THE PARTNERSHIPS FOR LEARNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (PLACE) INITIATIVE

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

BUILDING UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

Community and Youth Collaborative Institute

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Letter from CAYCI

Dear Colleagues,

Over the past five years, our team at the Community and Youth Collaborative Institute (CAYCI) at The Ohio State University served as the external evaluator for the Binghamton University Community Schools Partnerships for Learning and Community Engagement (PLACE) Initiative. The PLACE initiative is a place-based approach to transforming schools into hubs of community support, where students, parents or caregivers, families, and community members are welcomed and supported through a range of programs, services, and partnerships. Non-academic barriers to learning are addressed, and positive youth development experiences are expanded, all to ensure that children and youth are ready and able for school. When conditions are right, students learn and schools succeed.

Late in 2019, the PLACE initiative was awarded a Full-Service Community School grant by the U.S. Department of Education, bringing nearly 2.5 million dollars to two rural schools in upstate New York. Since, Caryl E. Adams Elementary in Whitney Point Central School District (WPCSD) and Deposit Elementary in Deposit Central School District (OCSD) have been transformed into University-Assisted Full-Service Community Schools.

This final evaluation report synthesizes findings from our external evaluation of the PLACE Initiative, demonstrating how these two high-poverty rural schools engaged families and the community, deepened partnerships, added, expanded and strengthened programs/services (e.g., extended learning opportunities, social skill programming, parenting groups), strengthened their learning support systems and infrastructure in innovative ways (e.g., data systems, new teaming structures), and planned for sustainability. Leaders at Binghamton University also provided strategic technical assistance, professional development and support to assist with the adoption and implementation efforts, as well as embedded content on community schools and rural contexts in coursework and through applied learning experiences in the schools. The dissemination of lessons learned and successes from the PLACE Initiative is already underway, as this work is being shared with others to inform future efforts to build FSCS in rural areas and other school communities.

As this report demonstrates, the past 5 years have been filled with accomplishments and successes. The PLACE Initiative's reach is grand. These two UA-FSCS continue to strengthen their curriculum and instruction, improve school climate, increase interventions and services to support students and families, and build strategic partnerships with parents/caregivers and the community. As you read this report, please celebrate the collective achievements of WPCSD and DCSD over the course of these five years. Let their story inspire you to further strengthen your school communities and carry their achievements and lessons learned forward in your own work.

Sincerely,

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Introduction

Since 2019, Whitney Point Central School District (WPCSD) and Deposit Central School District (DCSD) in upstate New York have been adopting and implementing a University-Assisted Full-Service Community Schools (UA-FSCS) framework within two of their schools, WPCSD's Caryl E. Adams Elementary (Whitney Point/Adams) and DCSD's Deposit Elementary (Deposit). These efforts were incubated by the awarding of a FSCS grant from the United States Department of Education (USDOE), bringing 2.3 million dollars to these two schools over a five-year period. In addition to supporting new and expanded programs/services in these two high-poverty rural schools, strategies have focused on improving the coordination, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families. The University-Assisted approach allowed for Binghamton University's resources and expertise to be leveraged to strengthen adoption and implementation efforts. Ultimately the aim was and is to improve outcomes for students, schools, families and the broader community.

PLACE leverages partnerships, resources, and capital to turn these two high-poverty rural schools into hubs of community support.

This work is critical in high-poverty rural schools such as Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit, ones facing a myriad of unique challenges that extend far beyond academics. Students in these geographically-isolated communities often encounter significant barriers, including poverty, limited access to healthcare, and the enduring effects of childhood trauma (Frankland, 2021). These non-academic challenges can disrupt attendance, engagement, and academic performance, compounding the difficulties that educators and families face when supporting children and youth (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022). Despite these obstacles, rural communities frequently possess an invaluable resource: Strong relational networks (Karnopp, 2022). These networks characterized by trust, shared norms, and collaboration can be harnessed to address systemic inequities and improve outcomes for students and families. The adoption of a UA-FSCS approach in rural communities leverages this social capital to further amplify efforts.

The UA-FSCS efforts at WPCSD and DCSD are called the 'Partnerships for Learning and Community Engagement' (PLACE) place-based Initiative. PLACE leverages partnerships, resources, and capital to turn these two high-poverty rural schools into hubs of community support. As hubs for isolated, poverty-affected rural communities with high resource needs, a UA-FSCS approach provides a platform for school districts and their community partners to provide comprehensive and coordinated services to students and families in need. In many close-knit, rural communities, expertise, resources, and social support are often provided through networks of relationships rather than institutions (Zuckerman, 2023), making UA-FSCS a promising fit. These partnerships are beneficial for improving educational attainment and positive youth development in rural communities (Murray et al., 2020). This promise is what guided the PLACE initiative.

This evaluation report highlights the strategies and outcomes of the PLACE Initiative, highlighting key outputs from the past five years, documenting progress toward grant deliverables, and exploring outcomes associated with these two UA-FSCS. Before diving in, it is important to call attention to one contextual factor that influenced the work at Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit, and that is the COVID-19 pandemic. The USDOE FSCS grant was awarded right before the pandemic hit (with adoption efforts only 3 months along when the shut-down occurred). This greatly impacted the schools, in relation to initial adoption efforts in the first year, as well as when strategies had to pivot to meet crisis needs

such as food insecurity, job losses, and health impairments. The significant long-term impacts of the pandemic remain to be seen, leaving questions about what these school communities might look like without the FSCS investment from USDOE. Given this context, the efforts of the PLACE Initiative were timely and in demand. WPCSD and DCSD rose to the occasion during this stressful time through their UA-FSCS efforts.

Drawing on evidence from five years of implementation, this report illustrates how rural schools can turn challenges into opportunities through place-based, relationship-driven approaches. In the end, the lessons learned from Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit offer valuable insights for others seeking to create meaningful change in under-resourced communities to strengthen social capital.

COMMUNITY OVERVIEWS

WHITNEY POINT

WHITNEY POINT COMMUNITY: WPCSD is located in rural Lisle Township, Broome County, New York. The population of this community is 8,792, of which 96% are White, 1% Black and 3% two or more races. Employment in this township is 55% and the median income is $61,976, with 39% of the population earning less than $50,000. The poverty rate is 18.7% but 35% for children under the age of 18 (a rate 1.4 times higher than in Broome County and nearly double the 18% rate of New York State). Here only 41% of the population reports holding a high school diploma or equivalent, with 31% holding some college degree or higher. Geographical isolation, limited medical and mental health services, intergenerational poverty, unemployment and substance abuse are major challenges in this community.

WHITNEY POINT SCHOOL DISTRICT: WPCSD supports an elementary school (PK-3rd), a middle school (4th-8th) and a high school (9th-12th). The elementary school, Whitney Point's Caryl E. Adams Elementary School (Whitney Point/Adams), is the focus for this UA-FSCS agenda. Overall the District has an enrollment of 1,307 students, of which 96% are White and 66% live in poverty. The District's graduation rate is 81%, but only 70% for students experiencing poverty. Chronic absenteeism is 28.1%. Attracting and retaining highly qualified staff is a challenge, as 25% of teachers leave in their first five years. Transportation also is a challenge limiting student and parent participation. This rural school district covers 139.1 square miles, putting over 480,000 miles a year on its fleet of 24 buses, which make 1506 stops a day.

CARYL E. ADAMS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: At Whitney Point/Adams, 64% of students are considered economically disadvantaged, which is 40% higher than the average poverty rate for non-metro areas. In this school, 55% of the 433 students are eligible for free lunch and 19.8% are chronically absent. Academic proficiency rates are well-below the state average, with 3rd grade English Language Arts (ELA) at 31% (state-wide New York is 43%) and 3rd Math at 39% (state-wide is 54%). Administration and teacher turnover, as well as the lack of extended learning opportunities, add to the geographical isolation. Limited medical/social services, coupled with intergenerational poverty, both presented as major challenges for the school.

DEPOSIT COMMUNITY: DCSD serves an area in rural Sandford Township, Broome County, New York. Sandford's 2020 census population is 1,387, a decline of 16% since 2010. The 2020 Census reports ethnicity as 91.33% white, 3.28% Black, 19% Native American, 2.79% Asian and 2.41% other, with 92% native English speakers. The median income for a household in Broome County is $35,347 and the median age is 38 (with 23% of the population under the age of 18). The poverty rate for children in Broome County, which is fifth highest in the State of New York, has been increasing over the past two decades. The rate is currently 25% (up almost 9% from 16% in 2000). Intergenerational poverty, substance abuse, limited transportation options, and a lack of access to medical, dental, mental health and related social services are significant challenges in this community. Also, Deposit is a Designated Physician Shortage Area with many families needing to drive up to one hour to reach the nearest hospital.

DEPOSIT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: DCSD has one elementary school and one middle/high school. Deposit Elementary is the school of focus for the UA-FSCS work. According to the New York State Education Department (https://data.nysed.gov), 488 students are enrolled across the district. Of these students, 96% are white and 68% are economically disadvantaged (which is 36% higher than the average poverty rate for non-metro areas). The graduation rate is 81%, but only 70% for economically disadvantaged students. The teacher turnover rate is 17%, and nearly 19% of teachers are not fully qualified – from teaching without a certificate to having fewer than three years of teaching experience.

DEPOSIT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Deposit Elementary School (Grades Pre-K-5) serves 220 students and has a chronic absenteeism rate of 36%. In addition to the non-academic barriers noted above, the geographical isolation, shortage of medical and mental health services, lack of early childhood and youth development opportunities along with the challenges of transportation are impediments to student success. Baseline academic achievement for Deposit Elementary reveals that of students identified as economically disadvantaged, only 33% were proficient in ELA and only 42% in Math, both at least 10+ percentage points lower than the New York state-wide average.

Progress Toward Grant Deliverables

When applying for the FSCS grant, WPCSD and DCSD along with their partners, outlined several goals and objectives based on localized needs, with an overall plan of adopting and implementing a comprehensive approach to addressing non-academic learning barriers. The focus was on providing comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, families, and community members. Often called pipeline services because they span from early childhood through postsecondary education and into the workforce, services fall under four pillars of community schools as outlined by the USDOE call for proposals and other national entities (e.g., Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018). These pillars include: Integrated Student Supports (e.g., social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports; Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities (e.g., pre-kindergarten programs, out-of-school-time programs; Active Family and Community Engagement (e.g., parent education, support and involvement strategies); and Collaborative Leadership and Practices (e.g., coordinated teaming structures, community collaboration, expanded data systems). Using these pillars as a guide, WPCSD and DCSD's PLACE goals as outlined in the original USDOE FSCS grant aimed to:

1   **DEVELOP TWO UA-FSCS IN HIGH-POVERTY, RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

2   **IMPLEMENT EVIDENCE-BASED ACTIVITIES, STRATEGIES, AND/OR INTERVENTIONS**

3   **ADD/OR ENHANCE PIPELINE SERVICES WITHIN EACH SCHOOL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY**

4   **RECRUIT AND RETAIN EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS FOR PRACTICE IN RURAL SCHOOLS**

5   **DISSEMINATE KEY FINDINGS, LESSONS LEARNED, AND SUCCESS STORIES TO PROMOTE POLICY CHANGE, SCALE-UP, AND REPLICATION.**

More details follow in relation to progress made toward these five goals over the past five years of the grant period. Please note Goals 2 and 3 are summarized together given their grounding in the pipeline service elements of the four FSCS pillars.

GOAL 1: Develop UA-FSCS in Two High-Poverty, Rural Schools

GOAL 1 OBJECTIVES

⭐ Develop and/or enhance school and, as needed, school district capacities and competencies to strengthen and expand school-family-community partnerships to provide students, families, and community members increased access to comprehensive services and supports, linking these services and supports to school improvement outcomes.

⭐ In partnership with the Consortium, each UAFSCS Community Table will conduct additional needs and resource assessments as well as gap analyses to refine service plans.

⭐ Schools and their partners will create collaborative leadership structures designed to ensure effective delivery of services.

⭐ Monitor and evaluate programs, services, processes, and structures in support of data based decision-making and continuous improvement and learning.

Under Goal 1 and In partnership with Binghamton University, WPCSD and DCSD set out to strengthen their schools' partnership agenda and evolve as UA-FSCS. Over the five years of funding, the PLACE Initiative made substantial progress on Goal 1. The UA-FSCS framework was successfully developed in the two high-poverty, rural schools by expanding teams, engaging communities, and planning for sustainability. One key component of the adoption and implementation efforts was the hiring of community school coordinators for both of the schools, as well as a Family Engagement Counselor at Whitney Point/Adams. Community Tables (i.e., essentially place-based steering committees) were established to ensure school, family, and community voices shaped the UA-FSCS model. PLACE also partnered with the Community and Youth Collaborative Institute (CAYCI) at The Ohio State University to conduct needs assessments, importantly collecting data via CAYCI School Experience Surveys (an evidence-based tool included on the National Compendium of School Climate Inventories). Collectively these efforts were assisted via technical assistance and support leveraged from Binghamton University and the USDOE, particularly the expertise of the Principal Investigator with a counseling background who is housed in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Leadership. Despite COVID-19-related challenges, systems change and expanded school improvement processes were advanced. Details follow here to contextualize the PLACE Initiative and its approaches at both WPCSD and DCSD.

WPCSD's APPROACH AT CARYL E. ADAMS ELEMENTARY

WPCSD identified three key priorities to guide their UA-FSCS efforts in their Whitney Point/Adams, including:

- Strengthen and expand school-family-community partnerships to better support early childhood development, and address the medical, dental, and mental health needs of students and families;

- Enhance social/emotional learning through implementation of the Incredible Years program; and

- Implement a CARE Team to address student/family needs efficiently, effectively, and holistically.

