

# Hartford Community Schools

Evaluation briefs describe the goals of major programs and strategic initiatives, what we have learned through monitoring and evaluation, key conclusions and examples of impact.

**EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY:**

ActKnowledge

**METHODOLOGY:** Surveys; Interviews; Administrative data; Best practices / literature review; Site visits

**SCOPE:** Results for community schools in Hartford for the 2015 - 2016 academic year

## THE CHALLENGE: WHY IT MATTERS

Hartford Community Schools (HCS) comprise a cohort of six schools located throughout the city of Hartford. Most of these schools have high concentrations of student need - 26 percent of students are English-Language Learners, while between 11 - 20 percent receive special education services. 93 percent of students are non-white. Since 2009, the schools' continual progress has been the shared undertaking of the Hartford Partnership for Student Success (HPSS) to improve student outcomes in select schools. HPSS is a partnership that is comprised of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Hartford Public Schools, the City of Hartford, the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut and other stakeholders, including corporations.

Community schools are a national model for public schools that, through coordination and partnerships, offer instructional services supplemented with homework help, tutorial and remedial services and academic enrichment, and resources customized to meet individual schools' and students' needs. Community schools contribute to the ultimate vision of a "sustainable and thriving community." Student success is defined holistically to include both academic success along with social, emotional and health attainment.

## EVALUATION FOCUS

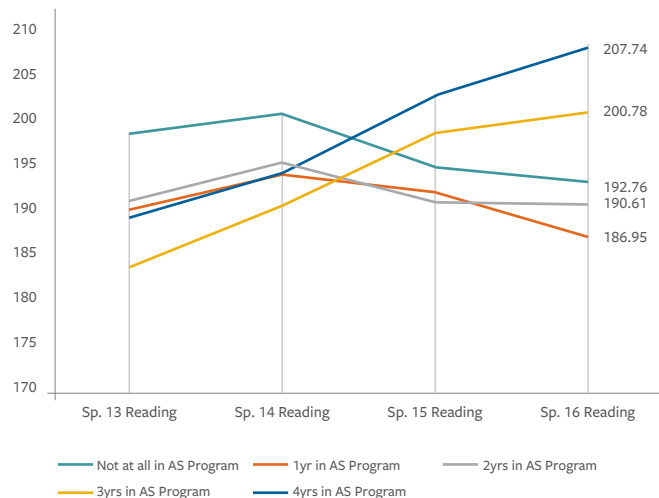
- What was achieved and what were the factors facilitating or hindering progress?
- What role have partnerships played in this progress?
- Analysis of data relating to preconditions for student achievement

## KEY FINDINGS

**Student outcomes:** Outcomes for academically "at-risk" students who were connected to programs or services targeted to their needs showed strong improvement, particularly among those students who had participated in these services for multiple years, as seen in Figure 1.

A majority of students reported at the outset of the afterschool program in the academic year 2015-16 that they were learning skills that would help them do better in school.

**Figure 1: MAP Reading Results Comparison of matched HSC afterschool participants from 2013 to 2016**



## KEY FINDINGS

Data from Hartford Public Schools “School Climate and Connectedness Survey” of parent/family perceptions also show the positive perceptions of parents and families about the experience of Hartford Community Schools:

- **88 - 94%** of parents reported ‘feeling welcome’ in their child’s school
- **84 - 90%** of parents believed their child’s school is a ‘supportive and inviting place for parents/guardians’
- **88 - 93%** of parents believed ‘adults at the school respect cultural diversity’ (an indicator of cultural competence)

**Infrastructure:** Long-term financial support of HCS by the Hartford Partnership for Student Success has been critical in providing continuity for the community schools, despite challenges and changes in the wider context in which they are operating. Continuity among staff and leadership was also critical in building support and creating the conditions for success. The involvement of senior representatives of Hartford Public Schools helped to foster more effective coordination and integration at the district level.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

HPSS and HCS should examine the causes for any decline in afterschool attendance and how this can be addressed. This includes a focus on how to balance a longer school day with an afterschool program that incorporates an optimal mix of academic and pure enrichment.

Each school should continue to assess the needs of students in a way that facilitates the matching of vulnerable students with services most appropriate to their needs. Continued focus on supporting mental health of students and families has been important in improving behavior and attendance.

HPSS should continue to focus on key systemic supports that facilitate easier implementation and integration and coordination of the community school model. This includes continued refinement of the common funding application and ensuring cabinet-level representation from Hartford Public Schools on the Hartford Partnership for Student Success, to ensure a continued strong connection to academics and student learning.