting better, which is a positive. Some goals from last year have been achieved, but with students still having fears of getting sick and having trouble catching up to their own grade level, different goals need to be on the ToC. There is an increase of student happiness now that they are able to see their friends in person. Also, now that students are back in school, their safety has increased. With students that have a troubled home life, being back in school gives them a space for security and resources.

Paterson FSCS ToC  
Fall 2022



**FIGURE 1. PATERSON FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS OVERALL THEORY OF CHANGE FOR 2022 - 2023**

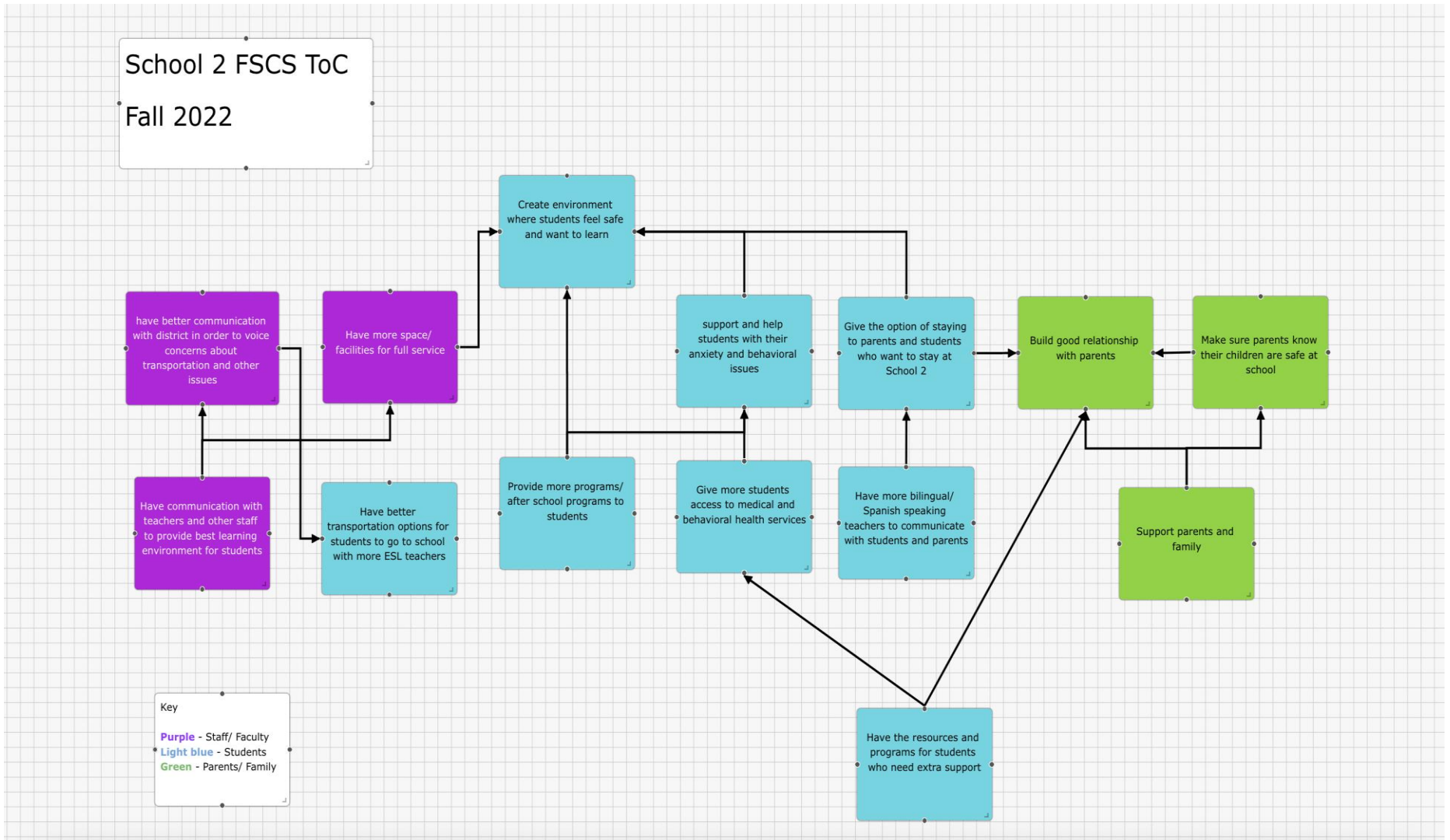


FIGURE 2. SCHOOL 2 THEORY OF CHANGE FOR 2022 – 2023

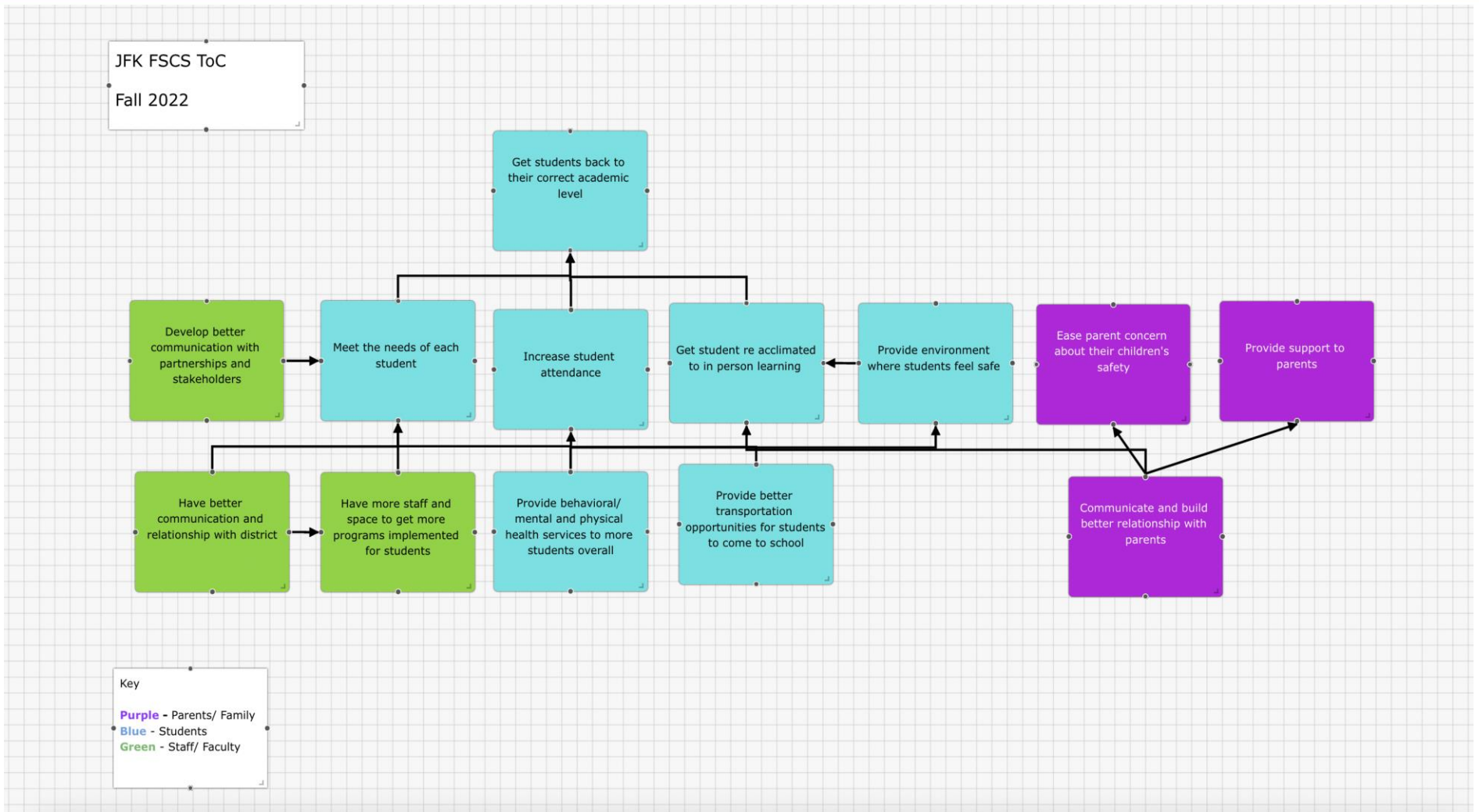
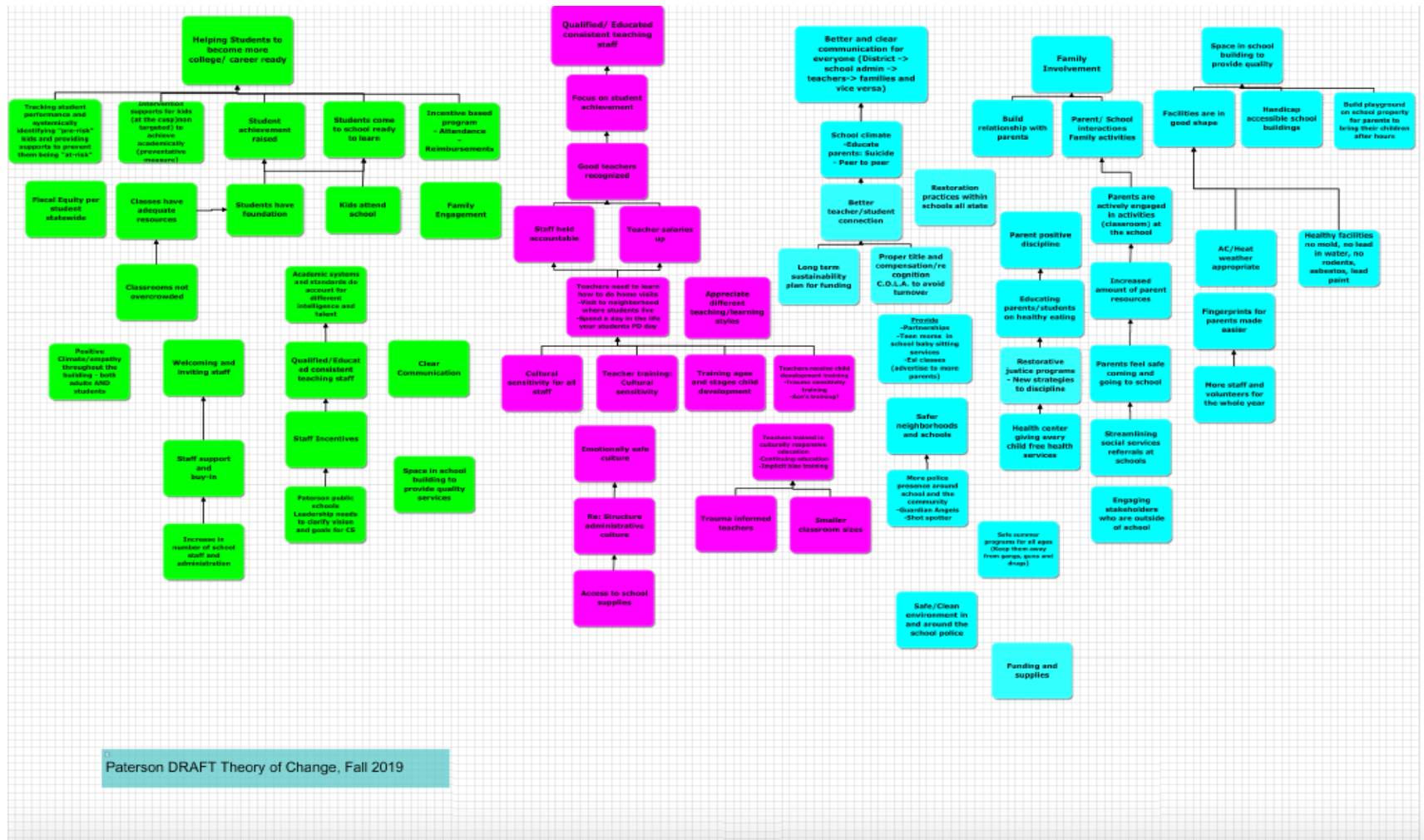