WPCSD made a firm commitment to support early childhood education throughout the grant and also by winning New York State grants to develop Pre-Kindergarten (PK) classes for both three and four-year-olds. These classes were implemented through a partnership with a local preschool and daycare center, as well as the Broome County Head Start Program. Importantly, all six full-day PK4 classes were housed at Adams and supervised by the school's assistant principal. The PK3 classes were split between the Whitney Point Preschool and Daycare Center and the Greater Opportunities for Broome and Chenango Head Start locations. Regardless of location, these structural changes have helped strengthen the curricular alignment in support of positive transitions from PK to first grade. Additionally, the Preschool Program has a well-articulated vision, utilizes a consistent, evidence-based curriculum aligned with New York State Standards, and features a robust parent/caregiver involvement program. In other priorities, community partners and school staff provided screenings for vision, hearing, speech, language, and occupational therapy/physical therapy. Community School Coordinators provided social-emotional lessons, parent training, and small groups, and also helped develop an annual Celebration of the Young Child event and a summer school program specifically designed for preschool children. Highlights include the early childhood programming, known as Early Eagles, as well as grandparent kinship care groups and various activities.

One key aspect of the efforts of the Community School Coordinators at Whitney Point/Adams also involved the creation of a Community Table to build relationships with existing partners (as well as recruit needed ones). The Community Table used CAYCI School Experience Survey findings to highlight needs leading to greater participation on a regular basis of groups like Mothers and Babies, Broome County Library volunteers, the Health Department and agencies providing mental health services. As a result of these efforts, a Broome County Division of Social Services Children's Services provider now works on-site and supports the school continuum of services to address individual and family needs. Also, a partnership with the local police department led to the placement of a Safety Officer in the elementary school, who not only attended to security needs, but acted as a role model and reinforced student behavior plans. Community partners also expanded services, such as a mobile dental van and Binghamton University student and faculty engagement (e.g., social work interns).

Parents/caregivers of students at Whitney Point/Adams also were supported by a variety of engagement strategies, including home visits, frequent text communication, creation of a Kinship Group, Parent Cafes, and parenting classes. Importantly, kinship groups and parenting classes were held in person and on-line to accommodate transportation issues, and parents/caregivers were supported by gift cards for gas money. Also, the school devised an innovative way to hold Back-to-School Nights and Parent Conferences and worked collaboratively with the secondary schools to adopt the same strategy, allowing parents to go to all three schools across the district in one night. Additionally, creative solutions to engagement were created during COVID-19 pandemic years, ones such as drive-by literacy kit pick-ups and family household and food distributions. Reports indicate greater attendance, improved planning by teachers, and better access to services.

Another aspect of WPCSD's approach involved Incredible Years (IY), an evidence-based curriculum for social-emotional learning that provides class presentations, small-group work, and parenting classes. Whitney Point/Adams implemented all three of the IY components over the first three years of the grant. The school counselor, social worker, and Community School Coordinator initially presented to the Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms, scaling up to the other grades, while continuing to run small groups. Eventually, the teachers even took over classroom lessons, developing a scope and sequence calendar to ensure that all lessons were taught and the program's vocabulary was integrated into their classroom management programs. This comprehensive program has had a profoundly positive impact on the school, and Whitney Point/Adams is recognized as a model implementation site for others to learn from, both regionally and nationally.

Also, the school's CARE (Consultation, Assessment, Referral, Education) Team implementation efforts were carefully structured to include traditional Response to Intervention (RTI) Team and Special Education Team members (and add new stakeholders such as the Department of Social Services Child Service worker and the Community School Coordinators). Over time, CARE Teams clarified roles and responsibilities of those involved, established clear procedures, and developed an internal student data tracking system. Successes from the Whitney Point/Adams' CARE Team are now being scaled up across the district, with the middle and high schools in WPCSD now implementing the CARE Team structure.

Importantly, Whitney Point/Adams will continue its efforts to address the social/emotional needs of students through partnerships, the IY program, and parent and family engagement efforts, with additional efforts to address chronic absenteeism and promote academic achievement. Recently, the District built upon the work done and data collected from the PLACE Initiative to win a competitive New York State grant that will be used to support scaled-up social emotional instruction, increase student connection, and promote further parent/caregiver engagement. The School Board has also provided sustainability funding by supporting the positions of the Community School Coordinators, as well as the purchase of another evidence-based program, Second Step, which is currently adopted in the middle school to complement the lessons learned in earlier grades through IY. Additionally, innovations such as the CARE Teams and Community Table will continue to operate, fostering ongoing collaboration and community engagement in support of students and families in Whitney Point.

DCSD's APPROACH AT DEPOSIT ELEMENTARY

DCSD's efforts at Deposit identified three key priorities for the five years of this grant:

- Build and engage community partners to address food insecurity and medical, dental, and mental health needs;

- Expand early childhood programs and extended learning programs; and

- Implement Professional Learning Communities to support a holistic approach to student needs and refine teaming structures.

Foremost, Deposit created a Community Table to strengthen and focus the well-established partnerships in this small, close-knit community. The Community Table shared data pinpointing greatest needs, worked to add needed partner organizations, and strove to eliminate the duplication of services. One such success was the enhanced partnership with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, resulting in monthly food bank truck visits to the school growing into the formation of the Lumberjack's Shack Food Center (funded by multiple small grants and open several days a week to serve all patrons in the Deposit community). The Food Center is coordinated by the Community School Coordinator Assistant, housed in the District's bus garage with new refrigeration and storage areas, and is staffed by students with special needs as a hands-on learning opportunity.

Further, the Community Table led to new and enhanced ways of working together that better meet the needs of students and families. The invitation to partner closely with the Broome County Mental Health agency and the Mental Health Association of the Southern Tier provided school-referred students and families with direct access (viewed as one-stop shopping for needed help). One success was the implementation of telehealth services, where the school nurse could work in tandem with a local physician to address medical needs. Another innovation tied to the PLACE work involved the 2021 Deposit Board of Education Capital Project, which funded the rebuild of the school's health office so it included private exam areas, a space for the secure storage of records, real-time access to medications, and a waiting room. This space affords other types of partnerships, such as the Lourdes Dental Van provided as part of the grant. The collaborative partners also organized Family Fun and Wellness Fairs, an engagement event for the entire Deposit community.

Deposit's efforts also prioritized extended learning opportunities through the provision of meaningful afterschool programming. A teacher on special assignment was hired as the Coordinator of Extended Learning Opportunities. Her expertise as a reading specialist supported individualized tutoring for students using carefully aligned curricula and strategies used in the classroom. High school students supported academic time during the school day, as well as implemented a variety of positive youth development programs/activities. Through this expanded approach, DCSD also leveraged Federal Recovery Funds to extend the afterschool program from two days a week to three and raised the pay scale for bus drivers to attract and retain drivers. Expanding learning into the homes was another focus of this position, as the Coordinator worked with grant writers to fund innovative projects such as the One School One Book initiative, where all students received a book to take home as part of the program. Deposit also made significant efforts to increase participation in pre-school and other early learning programs. To promote access, a local preschool/day-care was relocated into the elementary school building to serve infants through age 4. Although essentially a co-located service, over time the program became more engaged with the school, co-sponsoring parent/child nights, engaging with many other community partners, sharing the gym and other facilities, and working with the high school to provide CTE credit for students wanting to learn and experience childcare career opportunities.

More central to the academic priorities of the school, DCSD also implemented K-12 Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to improve teaching practices with attention to a holistic view of each student's well-being. Expert trainers worked with teachers/staff to develop expectations, collaboration skills, meeting protocols, interventions, and accountability measures. Additionally, the intentional restructuring of teams facilitated the implementation of the CARE Team, a multidisciplinary team focused on identifying and addressing individual student/family needs. In most cases, the PLC initially identified concerns, referred students to the CARE Team and then executed and/or monitored appropriate interventions. Focusing on efficiency and effectiveness, the CARE Team has clarified roles and responsibilities of its' members, eliminated duplication of committees, as well as developed a meeting schedule that addresses K-12 family needs as well as needs of individual students in each building. Excitedly, this process has now scaled-up from the elementary to the middle/high school and is now a permanent teaming structure embedded across the District.

As the USDOE grant comes to an end, DCSD has been able to build on the successes of the PLACE Initiative to secure a Stronger Connections State Grant for $540,000. This grant will be used to continue the position of the Community School Coordinator, allowing for continued facilitation of community partnerships and other important priorities. Grant funding also will support school-based social workers to provide individual/family counseling beyond school hours. Moving forward, DCSD will continue to refine the PLC's and CARE Teams across buildings in the district, as well as continue to collect and share qualitative data through the state's PASS survey. Deposit also is building on past efforts to improve attendance by clarifying roles and responsibilities of each staff member, making home visits, and addressing barriers to school attendance. Competencies built among key district and school teachers/staff, as well as system-level teaming and re-engineering efforts, will provide solid foundations for DCSD's next steps.

In summary, by examining both WPSCD and DCSD's approaches, it is clear that both have made progress towards their UA-FSCS development and implementation efforts. The PLACE Initiative's partnership with Binghamton University and Ohio State University has allowed additional resources, technical assistance, and evaluation support to

facilitate collective efforts. As expected in place-based initiatives, over the five years, each school developed its own priorities and specific action steps based on needs, gaps in services, and emergent priorities. The evolution of Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit Elementaries as UA-FSCS is still underway. Specific details about implementation efforts aligned with Goals 2 & 3 are overviewed next.

GOAL 2 & 3: Implement Evidence- Based Activities & Enhance Learning Support System Components

GOAL 2 OBJECTIVES

Enhance social-emotional learning, with specific emphasis on The Incredible Years program, social skills training, and functional behavior assessment-based interventions.

Improve early childhood education and family engagement through the establishment of UA-FSCS services including home visits, Parent Cafés, family engagement nights, integrating and/or linking a daycare center (DPCSD), and a Family Resource Center (WPCSD) to expand early childhood development services.

Offer extended learning/youth development opportunities including afterschool and summer programming and mentoring that emphasize social-emotional learning.

Increase access to health, mental health, and social services through the establishment of CARE Teams, telehealth services, and other health services.

Assess and implement support for linkages between schools and community partners.

GOAL 3 OBJECTIVES

Create new working teams and enhance existing teams in each school and partner community agency, including new school-family-community-government coordinating teams.

By June 2022, accelerate planning at the district central office to scale up the UA-FSCS model to other schools in the district, at the same time developing new infrastructure for policy change and sustainability. Create strategic connections with key administrators in each district to further embed the student support work within the pupil services/learning supports system of the district. Coordinators and principals also will work with other principals in the district. This is especially important to support scale-up and support students as they transition across the feeder pattern.

Increase knowledge and skills among educators, student support personnel, youth development workers, parents/guardians, school-mental health providers, and other stakeholders about UA-FSCS.

During the past five years, the PLACE Initiative also made substantial progress towards Goal 2, implementing evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions to address the needs of students, families, and the community. At the cornerstone of these efforts was IY, which included parenting groups, classroom-based social-emotional programming, and small-group mental health support. At Whitney Point/Adams, IY was highly successful, with school-wide training for staff, an active IY Committee, and expanded resources for students in Grades 3 and up. The program's popularity attracted interest from other districts seeking technical assistance. In Deposit, where IY faced challenges due to staffing and scheduling, the "Random Acts of Kindness" program was adopted as a better fit, ensuring the continued delivery of evidence-based social-emotional learning. Additionally, pipeline services addressing early childhood development, family engagement, and student mental health needs were expanded across both schools (and the districts), demonstrating a commitment to meeting diverse community needs in these rural settings.

In relation to Goal 3, the PLACE Initiative made significant progress in enhancing the learning support systems within each FSCS to improve coordination, integration, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. FSCS Coordinators at Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit became integral members of key teams, including student support and attendance teams, facilitating the alignment of services and reducing duplication. At WPCSD, the CARE Team model was implemented with a trauma-informed approach, while DCSD established its own CARE Team, developing policies, procedures, and tools to address student needs. Regular cross-site networking meetings and technical assistance provided by the Project Director, Consultant, and Lead Evaluator ensured collaboration and capacity building across districts. These efforts contributed to a more streamlined and practical approach to supporting students, families, and educators.

Collectively, the outputs from these Goal 2 and 3 efforts related to the delivery of key pipeline services at Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit are impressive, as shown in Table 1 and highlighted here.

- **Over 10,000 service counts with students were made each year** related to the delivery of early childhood education programs were completed each year with students (350 with family members and 126 with community members).

- **Nearly 4,000 service contacts with students were made on average each year** through high quality school and out-of-school time programs/strategies.

- Additionally, **751 service counts engaged students, 2,551 for families, and 26 for community members** on average each year as part of the PLACE Initiative's family and community engagement strategies.

- Given the focus on elementary schools, priorities to address postsecondary and workforce readiness were less fruitful yet still accomplished with **739 service counts among community members an average each year**.

- Impressively, **6,211 service counts averaged per year related to the provision of social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports with students** (with an additional 1,227 for family members and 642 for community members).

Even with the slow start of the grant during the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts at both schools far exceeded service counts prioritized in the original grant narrative. Furthermore, The progress-toward-deliverables also far exceeds the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) indicators for the USDOE FSCS grant program. Each year of the five-year grant WPCSD and DCSD collectively exceeded the target GPRA indicators for students, family members, and community members served. These GPRA data, along with the overall service counts, testify to the PLACE initiative's reach and scale. Tables 1 and 2 overview these data.

Table 1. Numbers Served By Year Across Key Pipeline Services.