FIGURE 3. JFK HIGH SCHOOL THEORY OF CHANGE FOR 2022 – 2023

FIGURE 4: FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL THEORY OF CHANGE – 2019  
Before the pandemic and out of school learning





### 1.3 Theory of Change Discussion and Evolution

There are quite a few different factors when comparing this year's ToC framework to previous years. For example, this is the first year back from online/ virtual learning. With students getting reacclimated and readjusted to in person learning, there are many concerns for the students' well-being. Behavioral changes have increased, which include shorter tempers, depression and anxiety. There are more goals that are geared towards providing a safe and non-stressful environment than there were in previous years. A major goal that was not in previous any previous framework, is to get students back to their grade level academically.

Across the board, in all the schools, students have declined in their education level during the pandemic and online learning. With both the families and students having been emotionally and physically strained from the pandemic, the site and health coordinators want to provide more awareness about the services they offer and reach more students overall. There are similar goals from last year that are in this year's framework. The adjustment for site coordinators is still as difficult. There is a lack of communication with the district which is an ongoing concern.

However, certain relationships between coordinators and principals have been getting better, which is a positive. Some goals from last year have been achieved, but with students still having fears of getting sick and having trouble catching up to their own grade level, different goals need to be on the ToC. There is an increase of student happiness now that they are able to see their friends in person. Also, now that students are back in school, their safety has increased. With students that have a troubled home life, being back in school gives them a space for security and resources.

Overall, the data in this year's ToC shows that despite the hurdles that the staff are experiencing, FSCS provides incredible resources and opportunities for the students that would normally not have access to these services, and they will continue to provide aid and services to help any student and parent that they can.

## 1.4 Evaluation Methods

This evaluation uses a participatory mixed-methods approach involving collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The implementation of the community school services at the schools is based on a model that hypothesizes what it takes to reach goals. The evaluation, in turn, tests whether the assumptions of that model were correct or not, and whether the outcomes identified are being achieved.

As a participatory evaluation, the evaluator and program practitioners ensured that key stakeholders were involved in setting goals, which they did as participants in Theory of Change workshops conducted by the evaluator during the summer season. Key stakeholders also helped identify and collect data, collaborated in the logistics of site visits and collection of materials, and participated in feedback meetings with the evaluators.

Because of COVID and online learning, and the increased gap between higher and lower income students, this evaluation also included an extensive desk review about education inequality and community school roles to alleviate it.

### Theory of Change

The evaluation in prior years has been guided by a comprehensive Theory of Change for the Initiative and for the constituent schools. The process of developing and refining the Theory of Change was carried out from 2010 to 2014 through a series Theory of Change sessions facilitated by ActKnowledge and the National Center for Community Schools, as detailed below:

Many FSCS model stakeholders participated in these sessions, including principals, teachers, parents, community school directors from each school; lead agencies (New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC), St. Paul's Community Development Center, and Boys and Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic); key personnel from Paterson Public School District and Paterson Education Foundation and providers of health services. The sessions were co-led and facilitated by ActKnowledge and the technical assistance provider from the National Center for Community Schools.

For this 2020 – 2021 school year we tried something different. As schools and coordinators faced uncertainty and unexplored mental health, learning and re-integration needs, we asked schools to just state goals for their first couple of months back in school. Those are presented in this report.

### Site Visits

Comprehensive site visits were made by ActKnowledge each grant year, using a set of interview protocols designed to elicit the views of stakeholders on how the community school was developing, including changes, achievements, challenges, and factors facilitating or hindering progress. This involved:

- Interviewing all community school directors and program staff.
- Interviewing principals and/or assistant principals.
- Focus group interviews with parents and/or parent coordinators.
- Focus group interviews with students.

This year, “site” visits were conducted exclusively via Zoom, as no school buildings were open.

### Student Surveys

ActKnowledge developed a survey questionnaire to elicit the views and perceptions of students (focusing on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up) in the full service community schools (identified through the initiative’s Theory of Change and through the education research literature) relating to their experience with attending online, their challenges getting online, the demand within a household for multiple members to use a computer, and how much help they needed or received.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1 Attendance and Absenteeism by the Numbers

#### Average Daily Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism in Paterson Full Service Community Schools

##### Average Daily Attendance

Both School 2 and JFK’s four Academies had an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) held relatively steady (with some experiencing a slight rise) for the same 3 year window (2016-2017 through 2/2020). That stability (or slight improvement) was erased during the pandemic, according to the data for 2021-22 SY.

For School 2 ADA was at 94.91% for 2016-2017 and 96.62% ending in 2/2020. In the all-virtual year, ADA went down by 5% to 89.83%. Students returned to school in person for 2021-22 SY, but the ADA dropped further, to 88.72%.

#### SCHOOL 2 – Data At-A-Glance

##### AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 (V)	2021-2022
94.91%	95.47%	94.14%	94.62% (through end 2/2020)	89.83%	88.72%

For JFK ACT, Overall Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for the school held relatively steady (with a slight rise) for the same 3 year window (2016-2017 through 2/2020), at 88.04% for 2016-2017 and 89.47% ending in 2/2020. In the all-virtual year, ADA went down by 8% to 81.3%. Students returned to school in person for 2021-22 SY, but the ADA dropped further, to 79.05%.

#### JFK: ACT – Data At-A-Glance

##### AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 (V)	2021 - 2022
88.04%	87.14%	86.58%	89.47% (through end 2/2020)	81.30%	79.05%

JFK BTMF’s overall Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for the school showed a slight rise for the same 3 year window (2016-2017 through 2/2020), at 84% for 2016-2017 and 88.55% ending in 2/2020. In the

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all-virtual year, ADA held relatively steady at 87.6%. Students returned to school in person for 2021-22 SY, but the ADA dropped to 83.53%

**JFK: BTMF – Data At-A-Glance**

**AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 (V)	2021 - 2022
84.0%	83.08%	86.14%	88.55% (through end 2/2020)	87.60%	83.53%

JFK SET had the most dramatic post-pandemic ADA drop. Overall Average Daily Attendance ADA for the school showed a slight rise for the same 3 year window (2016-2017 through 2019-2020), with the ADA percentages starting at 85.27% for 2016-2017 and 87% ending in 2/2020. In the all-virtual year, ADA rose to 92.23%. Students returned to school in person for 2021-22 SY, but the ADA dropped approx. 13% to 79.40%.

**JFK: SET – Data At-A-Glance**

**AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 (V)	2021 - 2022
85.27%	89.65%	85.70%	87.00% (through end 2/2020)	92.23%	79.40%

Similarly, JFK STEM experienced a substantial drop in ADA after promising gains in the pre-pandemic years. Overall Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for the school showed a slight rise for the same 3 year window (2016-2017 through 2019-2020), with the ADA percentages starting at 87.51% for 2016-2017 and 92.21% ending in 2/2020. In the all-virtual year, ADA stayed basically steady at 91.59%. Students returned to school in person for 2021-22 SY, but the ADA dropped approx. 9% to 82.97%.

**JFK: STEM – Data At-A-Glance**

**AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 (V)	2021 - 2022
87.51%	86.73%	88.68%	92.21% (through end 2/2020)	91.59%	82.97%

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**Chronic Absenteeism**

School 2 is experiencing record levels of Chronic Absenteeism, erasing (at least for the moment) gains that had been made over the past 6 years.

The data on attendance shows that School 2’s level of Chronic Absenteeism had fallen every year from 2016-2017 (the baseline data year) through February of 2020, from 26.72% to 16.57%. In the all-virtual 2020-21 SY, CA is higher than the benchmark year, at 28.65%, and then up by almost a third over that high—to 38.10%--is 2021-22 SY.

**CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020 Virtual Mar-Jun	2020-2021 Virtual all year (V)	2021-2022
26.72%	26.48%	19.47%	16.57% (through end 2/2020)	28.65%	38.10%

JFK and its four Academies have been experiencing even worse, with increases of over 100% after several years of steady or lowering rates of CA.

The data on attendance shows that JFK: ACT’s level of Chronic Absenteeism had fallen, risen, and fallen again from 2016-2017 (the baseline data year) through February of 2020, with the percentages beginning at 48.62% and ending up at 37.17% in 2/20. In the all-virtual 2020-21 SY, CA rose to close to the benchmark year, at 46.77%. When students return to school in person, however, CA jumps by almost 50% to 70.05% in 2021-22 SY.

**JFK: ACT – Data At-A-Glance**

**CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 Virtual all year (V)	2021 - 2022
48.62%	47.81%	55.74%	36.17% (through end 2/2020)	46.77%	70.05%

JFK BTMF’s level of Chronic Absenteeism had risen, then fallen and fallen again from 2016-2017 (the baseline data year) through February of 2020, with the percentages beginning at 59.86% and ending up at 43.69% in 2/20. In the all-virtual 2020-21 SY, CA fell further, to 32.70%. When students return to school in person, however, CA jumps by almost 100% to more than the baseline year: 63.6% in 2021-22 SY.

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**JFK: BTMF – Data At-A-Glance**

**CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 Virtual all year (V)	2021 - 2022
59.86%	63.26%	58.63%	43.69% (through end 2/2020)	32.70%	63.60%

Similarly the data on attendance shows that JFK SET’s level of Chronic Absenteeism had held steady from 2016-2017 (the baseline data year) through 2018-19, and then dropped by February of 2020, with the percentages beginning at 65.36% and ending up at 53.32% in 2/20. In the all-virtual 2020-21 SY, CA fell further, to 24.95%. When students return to school in person, however, CA jumps by almost 100% to more than the baseline year: 66.84% in 2021-22 SY.

**JFK: SET – Data At-A-Glance**

**CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

BASELINE		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021 Virtual all year (V)	2021 - 2022
65.36%	66.02%	63.43%	53.32% (through end 2/2020)	24.95%	66.84%

JFK: STEM fared the least well. Its level of Chronic Absenteeism dropped significantly from 2016-2017 (the baseline data year) through February of 2020, with the percentages beginning at 53.21% and ending up at 25.73% in 2/20. In the all-virtual 2020-21 SY, CA fell further, to 23.59%. When students return to school in person, however, CA jumps by over 100% to more than the baseline year: 69.24% in 2021-22 SY.

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**School 2 Testing Data**

According to the NJSLA and PARCC test results from SY 2018-19 through SY 2021-2022 (with no testing having been done in the Spring of 2020 or in the Spring of 2021), suggest some challenges in ELA but much more troublesome challenges in Math abilities. (It is worth keeping in mind that the sample size here is small, so any changes in numbers of students and their abilities on this particular test would cause outsized effects.)

There is a pronounced drop in ELA scores in the third and fourth grade: third grade percentages for students who tested at the level of “proficient” or higher dropped from 16.7% to 5.1% for the third grade, and from 32.6% to 20% for the fourth grade. In grades five through eight, however, the number of “proficient” students held steady or improved slightly. If the lens is widened to include SY 2017-18, there is a more consistent and/or steeper drop in the number of students testing at the “proficient” level, but most of that drop is happening between the 2017-18 and the 2018-19 school year—thus, it is not an effect of the pandemic school shutdown.

**School 2**

**English Language Arts/Literacy**

Test Code	2017-2018		2018-2019		2021-2022	
	# of Students Valid scores	% Prof Level (4 & 5)	# of Students Valid scores	% Prof Level (4 & 5)	# of Students Valid scores	% Prof Level (4 & 5)
ELA03	45	28.9	54	16.7	39	5.1
ELA04	60	10.0	43	32.6	35	20.0
ELA05	46	15.2	50	12.0	47	12.8
ELA06	47	40.4	50	22.0	46	26.1
ELA07	57	73.7	40	50.0	37	51.4
ELA08	50	60.0	58	41.4	42	40.5

Math scores tell a different story. Every grade’s Math percentage of “proficient” scores dropped significantly, with the 3rd grade (from 19.6% to 2.4%) and 4th grade (27.3% to 10.8%) showing the most severe drop. Only the 7th grade scores rose (from 9.8% to 12.8%). If the lens is widened to include 2016-17, the results are essentially the same.