Project Pipeline Services	FY 1 2019-2020			FY 2 2020-2021			FY 3 2021-2022			FY 4 2022-2023			FY 5** 2024-2025			Average/Year		
	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	# of Contacts with Student	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members
High quality early childhood education programs	1,986	200	620	7,885	209	9	14,424	800		20,121	161		10,238	378		10,931	350	126
High quality school and out-of-school-time programs and strategies	2031	5	1	3,732			6,578	4		3,071			3,501			3,783	2	0
Family and community engagement and supports	294	904	117	794	912	12	1,481	3,739		1,186	4,638			2,563		751	2,551	26
Activities that support postsecondary and workforce readiness					2	524		4	929		36	1,856		8	386	0	10	739
Community-based support for students who have attended the schools in the area served by the pipeline, or students who are members of the community						159			166			430			211	0	0	193
Social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports	4,128	967	21	6,223	87	2	7,747	402	1,050	8,224	2,027	2,135	4,733	2,653		6211	1227	642

Table 2. GRPA Indicators By Year

GPRA	FY 1 2019-2020			FY 2 2020-2021			FY 3 2021-2022			FY 4 2022-2023			FY 5 2024-2025			TOTAL				Average/Year		
	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Students	Family Members	Community Members	Total Individuals	Students	Family Members	Community Members
Actual	475	429	223	724	575	174	700	1,095	342	716	1,311	450	699	1,950	167	3,314	5,360	1,356	10,030	663	1,072	271
Target	762	420	169	724	420	169	700	420	169	716	420	169	699	420	169	3,601	2,100	845	6,546	3,780	1,521	12,262

2,006

Average number of students, family members, and community members served each year.

GOAL 4: Recruit and Retain Effective Teachers and Social Workers

GOAL 4 OBJECTIVES

⭐ Implement a grow your own teacher/social worker program at Binghamton University focused on rural schools.

⭐ Establish an elective course in Rural Community Schools that focuses on the unique challenges and opportunities in rural school districts.

⭐ Our Consortium will provide professional development to teachers, administrators, and other professionals in schools. Initial professional development will focus on broadly on rural community schools. Future professional development will be based on locally identified needs.

Over the five years of the PLACE Initiative, Goal 4 focused on recruiting and retaining effective teachers and social workers at Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit. The project made significant progress in supporting local students, graduates, and community members to serve rural school communities while enhancing university coursework to prepare future educators and social workers for the unique challenges of rural settings.

Through the "Grow Your Own Rural Teacher or Social Worker Program," three individuals were supported—some fully and others partially—over the course of the grant. While the original goal was to recruit at least four participants, the COVID-19 pandemic created significant recruitment challenges, reflecting national trends of declining interest in education and social work professions, particularly in geographically isolated communities. Despite these challenges, the program achieved meaningful outcomes: one Social Work graduate is now employed as a UA-FSCS Coordinator at one of the target schools, another graduate of the program recently completed her undergraduate degree and is pursuing a master's degree in social work with plans to serve rural schools, and a third participant continues to work toward a degree in early childhood education. Additionally, the project supported local leadership development. One parent participant from Whitney Point/Adams was elected to the district's School Board during the grant period, demonstrating another way the project contributed to growing local capacity and leadership in rural community schools.

The project also strengthened the preparation of future educators and social workers through the Community Schools course at Binghamton University. In partnership with the Rural Health Network, the course was offered twice yearly during all five years of the grant, training 120 students. Additionally, the course was integrated as an elective in the university's largest minor program, the Education Minor, significantly expanding access to training in rural education and community school practices.

Throughout the grant period, Master of Social Work (MSW) interns working in the target rural schools were supported through stipends and travel reimbursements. This helped reduce financial barriers and enabled hands-on experience in geographically isolated communities. These efforts directly contributed to the project's goal of building capacity in rural schools.

While the national and local context presented recruitment challenges, the project fostered a small but dedicated pipeline of educators, social workers, and local leaders committed to serving rural communities. Additionally, the partnerships and curricular enhancements established through the grant provide a sustainable foundation for continued support of rural schools beyond the funding period.

GOAL 5: Disseminate Key Findings, Lessons Learned, and Successes

GOAL 5 OBJECTIVES

Connect UA-FSCS innovations, success stories, research findings, and lessons learned with the broader NYS priority focused on community schools.

Use this Initiative to expand the regional and national agenda for UA-FSCS, expanded school mental health (Weist, 2006), expanded school improvement (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008), and other relevant initiatives, each of which needs to be a partner in the growing national movement for UA-FSCS via the Coalition for Community Schools.

Goal 5 focused on disseminating key findings, lessons learned, and success stories to support policy change, sustainability, scale-up, and replication of community school models. Over the course of the grant, the project team engaged in a variety of dissemination activities, reaching national audiences, fostering collaboration, and contributing to the academic literature on rural community schools.

The team conducted five conference presentations, including a keynote address by Mellin at the Southeastern School Behavioral Health Conference, where she highlighted success stories and lessons learned from this grant. Other presentations included appearances at the National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference and the annual Mental Health-Education Integration Consortium meeting. These events engaged diverse stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, and provided opportunities to discuss rural-specific challenges and solutions in community school implementation. The team participated in one webinar hosted by the NY/NJ University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) Community of Practice, UACS National Network/Netter Center, and the NYSED C/W Community Schools Technical Assistance Center. This webinar reached over 100 registrants and attendees and provided a broad platform for sharing the project's impact and lessons learned. The project also facilitated two national meetings of experts in school-linked services, bringing together leaders in community schools to exchange knowledge, strategies, and shared practice challenges. Finally, the team engaged in one academic journal dissemination effort. The Project Director, Lead Evaluator, Evaluation Team, Coordinators, and Administrators recently submitted an article to *The Rural Educator* that highlights the successes and lessons learned from Whitney Point/Adam's efforts, ensuring continued visibility and impact on the project's findings. We are also planning additional academic publications now that we have a five-year data history for trend analysis.

In total, the team engaged in nine dissemination activities: five conference presentations (including one keynote address), one webinar, two national meetings, and one academic journal contribution. These efforts significantly contributed to the national dialogue on full-service community schools, particularly in rural contexts, while providing valuable insights for policy change, sustainability, and replication.

In reflection across all five goal areas, Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit both have made significant progress in relation to the adoption and implementation of the UA-FSCS framework. Their approaches were contextualized further over the course of the five year USDOE FSCS grant, especially as they responded to local needs within these rural communities and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evidence-based practices were adopted, such as CAYCI-School Experience Surveys to drive planning, CARE Teams and IY social skills programming. The engagement of Binghamton University was strategic in relation to supporting implementation efforts, as well as for providing valuable services (e.g., social work interns, nursing interventions) for students and families. Evaluation services and technical assistance from an expert consultant also facilitated adoption

and implementation efforts. Lessons learned related to the UA-FSCS efforts in these two rural schools have been disseminated in multiple ways, and continue to inform policy and practice. Findings from the formal evaluation provide additional evidence to demonstrate the PLACE Initiative's achievements.

Evaluation & Findings

Throughout the five-year grant, formal evaluation methods were employed to assess progress toward deliverables and explore outcomes related to school improvement, stakeholder perceptions, and broader school community capacity building. This section provides a more detailed account of whether Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit achieved the goals and objectives outlined in their grant application, while also identifying facilitators and barriers to implementation. The evaluation also examined in what ways, if any, school-level indicators improved. This was done by exploring stakeholder perception survey data from students, parents/caregivers, and teachers/staff over the course of the five years, as well as through interviews designed to understand the experiences and social capital resulting from the UA-FSCS efforts. School report card data also were explored over the course of the five years to examine school outcomes. More details on the methods are provided next. Please note the research protocol was approved by The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board.

METHODS

Both process and outcomes evaluation methods were used. The process evaluation focused on documenting the progress both schools made in adopting and implementing the UA-FSCS model, as well as examined barriers and facilitators affecting the work. Multiple data sources were used to track progress toward deliverables, including site observations, meetings with faculty, staff, and school/district administration; community school leaders, and ongoing records review. Together these data allowed for the examination of whether key goals and objectives outlined in the original grant were met. Ongoing evaluation efforts also shed light on the facilitators and barriers that influenced efforts, and are summarized in relation to lessons learned.

Additionally, key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted with lead stakeholders at both Districts (e.g., principals, superintendents, CARE Team members, Community School Coordinators, community partners, parents/caregivers). These were done three times over the course of the grant, with the first two data collection periods primarily used to drive ongoing technical assistance in support of continuous improvements. The last set of interviews were used as a more formal evaluation method to explore perceived outcomes over the course of the five years. Findings from this last year's interviews are synthesized here in more detail.

Upon receiving consent, a semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit insights from participants. Example questions include: "What barriers have you encountered;" "What are the resources, supports or special conditions that are needed;" and "How has implementation of the Community Schools impacted your school or community-based organization as a whole?" Probing questions were used to elicit further detail and descriptive information from the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Initially transcripts were reviewed for overall themes using inductive techniques (Patton, 1990) allowing the data the "ability to be revelatory" (Mohajan, Haradham 2018) and guide next steps and system improvements. Throughout the coding process, the researchers consulted with a peer familiar with the data to discuss and monitor the validity of emerging themes.

Interviews conducted during the last year of the grant were analyzed through a social capital lens, allowing for the qualitative exploration of how bonding, bridging and linking occurred across the UA-FSCS adoption and implementation process. Operational definitions of these constructs include:

- Bonding – increasing trust and connection to school, parent/caregiver engagement and partnerships, community belonging, networks of school and community supports, and teacher/staff well-being;

- Bridging – increasing general resources (food, clothing, housing, utilities), increasing services (mental health, medical/dental, day care), community partners and connections, transportation and student progress; and

- Linking – increasing partnerships with universities (expertise and resources); expanding partnerships with civic, governmental, and business partners.

Interview data also informed the distillation of facilitators and barriers to the adoption and implementation efforts. In addition to the interview findings, the outcomes evaluation involved two additional methods. First, each year, grant stakeholders at each school (including students, teachers/staff, and parents/caregivers) completed CAYCI School Experience Surveys (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2013; 2021). CAYCI surveys examine key constructs, including academic motivation, school connectedness, access to resources, parent/caregiver involvement and support, and participation in various school community activities. These data, collected over time across each stakeholder group, were explored to distill any changes in stakeholders' views of the school community. Second, more traditional indicators of school improvement were examined, including indicators of school-level academic and behavioral outcomes. These data were pulled from a review of the School Report Cards and other secondary data.

In the end, both the process and outcomes evaluation strategies were useful in gleaning insights related to Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit's success in implementing the PLACE UA-FSCS model. Findings from these multiple strategies are provided in the next three sections of this report. The first section is titled "Deliverables and Contextual Factors," followed by the "Facilitators and Barriers of Implementation." This section concludes with "Findings from the Outcomes Evaluation."

DELIVERABLES & CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Upon examining multiple data sources (including foremost annual grant reports submitted to USDOE), it is clear how the PLACE Initiative consistently achieved and, in many cases, exceeded its expected outcomes and performance measures. This occurred even despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In relation to unduplicated counts, the grant served 3,104 students, 5,088 family members, and 1,293 community members, for a total of 9,485 individuals over five years. The financial resources and technical assistance provided by Binghamton University and the USDOE were instrumental in expanding and sustaining the two UA-FSCS in high-poverty, geographically isolated areas, ensuring critical support for students and families facing significant barriers to learning. Here progress toward deliverables by goal area are reported initially, and then facilitators and barriers to progress are presented to shed light on lessons learned related to the overall adoption and implementation process in these two rural schools. The degree to which goals and objectives outlined in project deliverables is described next.

GOAL 1: DEVELOP UA-LSCS IN TWO HIGH-POVERTY, RURAL SCHOOLS

Over the five years of funding, the PLACE Initiative made substantial progress toward developing the UA-FSCS in WPCSD and DCSD. Efforts centered on team expansion, community engagement, and sustainability planning. Key hires included full-time Community School Coordinators and a Family Engagement Counselor, with additional leadership and systems-building support provided by an educational consultant with deep experience in education leadership and community schools. These roles were instrumental in strengthening infrastructure, embedding sustainability into school systems, and fostering meaningful collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit both established Community Tables that brought together people from diverse perspectives and grew to include at least three new partners, exceeding original expectations. These Tables guided service planning and helped embed the place-based UA-FSCS model into daily practice. Their feedback, combined with data from annual needs assessments and gap analyses conducted in partnership with the CAYCI at The Ohio State University, was used to inform school improvement strategies and implement evidence-based services aligned to community-identified needs. These data also were formative in exploring evaluation results across the five years of implementation.

Programs such as the PAL program at Whitney Point/Adams and the LumberjackSchool Food Center at DCSD were direct outcomes of this collaborative process. Local agencies, such as Broome County DSS, Rural Health Network, and Mothers and Babies, became regular participants in CARE Team meetings and family-focused events, further deepening school-community ties. Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with Binghamton University Community

Schools formalized these partnerships, helping to sustain shared resources and responsibilities.

The PLACE Initiative also faced significant challenges, particularly around high staff turnover at community-based organizations, some of which operated with 50% or fewer personnel, which impacted the ability of partners to participate in or expand service delivery consistently. Encouraging full participation in assessments also required ongoing adaptation, but successful strategies emerged, such as offering incentives and aligning data collection with popular school events and staff meetings. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced unforeseen barriers, yet the initiative adapted and remained focused on building systems that support long-term impact. Despite these challenges, all outcomes under Goal 1 were met or exceeded. The PLACE Initiative successfully embedded the UA-FSCS model in both school communities, expanded access to services, and created a lasting foundation for student success through inclusive planning, data-informed decision-making, and sustained school-family-community collaboration.

GOAL 1 OBJECTIVES

Develop and/or enhance school and, as needed, school district capacities and competencies to strengthen and expand school-family-community partnerships to provide students, families, and community members increased access to comprehensive services and supports, linking these services and supports to school improvement outcomes.

MET

Outcome: Establishment of a UA-FSCS planning local Community Table for each school. Table members will include school, family, and community perspectives and may include district and building level leaders, teachers and supportive services staff, parents/residents, community-based health professionals, mental health providers, juvenile justice and local law enforcement, and other community partners who might be involved in addressing conditions to learning.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Each school will add 3 new partners to its school improvement planning "Community Table" over the course of the grant.

In partnership with the Consortium, each UA-FSCS Community Table conduct additional needs and resource assessments as well as gap analyses to refine service plans.

MET

Outcome: Each UA-FSCS site will have an complete needs and resource assessment as well as gap analysis that maps directly to the 8 service areas described in this proposal.

Schools and their partners will create collaborative leadership structures designed to ensure effective delivery of services identified (either co-located in schools or school-linked) in Goal 1, Objective 2.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: At least 3 new partners (per school) from outside the school will participate in these processes. Likewise, 2 new resource-planning Community Tables will be created (one for each UA-FSCS) based on top needs identified in the gap analysis.

MET

Outcome: Increased number of community-based services co-located at schools.

Outcome: Increased representation of community-based organizations in schools.

MET

Outcome: Formalized Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for roles, space, and resources.

MET

⭐ **Monitor and evaluate programs, services, processes, and structures in support of data based decision-making and continuous improvement and learning.**

Outcome: Annual evaluation report to the funder that will include: number of participants served at each UA-FSCS and across the initiative, and other important process indicators (such as number of evidence-based programs; number of new partners added to the "Community Table", etc),
variables related to implementation fidelity and usability, and targeted outcomes within each site that correspond to key goal areas and activities.

MET

GOAL 2: IMPLEMENT A MINIMUM OF 3 EVIDENCE-BASED ACTIVITIES, STRATEGIES, AND./OR INTERVENTIONS AND PIPELINE SERVICES

Over five years of funding, the PLACE Initiative also made substantial progress toward Goal 2, implementing evidence-based strategies and pipeline services designed to meet the needs of students, families, and communities. Through a multi-tiered system of support grounded in collaboration, structured programming, and cross-sector partnerships, the initiative delivered robust services across five key objectives.

Social-emotional learning was a central focus, with IY serving as a cornerstone in the WPCSD, where school-wide implementation was supported by a dedicated committee and staff training. At DCSD, where ultimately IY was phased out due to contextual fit, the Random Acts of Kindness curriculum was adopted to continue delivering social skill instruction. Across both sites, students received individual, group, and classroom support from school-based and community mental health providers. Some data, such as CAYCI School Experience Surveys, document improved social skills and other protective factors. Impressively, Deposit experienced a reduction in Office Disciplinary Referrals and suspensions. Evaluation data examined from IY at Whitney Point/Adams document improved social outcomes.

Expanded learning opportunities, including STEAM, literacy, and enrichment programming, engaged over 500 students, exceeding targets despite transportation barriers and pandemic-related disruptions. Youth development activities supported academic engagement and personal growth, though anticipated gains in attendance and academic outcomes were not observed. In the case of a few deliverables, there were pivots needed based on contextual factors.

Wraparound services, including CARE Teams and cross-sector partnerships, were launched at both schools. Each team coordinated access to physical, mental, and behavioral health supports, with formal MOUs, professional development, and technical assistance ensuring alignment. One highlight was the extensive reach of the CARE Team at WPSD, which was fully operational with in-tact policies and procedures in place by year five. Despite delays in service delivery due to COVID-19 and staffing shortages among partners, over 15 professionals per school were trained annually in coordinated care. A few targets were not fully met, however, especially given contextual factors. Specifically, the establishment of telehealth services at each school was not needed given amped up local efforts in the community mental health sector to provide these services (especially during and post the pandemic). DCSD did, however, use some telehealth-related services when partnering with local medical providers. Additionally, the pandemic impacted a few of the local programs originally outlined in the grant, such as the discontinuation of the Open Airways program offered by Binghamton University and a local Fruits and Vegetable Program. The schools pivoted

their approaches, such as when DCSD put in place the Lumberjack Food Center which provides more consistent, regular food access for students and their families.

Early childhood and family engagement services also expanded. Over 500 home visits were conducted, Parent Cafés were hosted quarterly, and family engagement events surpassed the original goal. A Family Resource Center was launched at WPCSD, and each school strengthened linkages with local daycare providers. Mixed results in student readiness, family involvement, and developmental milestones were observed, based on data collected from variable sources including CAYCI School Experience Surveys, stakeholder interviews, and academic indicators.

Across all objectives, the PLACE Initiative embedded evidence-based practices into daily operations, even as pandemic-related disruptions, staff burnout, and evaluation limitations hindered outcome measurement. While anticipated gains in attendance, academic achievement, and social-emotional indicators were mixed, no declines were observed. These efforts laid the groundwork for long-term systems change and continued investment in the UA-FSCS infrastructure.

GOAL 2 OBJECTIVES

Enhance social-emotional learning, with specific emphasis on The Incredible Years program, social skills training, and functional behavior assessment-based interventions.

MET

Outcome: Assess school readiness and train teachers and UA-FSCS Coordinators from both sites in The Incredible Years, social skills training, and functional behavior assessment-based interventions to support social-emotional learning

MET

Outcome: Continue or expand implementation of each of these evidence-based approaches for each UA-FSCS site.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Provide individual, group, and/or classroom social-emotional support to a minimum of 50 students annually through delivery of The Incredible Years curriculum, social skills training, and/or functional behavior assessment-based interventions.

MIXED DEPOSIT MET

Outcome: Improved behavior.

MIXED
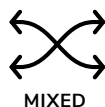
Outcome: Increased social outcomes

MET

Outcome: Increased school engagement.

MIXED WP MET

Outcome: Improved social-emotional effects.

Improve early childhood education and family engagement through the establishment of UA-FSCS services including home visits, Parent Cafés, family engagement nights, integrating and/or linking a daycare center (DPCSD), and a Family Resource Center (WPCSD) to expand early childhood development services.

MET

Outcome: Each UA-FSCS will make 5 home visits per 10 months of the academic year (100 across both schools, each year; 500 over the five years of grant funding).

MET

Outcome: Both UA-FSCS coordinators hired through the grant will be trained in the Parent Café model. Parent Cafés will be held quarterly at each school targeting at least 15 parents annually at each site (30 across both schools, each year; 150 parents over the five years of grant funding).

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Family engagement nights and celebrations will be held 3 times a year at each site (6 events per year; 30 over the five years of grant funding).

EXCEEDED

Outcome: A Family Resource Center will be established at Caryl E. Adams Elementary School and will serve a minimum of 50 families per year (250 families over the five years of grant funding).

MET

Outcome: Integrate or link local daycare center near Deposit Elementary School.

NOT MET

Outcome: Increased student attendance.

MIXED

Outcome: Improved academic outcomes for students.

MIXED

Outcome: Families increasingly becoming involved with their children's education.

MIXED

Outcome: Increase in the number of children in DPCSD and WPCSD who are ready to enter school.

MIXED

Outcome: Increase the number of children who are healthy - physically, socially, and emotionally.

Offer extended learning/youth development opportunities including afterschool and summer programming and mentoring that emphasize social-emotional learning.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Establish at least 2 new and/or expanded learning or youth development opportunities (after-school clubs, enrichment) for each UA-FSCS site.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: A minimum of 50 students within each UAFSCS (100 total each year; 500 over the five years of grant funding) will be involved in some capacity in these expanded learning or youth development opportunities.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Provide individual and/or group academic support to a minimum of 25 students in after-school programs at both sites (50 each year; 250 over the five years of grant funding).

NOT MET

Outcome: Improved attendance.

MIXED
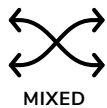
Outcome: Increased academic outcomes.

MIXED
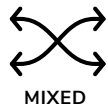
Outcome: Improved social and emotional wellbeing in students.

Increase access to health, mental health, and social services through the establishment of CARE Teams, telehealth services, and other health services.

MET

**Outcome:** Each school will receive training and technical assistance for establishing best practice CARE Teams.

MIXED
WP MET

Outcome: Each CARE Team will case 50 students per year (100 annually; 500 over the five years of grant funding).

NOT MET

Outcome: Telehealth services will be established at each school and will serve 50 students per year (each; (100 annually; 500 over the five years of grant funding).
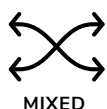
MIXED

Outcome: The Decker School of Nursing at Binghamton University will deliver the Open Airways asthma program to 15 students per year, per school (30 student annually; 150 over the five years of grant funding).
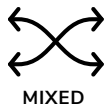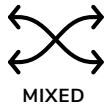
MIXED

Outcome: The Rural Health Network will deliver its Fruits and Vegetable Prescription Program to 20 families in each school per year (40 annually; 200 over the five years of grant funding).

NOT MET

Outcome: Increased attendance.

MIXED

Outcome: Improved academic outcomes.

MIXED

Outcome: Improved health, mental health, and social well-being of students.

Assess and implement support for linkages between schools and community partners.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Provide professional development on cross-systems collaboration to a minimum of 50 school and community professionals over the five years of grant funding.

MET

Outcome: For each school site, map relationships and assess current state of collaborations with community partners, focusing on areas of strength and need.

MET

Outcome: Provide professional development on cross-systems collaboration to a minimum of 50 school and community professionals over the five years of grant funding.

MET

Outcome: Increased number of community-based services co-located at schools.

MET

Outcome: Increased representation of community-based organizations in schools.

MET

Outcome: Formalized MOUs for roles, space, and resources.

GOAL 3: ENHANCE THE LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEM COMPONENT WITHIN EACH UA-FSCS

Over the five years of funding, the PLACE Initiative made substantial progress toward developing the UA-FSCS in WPCSD and DCSD. Efforts centered on team expansion, community engagement, and sustainability planning. Key hires included full-time Community School Coordinators and a Family Engagement Counselor, with additional leadership and systems-building support provided by an educational consultant with deep experience in education leadership and community schools. These roles were instrumental in strengthening infrastructure, embedding sustainability into school systems, and fostering meaningful collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit both established Community Tables that brought together people from diverse perspectives and grew to include at least three new partners, exceeding original expectations. These Tables guided service planning and helped embed the place-based UA-FSCS model into daily practice. Their feedback, combined with data from annual needs assessments and gap analyses conducted in partnership with the CAYCI at The Ohio State University, was used to inform school improvement strategies a and implement evidence-based services aligned to community-identified needs. These data also were formative in exploring evaluation results across the five years of implementation.

Programs such as the PAL program at Whitney Point/Adams and the On-Site Lumberjack School Food Center at DCSD were direct outcomes of this collaborative process. Local agencies, such as Broome County DSS, Rural Health Network, and Mothers and Babies, became regular participants in CARE Team meetings and family-focused events, further deepening school-community ties. MOUs with Binghamton University Community

GOAL 3 OBJECTIVES

⭐ Create new working teams and enhance existing teams in each school and partner community agency, including new school-family-community-government coordinating teams.

🎯 **MET** **Outcome:** Teaming structures will be created, redesigned, and/or dismantled based on the overall learning support system within the school. Outside partners who are central to the UA-FSCS will be added to these teams where appropriate in order to facilitate further service integration and reduced duplication (at least 2 new partners will be added within each school). In addition, strategic linkages will be made among school intra- and interagency teams and the county wraparound teams serving students in multiple systems.

⭐ By June 2022, accelerate planning at the district central office to scale up the UA-FSCS model to other schools in the district, at the same time developing new infrastructure for policy change and sustainability. Create strategic connections with key administrators in each district to further embed the student support work within the pupil services/learning supports system of the district. Coordinators and principals also will work with other principals in the district. This is especially important to support scale-up and support students as they transition across the feeder pattern.

🎯 **MET** **Outcome:** A strategic plan for scaling up the UA-FSCS model to other schools will be developed for each school district (2 strategic plans; one for each district).

Increase knowledge and skills among educators, student support personnel, youth development workers, parents/guardians, school-mental health providers, and other stakeholders about UA-FSCS.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Our Consortium will host quarterly cross-site professional development and networking meetings across the two UA-FSCS sites. These meetings will focus on enhancing knowledge and skills in the implementation of comprehensive, coordinated services for students and families. In addition, key leaders from our Consortium will be available to sites for ongoing technical assistance and consultation (4 per year; 20 meetings over the five years of grant funding).

GOAL 4: RECRUIT AND RETAIN EFFECTIVE TEACHERS & SOCIAL WORKERS

The PLACE Initiative advanced Goal 4 by building a stronger pipeline of educators and social workers equipped to serve rural schools in Broome County. Through the Grow Your Own Rural Teacher and Social Worker Program, three local community members, including a WPCSD graduate, received financial support to pursue degrees in education or social work. One participant now serves as a Community Schools Coordinator and plans to return to rural practice after completing a Master of Social Work. Although the initiative fell slightly short of its target (three of four participants funded), the program demonstrated meaningful local impact.

The Community Schools course at Binghamton University was enhanced through a formal partnership with the Rural Health Network. Rather than launching a separate rural course, the team integrated rural-focused content into the existing elective, which was adopted as a formal option for the university's largest minor program. The course was offered annually, with notable growth in participation: from 32 students in Year 4 to 38 students across two sections in Year 5 (18.75% increase), and more than 120 students total over the grant period. MSW interns serving at WPCSD also received stipends and mileage reimbursements to support field placements in rural schools. These combined efforts bolstered exposure to rural education and increased students' practical experience; however, most students ultimately expressed interest in relocating to larger cities after graduation. Data related to applications to Binghamton were not available.

Staff retention at the two rural UA-FSCS sites improved significantly. At DCSD, turnover among teachers and aides fell from 15% to 2.78% between the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 school years. At WPCSD, turnover dropped from 9% to 0% over the same period. Professional development activities reached approximately 30 educators in Year 5 and were provided through multiple formats, including faculty meetings, trauma-informed education training, technical assistance, and sessions on professional learning communities. Place exceeded its goal of reaching at least 100 stakeholders through professional development opportunities. Time constraints at times presented as consistent barriers. To reduce disruption to classroom instruction, PLACE-funded stipends were offered for after-school participation.

In sum, nearly all targets were met, outside of only engaging three family members for the career pathway priority (as opposed to four). However, data on increased applications to rural school districts by graduates of Binghamton University's teacher education or social work programs was available to examine progress on this deliverable. Additionally, the PLACE Initiative yielded clear improvements in staff retention, embedded rural education content into a major university course, and strengthened university-district partnerships to support the rural educator and social work workforce.