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**Mathematics**

Test Code	2017-2018		2018-2019		2021-2022	
	Total # of Students Valid scores	% Prof Level (4 & 5)	Total # of Students Valid scores	% Prof Level (4 & 5)	# of Students Valid scores	% Prof Level (4 & 5)
MAT03	46	41.3	56	19.6	42	2.4
MAT04	60	8.3	44	27.3	37	10.8
MAT05	49	12.2	49	8.2	49	4.1
MAT06	50	8.0	51	9.8	47	4.3
MAT07	59	11.9	41	9.8	39	12.8
MAT08	44	9.1	61	9.8	44	6.8
ALG01	9	77.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

## 2.2 Are Schools Meeting Goals?

### Staff / Partner Survey Results Analysis

Taking in the data from the Staff and Partner survey, it is clear that there is general agreement about the challenges for students and staff this school year—and a sense of dedicated possibility about the work ahead. While the survey is anonymous, the perspectives shared suggest that most of the respondents are staff, though some may be partners. The respondents' sense of the major issues students were grappling with as the fall of 2022 began fell into two major categories: unfinished learning (or academic difficulty / not being at grade level), social skills & emotional issues. In addition, individual respondents mentioned students' fear of getting Covid and the lack of Chromebooks for some who say they turned them in last year. Anticipating questions regarding social and emotional issues, the survey drilled down by asking about the "trauma and behavior issues" students returned with last September. Many of the responses fit under the larger umbrella of what one staff or partner termed "disregulation": disruptive behavior, teasing, a "disdain for structure and authority," anger, a "lack of self-control and a lack of organization." Other responses noted the root causes: Covid, "anxiety, loss," "low self-esteem," and the fact that "many of our students are newcomers to the country and need time to adjust."

When asked whether they had the staff and space to do as much as they wanted, 55% said they did not, while 27% said they did have the resources. 18% did not respond. One respondent offered that their "two part-time staff [are only] available for 15-16 hours a week and both only available during after school hours." This would, of course, not provide support for academics during school hours. While that respondent acknowledged that there are interns as well, they noted that "interns have less than 8 hours a week" and are "also only available during after school hours."

Turning to the question of how being a community school helped in this time of student adjustment, staff members who responded were universally grateful for the wide range of supports the students had received. Several mentioned the specific medical and counseling resources, as well as clothing, hygiene products, uniforms, and backpacks. Families benefited in other targeted ways, respondents noted: "parent engagement, ESL classes" for parents. Less tangible benefits were mentioned as well: "Our Full Service Community School reaches out to families in any kind of need. Our school nurse knows our families and students. Many of the staff [have] been in our school for several years and have strong connections to our families," which dovetails with other respondent's sense that "it helped keep kids [with health issues] in school." Overall, as one respondent put it, "The Full Service Community School was very helpful in finding resources for both students and parents, and Jessica is an excellent facilitator with parent communication and information." The connective tissue that the FSCS model strives to build is clear here.

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Looking at the tasks ahead, respondents noted the challenge but also set specific goals for the year. Estimates for where “students are academically after coming back for a second year” ranged from “2 years behind at least” to “about a year behind where they could have been without a year of virtual learning” to “better but still behind”. Without knowing where the students stood in terms of grade level before the pandemic (and whether being at grade level before was the measure respondents were using here), the responses suggest some reflection of how deep an impact the 1-2 years of the pandemic has had on students. The lament that students are “about a year behind where they could have been” resonates with that sense of loss, which connects back to an earlier response (from a different respondent) that the students were experiencing “anxiety [and] loss”. While one respondent’s “far behind” suggests the momentous task ahead of striving to help students recover unfinished learning, another respondent’s observation that “they are less issues now that we are in person” because there are “more resources in person for help” suggests the promise of community schools (and in-person schools in general): together, the work is possible.