GOAL 4 OBJECTIVES

Implement a grow your own teacher/social worker program at Binghamton University focused on rural schools.

NOT MET

Outcome: Four family members from our two rural full-service community schools sites will receive funding to pursue a degree in teacher education or social work from Binghamton University and work in a rural school district. (3 members were successful.)

MET

Outcome: The teacher turnover rate at the two UA-FSCS sites will decline.

MET

Outcome: Increased teacher or social worker satisfaction with their work and school environment.

Establish an elective course in Rural Community Schools that focuses on the unique challenges and opportunities in rural school districts.

MET

Outcome: The Rural Community Schools course will be offered 5 times over 5 years and a minimum of 10 students will take the course each year (50 students over the five years of grant funding).

NO DATA

Outcome: Increased applications to rural school districts by graduates of Binghamton University's teacher education or social work programs.

MET

Outcome: Improve teacher retention in two rural UA-FSCS sites.

Our Consortium will provide professional development to teachers, administrators, and other professionals in schools. Initial professional development will focus on broadly on rural community schools. Future professional development will be based on locally identified needs.

MET

Outcome: Provide professional development to a minimum of 100 (over the five years of grant funding) teachers, administrators, and other professionals who work in and with the two UA-FSCS sites.

MET

Outcome: The teacher turnover rate at the two UA-FSCS sites will decrease.

MET

Outcome: Increased teacher or social worker satisfaction with their work and school environment.

GOAL 5: DISSEMINATE KEY FINDINGS, LESSONS LEARNED & SUCCESS STORIES

Over the course of the grant, the PLACE Initiative meaningfully contributed to the knowledge based by sharing lessons learned, successes, and innovations with local, regional, and national audiences to support policy change, sustainability, scale-up, and replication. Dissemination efforts were aligned with key state and national networks, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities of implementing FSCS models in rural contexts.

Between Years 2 and 5, the team produced and shared seven policy/practice briefs that emphasized implementation strategies, lessons learned, and implications for statewide practice. Dissemination occurred across multiple formats—including electronic newsletters, printed documents, professional conferences, and webinars—ensuring reach across education, mental health, and child- and family-serving systems. Additionally, a manuscript focusing on rural place-based strategies to address non-academic barriers to learning was submitted to The Rural Educator journal, with additional academic products planned. These contributions have helped shape the emerging literature on rural FSCS implementation and informed policy discussions on sustainability and scale-up in low-density areas. Notably, lessons learned through this project informed and strengthened the successful 2023–2024 FSCS grant application to the USDOE in two different communities in Ohio (efforts led by the project's Lead Evaluator). This reflects the translational value of the PLACE Initiative and the project's ongoing impact on future initiatives.

Throughout the grant, nine dissemination activities occurred, including five conference presentations (one a keynote at the Southeastern School Behavioral Health Conference), one webinar with over 100 attendees, two national expert meetings on school-linked services, and one academic contribution in progress, with others planned. These activities reached national audiences of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, highlighting rural-specific challenges, successes, and lessons learned. Lessons also were shared at the annual meeting of the Mental Health-Education Integration Consortium (MHEDIC), a network connected to the National Center for School Mental Health. This meeting enabled our Project Director and Lead Evaluator to engage directly with national experts, practitioners, and policymakers to share how rural districts can implement, adapt, and sustain community school strategies.

These dissemination efforts exceeded the benchmarks and positioned the PLACE Initiative as a model for knowledge-sharing and collaborative learning in the UA-FSCS and broader FSCS field. While no major challenges emerged, the team strategically timed key dissemination activities for later in the grant period, once sufficient longitudinal data and implementation findings were available. This ensured that shared insights were rich, actionable, and relevant to both policy and practice audiences.

GOAL 5 OBJECTIVES

Connect UA-FSCS innovations, success stories, research findings, and lessons learned with the broader NYS priority focused on community schools.

MET

Outcome: Publication of 7 policy/practice briefs highlighting lessons learned and implications that will be widely disseminated across NY state through the various education, mental health, and family and children serving networks. In addition, other dissemination outlets such as electronic newsletters, webinars, printed documents, professional conferences, and primary journals will be targeted.

Use this initiative to expand the regional and national agenda for UA-FSCS, expanded school mental health (Weist, 2006), expanded school improvement (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008), and other relevant initiatives, each of which needs to be a partner in the growing national movement for UA-FSCS via the Coalition for Community Schools.

EXCEEDED

Outcome: Share a minimum of 3 lessons learned about successes, challenges, barriers, and "how to's" with Coalition for Community Schools, Children's Aid Society, and MHEDIC which provides ongoing consultation and support to the National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland-Baltimore.

Overall the PLACE Initiative met and/or exceeded target goals and objectives outlined in the overall grant proposal. Areas where progress was mixed or limited mostly related to behavioral and academic outcomes which are long-term goals evident in most school reform efforts (ones that usually take upwards of 10 years to accomplish as noted in the school change literature (Aladjem et al., 2010). Additionally, these outcomes are even more difficult to change post COVID-19, as the pandemic disrupted student learning, has impacted student and teacher engagement, and increased various non-academic barriers to learning (most significantly mental health challenges and absenteeism). Nonetheless, Whitney Point/Adams, Deposit, and their partners have continued down their journeys toward adopting and implementing the UA-FSCS framework, and have made significant progress in relation to most deliverables set out in their original plan. Facilitators and barriers to these efforts shed light on incubators and roadblocks and inform lessons learned.

FACILITATORS & BARRIERS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Multiple data collection efforts informed the distillation of the various facilitators and barriers related to the adoption and implementation of the UA-FSCS model in these two rural schools. Facilitators are factors and influences that helped with these improvement efforts, whereas barriers are challenges and other factors which impede progress. In some cases, some factors served as both facilitators and barriers and also are described here.

FACILITATORS

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP: The work of building the UA-FSCS began several years before the PLACE Grant was awarded, as both districts were already considering expanded approaches to school improvement. For instance, the WPSD Superintendent and district leadership team provided district-wide trauma Informed training to all teachers and staff, focused district policies and procedures so they were whole-child centered, and set high expectations for academic and behavioral achievement for all students. Once awarded, district leadership continued to facilitate adoption efforts as district leaders emphasized key elements of the Community School Model in steps, building on existing programming and growing the program through creative staffing, wise use of funding, and through strategic personnel hires. The expected adoption of classroom social-emotional instruction, implementation of CARE Teams, and efforts focused on strategic parental engagement were made clear to teachers, staff and administrators. This clarity and consistency was a guiding star that accelerated the work and provided well-defined guidance even in the face of staff turn-over, the pandemic and competing priorities.

SOCIAL CAPITAL & RELATIONSHIPS: A key facilitator to the PLACE efforts involved leveraging social capital, the historical relationships and networks in place in these rural school communities which serve as such strengths. This is best demonstrated through the wise decisions made by the WPCSD Superintendent to fill the role of the Community School Coordinator with a surprising three-person team (allowing for the leveraging of social capital times three!). Each of the part-time staff members brought their considerable expertise, past experiences, relationships and social networks to a well-defined division of the position. As an example, parent engagement and social emotional learning efforts were supported by a long-time counselor/coach in the District, who was equally well-liked and respected by teachers, staff, parents, and the parents' parents (his former students). He added to his long-term trusting relationships in and out of the district by his willingness to provide home visits, work collaboratively with agencies and civic groups to obtain needed resources for individual families, and his unshakeable positive attitude that FSCS were the best solution to a myriad of challenges. Community partnerships, along with parts of the school's parent/family engagement efforts, were supported by a social worker who recently transferred to the school from the realm of state agencies. She also had strong relationships with a large group of community businesses and non-profit organizations and was able to build the Community Table with a number of critical partners. Additionally, she provided Parent Café trainings as stand-alone topics, but also led on-going targeted groups, such as the Kinship group and IY parenting class. Support for early childhood education, extended learning, and IY was overseen by a third outstanding hire, an Adams Elementary

teacher who was highly regarded by her peers and administrators. This trusted individual served the Community School Team well as teachers' roles and responsibilities were somewhat redefined and as the CARE Team was implemented and scaled up to the secondary schools. Each team member led out in their area of responsibility, but collaboratively planned together and supported each initiative, especially in providing supports and resources to parents and families. Survey data reported strong support from teachers and parents for this CARE Teams.

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES: In particular, the implementation of IY was a facilitator because efforts jump started both schools UA-FSCS. Putting in place this evidence-based program at the Pre-K and Kindergarten levels, whether successful or not, fostered initial planning and implementation steps in both schools. At Whitney Point/Adams specifically, teachers were able to watch, learn the curricula, and begin to feel comfortable with the verbiage and major themes. Further, intern social workers ran small groups for targeted students, the school Social Worker or Counselor provided individual child/parent support, and the Community School Team ran parent groups. After teachers came to love curricula and the puppets as much as the students did, they began teaching the whole class lessons using the IY curriculum. In order to scale up the program, administration provided paid time during the summer for all grade level teams to work together on planning the lessons and developing a pacing guide to ensure consistency among classes. Classroom instructional efforts and small groups. Resources were also provided for each class to have their own set of materials and puppets to ensure that the instruction could happen as scheduled.The enacted IY program at Whitney Point/Adams has become a model site for other schools to visit and learn.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: Deposit, in particular, capitalized on well-established partnerships in this small, close-knit community to implement the UA-FSCS grant goals. The local churches, businesses, civic and local non-profit organizations, including the Deposit Foundation, have had a strong partnership with the district in the past as they provided services to the children and families of the school district for many years. Their collaborative efforts were strengthened by the formation of the Community Table to share data pinpointing greatest needs, add needed partner organizations, and eliminate duplication. One such success was the enhanced partnership with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier. The service increased from monthly food bank trucks visiting the school to the formation of the Lumberjack Food Center, funded by multiple small grants and open several days a week to all patrons in the area. The Lumberjack Food Center is coordinated by the Community School Coordinator Assistant, housed in the District's bus garage with new refrigeration and storage areas, and is staffed by students with special needs as a hands-on learning opportunity.

The Community Tables in both districts led to new and enhanced ways of working together to better meet the identified needs of students and families. As an example in DCSD, the invitation to partner closely with the Broome County Mental Health and the Mental Health Association of the Southern Tier provided students and families with direct access, viewed as one-stop shopping, for needed help. Another success was the implementation of Telehealth Services, where the school nurse could work in tandem with a physician to address medical needs. This was especially helpful during the pandemic and led the way to the establishment of a medical clinic in town. Nursing students from Binghamton University provided Open Airways asthma training, the Lourdes Dental Van provided on-site dental care, and other college students supported extended learning programs after-school and during the summer.

TEAMING STRUCTURES: Opportunities for staff, teachers, and community partners to meet together in teams, whether it be to plan, coordinate services, discuss student and family needs and prioritize, or support each other were critical facilitators. Key teaming structures included Community Tables, Care Teams, PLCs, and regular UA-FSCS team meetings. The CARE Team really emerged as an important structure needed to identify and address individual student/family needs. Focusing on efficiency and effectiveness, the CARE Team clarified roles and responsibilities of its members, eliminated duplication of committees, and developed a meeting schedule that addressed K-12 priorities as well as individual student needs in each building. This multidisciplinary teaming structure was so effective the CARE Teams were scaled up from the elementary to the middle/high schools and are now permanent teaming structures in the Districts.

USE OF DATA: Over the course of the UA-FSCS adoption and implementation process, data became a critical driver of action. For instance, both districts regularly used academic data tools for teachers to plan instruction and monitor student achievement. However, school climate and student well-being data collection was limited prior to the

UA-FSCS work. The addition of the CAYCI School Experience Survey annual data collection process was another key facilitator, as findings allowed for a better understanding of needs and non-academic barriers, but also fostered stakeholder buy-in and "readiness" and drove expanded solutions. One district administrator noted how "the survey data identified things that are really important but were not even on our radar" such as perceptual differences between students, teachers/staff, and parents/caregivers on matters of safety, empowerment, mental health concerns and engagement. CAYCI data was presented on several occasions to teachers/staff as a way to gain empathy and reflect on personal assumptions. Goals were established to support teachers/staff in making individual connections with each student, communicate directly and frequently with parents/caregivers through text using new technology, and to foster greater parental involvement through Parent Cafes and active participation on committees making decisions. Trend data show that these action steps, now part of the WPCSD's Strategic Plan, are making a positive difference. One example of listening to and including stakeholders in problem solving led to a task force which created a community petition and presentation to the School Board, winning their approval and funding to provide transportation to all children to and from school, no matter the distance.

EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES: Both schools also made significant efforts to increase participation in pre-school and other early learning programs. At DCSD, a local preschool/day-care was relocated into the elementary school building, providing childcare for infants through age 4. Although essentially a co-located service, over time the program became more engaged with the school, co-sponsoring parent/child nights, engaging with many other school community partners, sharing the gym and other facilities, and working with the high school to provide CTE credit for students wanting to learn and experience childcare career opportunities. WPCSD worked collaboratively with Head Start to consolidate district preschool programming under the direction of the Assistant Principal, which then raised the standards for instruction, aligned behavior expectations and unified parent engagement.

Afterschool programming also served as an important facilitator of student engagement and growth, as well as family support. As an example, Deposit provided meaningful afterschool programming by hiring a teacher on special assignment to coordinate extended learning opportunities. Her expertise as a reading specialist supported individualized tutoring for students using carefully aligned curricula and strategies used in the classroom. High school students came to support academic time as well as the implementation of a variety of youth development opportunities. Federal Recovery Funds were used to extend the program from two days a week to three and raised the pay scale for bus drivers to attract and retain drivers. Expanding learning into the homes was another focus of this position, as the Coordinator worked with grant writers to fund innovative projects such as the One School One Book initiative, where all students received a book to take home. At Whitney Point/Adams, extended learning opportunities were developed through university partnerships with Cornell, Binghamton University, and Syracuse University. The school also used these new partnerships to enrich their parent engagement by offering classes for both children and parents/caregivers. Syracuse University physical education faculty continue to lead recess interventions at the elementary school post the grant period.

BARRIERS

STAFF TURNOVER: Turnover of staff remained a challenge throughout the grant period. As a case in point, Whitney Point/Adams had three principals over the course of the five-year grant. There were two to three teachers who left this small school each year, with four leaving in one year. The school social worker left, as did the School Counselor, who quit midyear and could not be replaced. Additionally, social work interns, student nurses, and other college student support staff regularly rotated in and out of the school. Local partners struggled with finding staff to fill their open positions. Each of these presented challenges, and new staffing arrangements required on-boarding and time for new staff to adjust to the school and community culture. In some cases, the change was helpful to the overall mission of the school, but progress was slowed in most cases.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR: As in many schools where trauma-informed approaches are needed based on the student population, there can be challenges with behavior, often representing itself as behavioral incidences (office discipline referrals), absenteeism, and student disengagement. Also, there were challenges with consistency in relation to expectations and consequences for behaviors, as teachers/staff/administrators had differing opinions and perspectives on their roles. As such, there were times when there was a lack of understanding about how to address disruptive behavior and when. These challenges are not isolated to these two rural schools. Nonetheless, this presented itself in interesting ways, as at times teachers/staff felt there was no clarity of rules, lack of consistency in addressing behavior, and limited support for students in the classroom. Some preferred to return to "zero tolerance" with clear consequences for students who were unable or unwilling to control their behavior. Others still wanted an individually based behavior plan for students with aides to intervene, while a few wanted special placements for the students outside of the school. Clarity on all these issues appears not to have been provided or consistently implemented, creating a huge barrier for the schools and their capacity to implement other priorities. CAYCI surveys from students, parents/caregivers and teachers/staff all reflect concerns with behavior. Teachers, in particular, noted behavioral issues as a major cause of stress and low morale. Collectively behaviors and the challenges they present for highly impacted schools limited progress.

PACE OF IMPLEMENTATION/CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS: The transition to a FSCS is most often built over time with key milestones occurring over-time as stakeholders become "ready" for next steps. Also, the evolution of a school from a place where perhaps programs/services are co-located or l-inked, to a setting which serves as a hub of community support can take time. Grant deliverables, however, outlined key deliverables and expectations each year nonetheless. The pace of implementation at times was slowed as actors needed clarity related to what it meant to be a FSCS, and sometimes knowledge, awareness, and skills needed to be built along the way as improvement efforts were expanded. As an example, the PLACE grant necessitated the simultaneous adoption of multiple programs/services to meet grant requirements (and serve specific numbers of students, families and community members). While the districts had community partnerships in place prior to the grant (such as Deposit's afterschool and summer offerings), these often operated as add-ons and were external to the daily operations of the schools. Structured and focused endeavors on parent and community engagement, health and mental health services, and the broadened school approach to the "whole child" were new in these buildings (as was connecting all of this back to classrooms and teachers). In some cases, rather than being integrated efforts working toward a broader goal, activities were perhaps seen as "one more thing" and in some cases met with resistance. Barriers to implementation occurred.

"TURF" ISSUES: Sometimes professionals working in the two schools were not always on the same page in relation to roles and responsibilities, and other times there were concerns with turf issues. There also was confusion at times about the role and responsibilities of the newly created position of Community School Coordinators, especially given the role focused on backbone services while also at times necessitating the delivery of specific programs/services. Over time these were minimized as progress was made toward full UA-FSCS implementation and knowledge of the broadened agenda was clearer to stakeholders.

Additionally, the development of the CARE Teams created an opportunity to reexamine roles, responsibilities and processes that the schools used to identify and address the needs of students and families needing support. In both schools, a well-established team was already in place to address academic issues. Known as the RtI team or Special Education Team, referrals were typically made only to address lack of academic progress that might lead to a placement in Special Education. CARE Teams allowed for the assessment of all factors that may be causing students to struggle - behavioral, social emotional, attendance, family issues, and concerns for basic needs of food, shelter, medical/dental care and appropriate clothing. This, in turn, necessitated the broadening of teaming structures through the CARE Teams which added new perspectives (e.g., teachers/staff, parents/caregivers, community mental health specialists, Coordinators). At times, even representatives from the Division of Social Services participated in CARE Team meetings. Struggles among professionals emerged some times as new perspectives were added. Defining the unique purpose of each team, training teachers/staff and partners on the new processes of referrals and teaming structures, working to consistently provide case management and data tracking, all were instrumental in showing the value and alleviating concerns .

COMBINED FACILITATORS & BARRIERS

COVID-19: Educators and aligned experts are still assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic progress and social/emotional health of children. While outcomes will not be expanded upon here, it's important to recognize how the shared vision, mission, and newly created infrastructure of the UA-FSCS were critical factors in WPCSD and DCSD's' productive response to the pandemic. The need to rapidly move to online learning required intentional outreach and training to teachers and to parents, along with distribution of computers and modems to access the internet. The UA-FSCS Team, social workers, school counselors, teachers/staff, and administrators rapidly addressed basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and referrals for mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence support. The resources from the UA-FSCS grant allowed for the delivery of vital services during a period of crisis and great need. The schools became "safe" places for community members-at-large to get needed help, and those experiences built trust between the families and the school. In fact, CAYCI School Experience Survey trend data show that even with the resumption of "regular" school, the perceptions of parents/caregivers, community partners and teachers/staff of the value of the schools increased and the "new-normal" way of operating continues to become more positive each year.

The social/emotional effects of the pandemic on students also are well-documented, and continue to impact the schools. CAYCI baseline data at both schools documented the pandemic's dramatic effect on students' self-reporting of internalizing and externalizing behavior. The alarming numbers of students who reported feeling sad, lonely, fearful, and had trouble sleeping, getting along with friends, and feeling little sense of purpose or control over their lives also had a catalyzing effect on schoolwide efforts to increase student connectedness and address social emotional issues. The need for consistent, doable, social emotional supports and social skills/mental health programming was somewhat reduced through key UA-FSCS programs/services such as IY, Random Acts of Kindness (an alternative evidence-based program approved for use), individual counseling and case management, and small group instruction. The extensive need and mental health-related challenges resulting from COVID-19 have remained and continue to impact the schools' progress.

Further, attendance issues became more pronounced following the school-closures required during the pandemic. Whitney Point/Adams created a school-wide approach to positively support regular attendance, educate parents, and address individual student needs using the Attendance Works resources. This effort, led by the Assistant Principal, also linked into the CARE Team to coordinate interventions. Deposit likewise made targeted efforts with the K-12 CARE Team to identify and support students and families struggling with regular attendance. The Community School Coordinator was key in making home visits and linking families to needed resources. At both schools, academic achievement, school connectedness, positive mental health, and chronic absenteeism, exacerbated by the pandemic, continue to be major concerns.

BUY-IN: The work of transitioning to a UA-FSCS in both schools was accelerated by engaging district-wide leaders and fostering buy-in for the expanded approach. Superintendent leadership was critical in securing the buy-in of teacher/staff, the school board, and community partners. The Board's buy-in, as well as public acknowledgement of the services provided by the Team through the UA-FSCS, was a key facilitator, especially during the pandemic. The Board also supported the Superintendent's recommendations to expand social-emotional curricula to the middle school (using Second Step) and fund needed personnel. Key district leaders at the high school, middle school and elementary school were also engaged to garner their support for implementation of the CARE Team at each level, aligning Back-to-School and Parent/Teacher Conferences to streamline events for parents/caregivers, and coordinating attendance efforts with targeted families. K-12 participation in the CAYCI School Experience Surveys also was used to identify needs and monitor progress, but also to allow stakeholders to "see" themselves as part of the solution and to commit further to the expanded priorities.

Buy-in in other cases was limited, which served in turn as a barrier to implementation efforts. Staff turnover contributed, especially in the case of changes in principals, afterschool program leaders, and the Community School Coordinator (such as at Deposit). At times the lack of consistent leadership in the building slowed the grant implementation work and left many implementation questions about what was expected, who was responsible for what, and how decisions

were made. Redefining roles of teachers, social workers, and the school counselor in light of expected classroom social/emotional instruction, a refined RtI process, and integrated partnerships also were stressful and created tension among stakeholders at times. During the first few years of the PLACE initiative, school moral declined, during the COVID-19 years. Once key positions were filled with the people aligned to the work of UA-FSCS, and the "storming" settled and the "norming" phase of implementation began, vuy-in and action steps became more solidified.

FINDINGS FROM OUTCOMES EVALUATION

In addition to exploring progress toward deliverables and the factors influencing the adoption and implementation of the UA-FSCS agenda, the evaluation also examined broader outcomes associated with the PLACE Initiative. Three methods were central to the outcomes evaluation. First, qualitative interviews with key stakeholders at each of the schools during the last year of the grant period were examined using a social capital lens, followed by the exploration of student, parents/caregiver, and teachers/staff CAYCI School Experience Survey trends over the course of the five years. School report card data also were explored over the course of the five years to examine student- and school-outcomes. This next section presents these findings.

INTERVIEW THEMES EXPLORED THROUGH A SOCIAL CAPITAL LENS

The PLACE Grant provided the schools with opportunities to identify, prioritize and mobilize networks of relationships to provide expertise, resources, and social supports to meet the non-academic challenges of students. Social capital, or the belief that others working toward shared goals are reliable, competent and share values that meet the community expectations (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 2000), not only facilitated efforts but also resulted. The PLACE Grant built on the notion that although rural communities may be resource-poor, they are commonly relationship-rich (Fleming et at., 2018) and often provide expertise, resources, and social support through networks of support rather than institutions (Fleming et al, 2018). Bonding, bridging and linking social capital resulted in different ways, as described by key stakeholders who participated in the interviews in year five.

The first type of social capital is bonding expressed as relationships built and mobilized among groups with similar identities (Claridge, 2018). Stakeholders who participated in Interviews and focus groups at both schools reported efforts to capitalize on the power of bonding. They mentioned how the PLACE efforts led to improved school climate, increased access to supports and expanded family connections and engagement. Professional learning experiences for teachers/staff, such as WPCSD's district-wide Trauma Informed Practices group, resulted as staff-led efforts to reduce chronic attendance issues and build consensus. Stakeholders reported how the implementation of school-wide social-emotional learning programs helped improve school connections for students and greater satisfaction among teachers/staff. Stakeholders from both schools talked about how parent and family engagement and support was improved due to home visits, tailor-made parent classes, personalized communications, and alignment to existing parent organizations. They also reported on specific improvements related to student/caregiver connections to school, an increase in community belonging and a more positive view of the school among parents. Importantly, participants in the interviews also reflected on challenges for staff (more demands than time, turn-over, burnout, lack of support) , and related to challenges associated with community engagement (factors such as poverty, addiction, trauma, lack of resources, lack of community services and transportation issues.) Bonding was the most cited type of social capital reported upon by participants in the interviews.

Bridging, the second type of social capital, defines the relationships built among groups with differing identities, but similar status or power (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 2000). These horizontal relationships occur between groups that might not otherwise regularly connect, or there may be system barriers limiting accessibility. In schools, these relationships can be seen between school staff and community professionals who both work with students. Bridging can be seen in co-located services, or community service providers integrating into the work of the school to eliminate challenges for families to access care and resources. Participants in the interviews from both schools reported on successful efforts related to the mobilization of existing and new relationships in support of a "systematic method of addressing holistic needs for students." Several spoke to the CARE Teams and how they created a multi-disciplinary group of professionals collaborating together in a new way to address student/family issues. Interviewees also mentioned the value of the provision of essential supports for students and families, specifically highlighting the value of UA-FSCS strategies to provide food, clothing, shelter, help with utilities (including internet), and expanded services such as medical, dental, mental health, child welfare services and adult education. Another common strategy mentioned by the participants in the interviews focused on the value of the Community Tables. They reported how these promoted sustainability by formalizing relationships, allowing for the assessment of needs, reducing duplication, filling gaps in services, and reviewing data to monitor performance. Interviewees reflected upon how parent/caregivers came to see

the schools as the "hub" of the community, a place where "trusted individuals" were able to work together to meet needs.

Linking, the third type of social capital, involves sharing expertise, resources, or social support in a vertical network, where there is a distinct difference in power or status (Healy, 2001, Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). This structure has the potential to share resources, influence, and additional support more broadly as many diverse groups of differing socio-economic backgrounds can access the resources. Stakeholders who participated in the interviews identified the PLACE initiative as a clear example of linking relationships, noting the expertise and technical assistance provided by university professors on the PLACE Grant and other resources provided beyond the scope of their community, such as Cornell Extensions Services. Some participants even mentioned specific professional development opportunities offered as part of the grant, such as those provided by the BUCS Regional Network and Ohio State.

Beyond this assistance, stakeholders from Whitney Point/Adams mentioned ways in which their school was especially proactive in linking relationships with Binghamton University in other ways (e.g., student interns, student teachers). A few participants mentioned the value of the "Grow Your Own" program. One stakeholder mentioned how the school was selected as a model site for implementing the evidence-based IY program. Overall interviewees mentioned linking-type relationships as primarily a source for added resources and partnerships that enhance the work of the school by connecting individuals to broader opportunities.

CAYCI SCHOOL EXPERIENCE SURVEY TREND ANALYSIS

The CAYCI School Experience Surveys were used as part of the evaluation to ascertain a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of school-level outcomes that resulted from the PLACE efforts. Each year of the grant, students, parents/caregivers, and teachers/staff completed surveys each year from 2020-2024. Table 3 displays the number of participants completing the surveys by each stakeholder group at each measurement point. Although several constructs were measured each year to guide annual school improvement efforts, only a few indicators were selected here to demonstrate some of the changes in stakeholder perceptions over time. Presented here are trend data related to overall school experiences by stakeholder groups, as well as those specific to the availability of and support for involvement of different types of pro-social activities in the school community.