In taking on that work, respondents are focused. When asked about their plans “this year regarding academics,” each respondent had very specific sets of goals and supports; some offered classroom/content-specific goals, from “small group work that is differentiated” to “help[ing] the students improve their reading decoding skills.” Others were more about school culture and inclusive activities like “executing math and reading competitions for students of all ages” or about “being more supportive and visible.” A third group was thinking more conceptually: “helping children value and improve their academic functioning” and “continue to try and close the gap while teaching new information.” Schools, staff, and partners are creating plans that reflect their ability to be the bridges between the promise of each student and the communities they need to realize that promise.

The final formal question in the survey gave the respondents a space in which to share their “hopes for this year overall,” and the answers offered a view of that same promise from different perspectives. Some hoped just for a “healthy year,” or for “this year to be the best year ever.” Others were more specifically looking to have students “not fall behind academically,” which another response tied to improving parent engagement “to have parents actively participate in their child’s academic success.” The other thread in the responses was the acute awareness of the SEL challenges facing the students and the community; one respondent hoped “to really hone in on SEL to improve the climate of the school,” while another wanted his students “to know they are seen and cared for as individuals, not just as part of a class roster,” and another wanted to instill “an eagerness to want to learn and be motivated to be successful to the best of their abilities.” Undergirding that sense of possibility were elements of the FSCS model: one response talked about being in charge of the after-school program and “excited to be able to provide all of the support and needs of the children that aren’t addressed or are less-addressed in the public school curriculum.” Another response mentioned that the “number of clients [was] getting higher, helping students with anything they need—academically and medical[ly];” that same respondent used the open “any comments?” space to suggest that success will come because the work *is* being done: “FSCS is

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well-supported here with staff, parents, and students. All it takes is one person who received services and [is] pleased to pass the word.” The generative nature of quality community educational systems shines in these surveys.

### 3. Conclusions

The FSCS program in Paterson consistently, from March 2019 through the present, served hundreds of families and students. They switched and adapted quickly to online programs, and became creative in how to reach parents, which worked.

The FSCS staff are focused on returning students' mental health, trauma, readjustment and on their own ability, with limited space and staff to meet the need.

The performance of the initiative as a whole confirmed our belief in the importance of community schools, but also surprised us with its strength and resiliency. Staff were going through the same pandemic as the rest of us, and had losses, child care issues, work-at-home issues, and they still worked non-stop to reach families and were largely successful (within their level of funding and staffing).

The gap community schools fill by making it possible for students to learn in normal years, was revealed to be a deep chasm. Nonetheless, the FSCS initiative was ready to step in. We need, as a society, to recognize that the magnifying glass the pandemic put on family problems for immigrants, low income or unemployed parents, mental health of parents and children under conditions of extreme poverty, crowding and lack of access to services shows that all students and families need community school type support.

Society and policy-makers must take educational inequality seriously and make all schools community schools, with resources to reach all students and families. This can be done by expanding the community school model or by districts making all schools community schools. Pretending family and student trauma, poverty, malnourishment, lack of hope, poor English, violence and discrimination are not suitable areas for schools to take on only perpetuates the poor or non-existent education for millions of students. The cost to society of these students not maturing into citizens with marketable skills and an engagement with community will (and has) cost us far more than assuring all students equal opportunities.

Fund existing programs to have more staff and space, so their capacity is not limited to one or two hundred students.

FSCS should continue to maintain its structure of meeting, working with partners, having good health services and being a firm community. They are doing an excellent job of it and their performance during the pandemic was inspiring. A less-committed initiative and staff could have been too inundated with uncertainty and their own problems.

However, lack of communication and alignment with the district is a hindrance to solving some problems, such as providing accessible ESL classes. Next year is the final year of federal funding of the initiative and planning with the district for sustainability of the vital services and support of the community school model.