Table 3. Number of Participants by Stateholder Group Completing CAYCI Surveys

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Students					
Whitney Point/Adams	68	103	208	215	214
Deposit	70	68	88	122	93
Parents/Caregivers					
Whitney Point/Adams	122	138	75	93	76
Deposit	30	49	21	29	34
Teachers/Staff					
Whitney Point/Adams	49	57	43	73	65
Deposit	29	19	28	26	21

OVERALL SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: First, the responses among parent/caregivers on the Overall School Experiences Scale (Ball et al., 2019) of the CAYCI School Experience Surveys were examined to explore over the course of the five years. This scale measures on a 7-point likert-type scale (1 to 7) parent/caregiver perceptions of the quality of their children's school environment. Key factors influencing these perceptions include student satisfaction, family-school engagement, and overall school climate. Positive perceptions are associated with improved student outcomes, such as higher academic performance, better attendance, and increased student well-being (Ball et al., 2019). As demonstrated in Figure 1, scores on the Overall School Experience Scale completed by parents/caregivers at each building improved dramatically over the years of UA-FSCS implementation, especially in WPCSD. Since 2022, however, perceptions of

parents/caregivers were increasingly more favorable, providing indication as well of improvements in school climate.

Figure 1. Overall School Experience
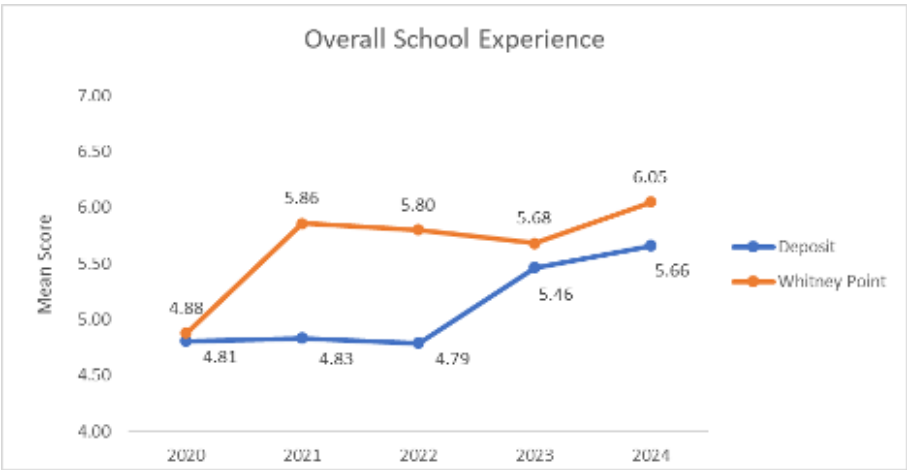
When examining overall school experiences from the student perspective, CAYCI data point to ongoing favorable and stable perceptions of the school over the course of the five years. Figures 2 and 3 showcase trend data based on students' scores on three CAYCI subscales, including Academic Motivation, Academic Press, and School Connectedness. There was little change in these scores over time, which mostly was related to ceiling effects (i.e., perceptions were positive on the scale so there was little "room to grow"). As an example, 91.2% of students at Whitney Point/Adams reported they were "proud to be at my school" in 2024, an item on the School Connectedness subscale (which is similar to the 94.1% in 2020, 96.1% in 2021, 91.8% in 2022, and 93.0% in 2023). While at Deposit, 89.1% of students in 2024 reported they were "confident in my ability to manage my school work," an item on the Academic Motivation subscale (as compared to 88.2% in 2020, 88.2% in 2021, 75.0% in 2022, and 79.5% in 2023). As the trend lines for both schools demonstrate, the students reported favorable school experiences in relation to these three constructs over the course of the five year grant.

Figure 2. Student CAYCI Responses from Whitney Point/Adams in WPCSD
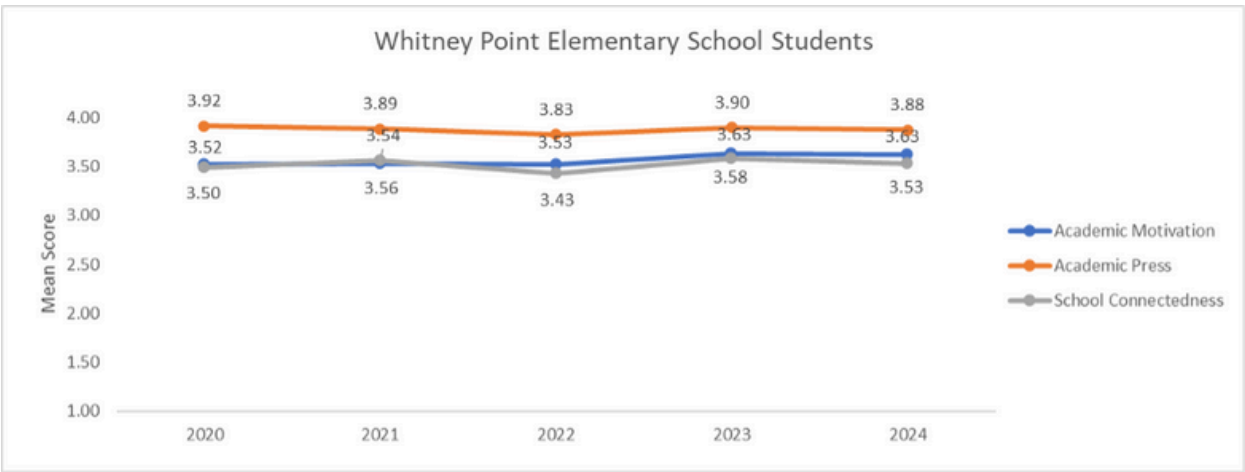
Figure 3. Student CAYCI Responses from Deposit Elementary
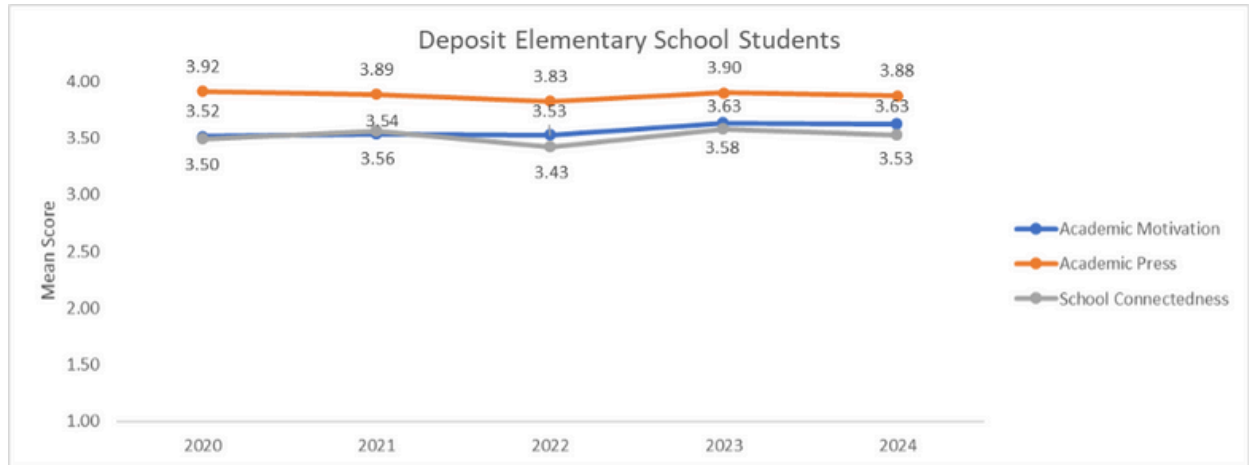
A few items were interesting to explore from the teachers/staff CAYCI School Experience Surveys. Perceptions of teachers/staff at both schools were increasingly favorable when asked if they felt they were an "important part of the school, with Whitney Point/Adam's teachers/staff scores improved eight percentage points from year one to five, and Deposit eighteen percentage points over the same period.

There also were favorable responses related to other teacher/staff experiences. For instance, across all years teachers/staff reported from Whitney Point/Adams said they were "committed to my schools," with 85.5-88.9% reporting they agree with this statement. Deposit teachers/staff reported they were "proud to work at the school," with 93.1% reporting so in 2020 and 95.2% in 2024 (please note there was a dip in 2022 with a score of 66.7% when there was some turnover).

Importantly, data from teachers/staff at year five are indicative of general satisfaction with the learning support system during the last year of the grant, with Deposit scores being generally more favorable:

- 81% of teachers/staff at Deposit and 61.3% at WhitneyPoint/Adams reported "the learning supports and services in my school meet the needs of students."

- 95.2% at Deposit and 84.4% at Whitney Point/Adams reported "there is a system in place in my school where teachers and staff can refer students and families who are in need of additional learning supports."

- 90.5% at Deposit and 60.3% at Whitney Point/Adams reported "student learning problems are identified early and acted upon in my school."

Collectively, CAYCI responses over time by stakeholder groups (especially the parent/caregiver data) provide indication that the overall school climate has improved over the course of the grant efforts. These data also serve as baseline indicators for future UA-FSCS efforts in both school communities.

PRO-SOCIAL ACTIVITIES: Several subscales on the CAYCI have the various stakeholders report on their perceptions of the availability of pro-social activities and other positive youth development experiences in the school community.

The teacher/staff completed several CAYCI subscales related to the extent to which they feel their students have opportunities to be involved in and supported through community-based pro-social activities. Research has shown that youth involvement in such activities (e.g., after-school programs, youth clubs, religious or social organizations) positively influences academic, psychological, and social development (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2011). Importantly, schools play a key role in connecting students with these resources, which in turn can enhance students' self-concept, peer relationships, and academic success (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

The Community Support for Positive Youth Development measures whether the teachers/staff perceive there are ample pro-social opportunities in the community, offering insight into areas for strengthening school-community partnerships and enhancing opportunities for positive youth development. Two other subscales, Family Support for Pro-social Activities and School Support for Pro-social Activities, provide insights into perceptions of the availability of and support for involvement in pro-social activities (e.g., the value of involvement). Figures 4 & 5 showcase the trend data for each school on these three measures, demonstrating improved teachers/staff perceptions related to all three indicators related to prosocial activities (particularly in relation to school and community supports, a key target for the PLACE initiative).

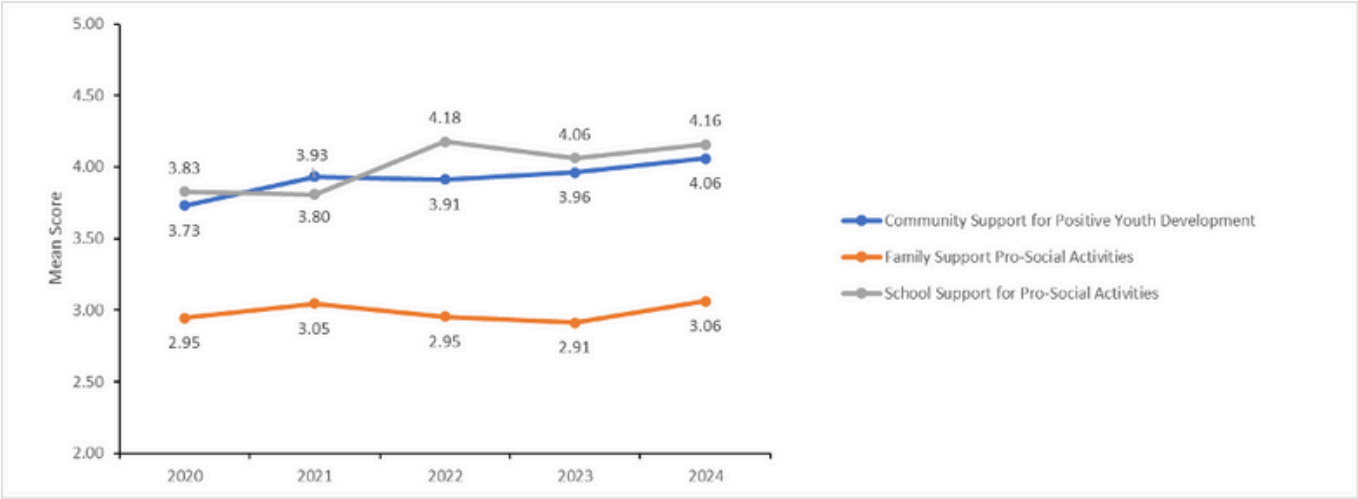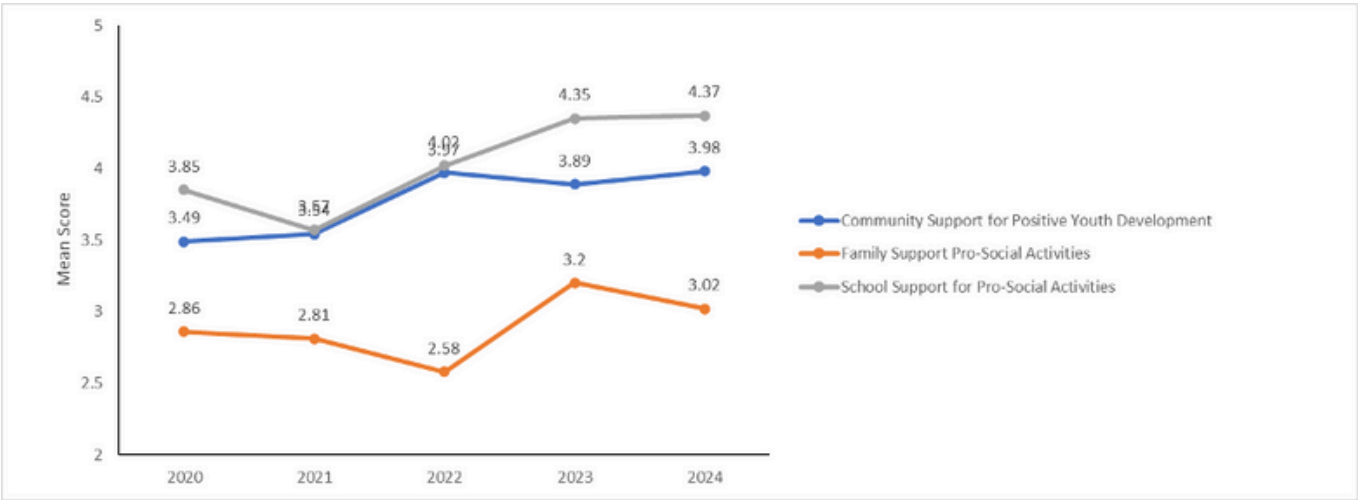*Figure 4. Whitney Point/Adams Teacher/Staff Perceptions of Supports.*

Figure 5 Deposit Teacher/Staff Perceptions of Supports.

Students also completed items reporting about their involvement in different types of positive youth development experiences, ones such as sport, dance, and clubs. Research has shown that extracurricular participation leads to better academic outcomes and offers opportunities for prosocial development (Eccles et al., 2003). The following Figures showcase these responses among students at each school over-time, demonstrating how scores were higher in the later years of the UA-FSCS. These findings showcase more engagement in pro-social activities reported by students, a positive finding given the grant's focus on providing extended learning opportunities. Please note the significant improvements in student reported involvement at Whitney Point/Adams, whereas students at Deposit reported less

engagement but still showed progress related to youth groups and programs. See Figures 6-9.

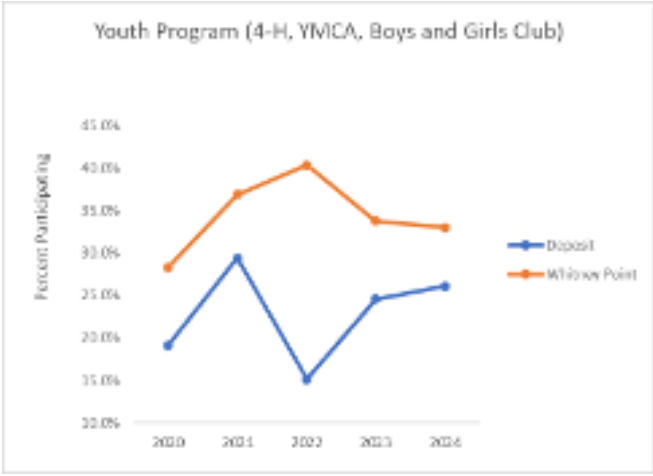**Figure 6. Play on a Sports Team**

Figure 7. Youth Programs

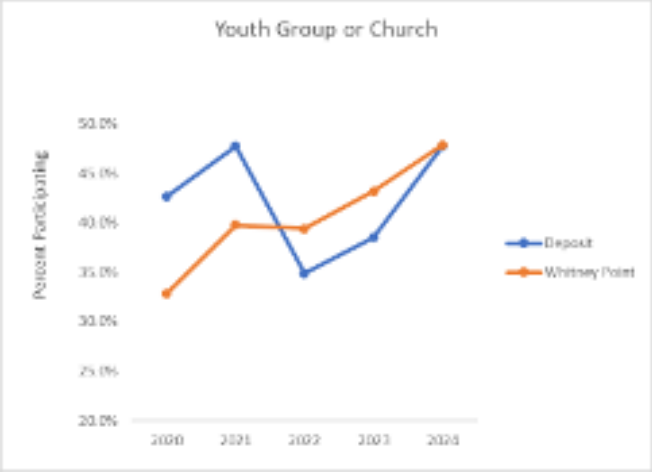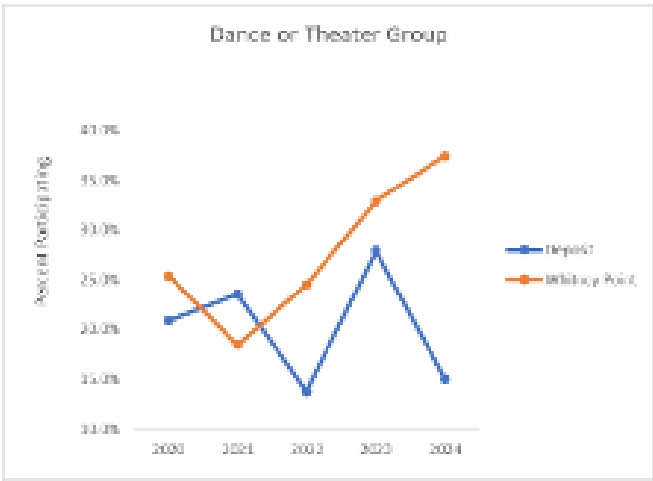**Figure 8. Youth Group or Church**

Figure 9. Dance or Theater Group

SCHOOL LEVEL INDICATORS OVER THE YEARS

Ultimately the UA-FSCS grant through the USDOE aspires to address the conditions students bring with them to school so that learning improves. The two schools prioritized in the PLACE initiative serve children and families with many needs common to rural communities, ones the UA-FSCS promised to address. Data on various school-level indicators over the years are presented in Tables 4, 5, and 6 showcasing continued areas of improvement needed across both schools. As in other schools post the COVID-19 pandemic, absenteeism rates have increased at both Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit. Behavioral challenges common in schools serving students who have experienced trauma continue at the more highly impacted Whitney Point/Adams school. Deposit has experienced some reductions in these behavioral challenges. Achievement scores have moved up and down over the years, but remain similar or lower over the years. One imagines what data might look like had there not been the UA-FSCS investment in these two rural schools post-pandemic. Efforts to continually drive school reforms and the partnership agenda continue with an eye on moving the needle on this school-level indicators.

Table 4. School-Level Behavior by Years

School Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Chronic Absenteeism						
Whitney Point/Adams	13%	97%	16%	28%	25%	21%
Deposit	15%	22%	35%	30%	32%	21%
Office Discipline Referrals						
Whitney Point/Adams	491	560	212	164	337	537
Deposit	82	63	3	35	52	66
Out-of-School Suspensions						
Whitney Point/Adams	6	17	12	1	3	27
Deposit	8	4	0	7	5	1
In-School Suspensions						
Whitney Point/Adams	5	15	1	0	3	1
Deposit	16	0	0	5	2	3

Table 5. School-Level Reading by Years

School Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
% Proficient ELA Grade 3						
Whitney Point/Adams	36%	n/a	62%	25%	22%	31%
Deposit	41%	n/a	47%	44%	14%	42%
% Proficient ELA Level 1 All Students						
Whitney Point/Adams	19%	n/a	12%	33%	54%	35%
Deposit	13%	n/a	12%	0%	39%	35%
% Proficient ELA Level 2 All Students						
Whitney Point/Adams	46%	n/a	27%	42%	24%	35%
Deposit	47%	n/a	41%	56%	47%	23%
% Proficient ELA Level 3 All Students						
Whitney Point/Adams	33%	n/a	33%	24%	18%	26%
Deposit	41%	n/a	35%	40%	14%	39%
% Proficient ELA Level 4 All Students						
Whitney Point/Adams	3%	n/a	28%	1%	4%	5%
Deposit	0%	n/a	12%	4%	0%	3%

Note. Data in 2019-2020 were not available due to COVID-19.

Table 6. School-Level Math by Years

School Year	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Chronic Absenteeism						
Whitney Point/Adams	13%	97%	16%	28%	25%	21%
Deposit	15%	22%	35%	30%	32%	21%
Office Discipline Referrals						
Whitney Point/Adams	491	560	212	164	337	537
Deposit	82	63	3	35	52	66
Out-of-School Suspensions						
Whitney Point/Adams	6	17	12	1	3	27
Deposit	8	4	0	7	5	1
In-School Suspensions						
Whitney Point/Adams	5	15	1	0	3	1
Deposit	16	0	0	5	2	3

Note. Data in 2019-2020 were not available due to COVID-19.

Conclusion

As we look at the cumulative efforts of the PLACE Initiative over the five years of UA-FSCS adoption and implementation efforts, overall both Deposit and Whitney Point/Adams made strong progress toward their grant goals and objectives, with each district showing growth in different ways. Most quantitative targets were met, and the systems, partnerships, and practices developed through the grant remain sustainable and impactful.

WPCSD's efforts at Whitney Point/Adams demonstrate its strategic, phased implementation of FSCS, one characterized by strong district leadership and clear expectations. The three-person Community School Coordinator team was a major asset, leveraging deep relationships and complementary skills. IY was implemented with fidelity and scaled across grades and stakeholders, becoming a model site for others across New York and nationally. CARE Teams were expanded district-wide, and early childhood programming was aligned and strengthened. WPCSD also successfully secured additional funding to sustain and scale FSCS work (Federal Mental Health grant), and has made commitments internally to continue their efforts (including commitments to fund the Coordinators in the future).

Deposit created and will sustain a strong Community Table, a structure that has become the hub for collaboration and has led to innovations such as the Lumberjack Food Center. Despite the turnover of key staff and leaders, the district showed resilience and adaptability. CARE Teams and PLCs were strategically integrated and scaled K–12. They made a successful pivot from IY to "Random Acts of Kindness," although it was more of a tier-1 intervention. Extended learning opportunities remain strong. Further, a Stronger Connections grant was secured to assist with the sustainability of the UA-FSCS model and the Coordinator role.

Collectively, the CARE Teams became central to learning support systems, serving as a key teaming structure to improve the early identification and intervention systems in both schools. Parent/caregiver and family engagement efforts were expanded across PLACE through home visits, Parent Cafés, and other outreach efforts. Early childhood and extended learning programs grew in reach and quality, as well as did the provision of various health, mental health, and social services. Family and community engagement strategies in both schools were highlights. Broader systems-level assets developed, as staff retention improved and the rural educator pipeline was established. Coursework at Binghamton was expanded, and the "Grow Your Own" approach showed promise. Further, dissemination efforts reached state and national audiences, positioning both districts as UA-FSCS leaders from rural settings.

Evaluation findings demonstrate key facilitators that supported the overall adoption and implementation efforts, such as strong leadership and vision (especially at WPCSD) and effective Community Tables. The use of CAYCI School Experience Survey data also helped facilitate buy-in and readiness, supported the broadened UA-FSCS vision, and provided key data indicators to drive improvement efforts and explore trends over time. Strong, evidence-based programs/services were implemented at both schools (e.g., IY, extend learning opportunities, Parent Cafes). Technical assistance and consultation proved critical in support of adoption efforts, as did the involvement in PLCs, networks across the region, and other professional development and consultation opportunities.

Some barriers, most notably COVID-19, impeded progress and remain today. Continued challenges exist with increased needs among students and their families, social isolation and geographical barriers in these rural communities, escalating chronic absenteeism, and other lasting effects of the pandemic (e.g., mental health challenges). Staff turnover and

recruitment presented challenges, and barriers typical to FSCS adoption and implementation efforts presented themself (e.g., turf wars, lack of clarity, varying expectations).

Nonetheless, the process and outcome evaluation highlights key successes resulting from the PLACE Initiative. Data on service count outputs demonstrate the clear reach of Whitney Point/Adams and Deposits' UA-FSCS efforts. A few examples are noteworthy, such as the over 10,000+ service counts on average each year with students through early childhood education programming, the 2,551 counts on average for families engaged in family and community engagement programming, and the 6,211 service counts averaged per year related to the provision of social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports with students (with 1227 for family members and 642 for community members). Workforce preparation goals engaged 120 university students in rural health and FSCS content, and 3 "Grow Your Own" students were involved (with one becoming a Coordinator). Further, dissemination efforts were widespread, with lessons learned shared in regional and national conferences, through technical assistance to others, and in article submissions.

In general, the PLACE Initiative successfully achieved its expected outcomes and met nearly all of the identified performance measures outlined in the original grant. This reflects strong overall implementation and impact. However, a small number of performance measures—particularly those related to trends in chronic absenteeism, social-emotional skill development, and learning loss—were not fully achieved. These outcomes related to attendance, behavior and achievement take time to change, and require lasting investments in school reform practices. Additionally, these areas have also been significantly affected by broader national and local challenges, including the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued de-investment in public schools. Nationally, chronic absenteeism has risen in districts across the country, contributing to inconsistent levels of student engagement, while disruptions to in-person learning hindered both academic progress and social development. Despite targeted interventions and innovative approaches such as FSCS, these systemic issues posed barriers beyond the scope of the PLACE Initiative. Both WPSD and DCSD and their two UA-FSCS, Whitney Point/Adams and Deposit continue to adapt their strategies to better address these evolving challenges.

Regardless, various stakeholders provided key insights into ways in which the schools improved over the course of the five years. Most notably are the significant improved perceptions of the overall school reported by parents/caregivers at both schools. Other findings demonstrate how teachers/staff perceive a strengthened learning support system, as well as reported improved perceptions of their school climate-related experiences (e.g., pride, enjoyment). Qualitative data demonstrate some of the ways these may have occurred, such as through bonding, bridging and linking social capital that resulted over time. CAYCI data also demonstrate how stakeholders, including teachers/staff and students, perceive improved access, opportunities, and supports for prosocial activities that contribute more broadly to overall development and well-being.

In closing, the efforts of the PLACE Initiative have been significant and far reaching. A solid foundation has been laid, one where several evidence-based programs/services and strategies have been adopted through the UA-FSCS approach, one that can inform WPCSD and DCSD in their continued expanded school improvement efforts to come. Surely the districts and schools will continue to engage and expand their Community Tables as a space for shared leadership and innovation, and explore new partnerships in health, mental health, and workforce development to meet emerging needs. CARE Teams, early childhood program investments, and family and community engagement strategies are worthy innovations that will no doubt continue in the future. Investments in the continuation of the Coordinator roles by both districts post-the grant also will help build upon the current momentum to build multi-year sustainability plans, including diversified funding streams and policy advocacy. System-level infrastructure, leadership structures and people, and strategic partnerships are all in place to move PLACE forward in years to come.

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