

Community Partnership Schools

An Implementation and Effectiveness Evaluation: Key Findings

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Introduction

Starting in the 2014–15 school year, the Florida legislature began providing state funding to support the replication and sustainability of the Community Partnership Schools™ (CPS) model. The purpose of the CPS model is to provide approximately \$400,000 to \$500,000 annually in additional funding to participating schools to support the implementation of a comprehensive community schools model. The CPS model is predicated on providing students and their families with access to a wide variety of learning opportunities and health and wellness supports provided through a defined set of key partnerships involving the school district, a lead social service agency, a health care provider, and a university. Leveraging the principles established by the larger community school movement (Blank et al., 2021; Maier et al., 2017), the CPS model seeks to promote student growth and development by removing barriers to learning and providing access to new, integrated learning opportunities oriented toward supporting whole child development. The CPS model—initially developed in 2010 at Evans High School, in Orlando, Florida, and based on the success of that effort¹—has been replicated in 26 schools across 17 school districts in the state.

The University of Central Florida’s (UCF’s) Center for Community Schools (the UCF Center) plays a key role in administering the CPS grant program, providing technical assistance (TA) and professional development related to supporting implementation of the model at new CPS sites and managing a certification process for schools enrolled in the Initiative.

In spring 2020, the UCF Center contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct an implementation and effectiveness evaluation of the CPS model. This brief details findings specifically from the implementation and effectiveness evaluation conducted by AIR.

AIR’s Scope of Work Involved:

1. Developing a set of key performance indicators for the Initiative.
2. An implementation study that included 15 CPS sites that began implementation during the 2019–20 school year or earlier
3. An effectiveness evaluation of 11 CPS schools that were in at least their second year of implementation as of the 2018–19 school year.

¹ Information taken from the University of Central Florida Community Partnership Schools website: <https://ccie.ucf.edu/communityschools/schools/>

Evaluation Questions and Methods

The study conducted by AIR addressed evaluation questions related to both CPS implementation and effectiveness.

Questions related to implementation included:

1. To what extent are CPS schools implementing the model with fidelity?
2. How does implementation of the CPS model in schools that have received certification or are seeking certification compare with the level of implementation fidelity in schools that are not certified?
3. What strategies and supports for implementation of the CPS model are associated with high-quality implementation in schools?
4. To what extent does the TA provided by UCF support the implementation of the CPS model, and what types of services are most useful in supporting implementation with high fidelity?
5. What experiences are students having in afterschool and expanded learning programming being provided by CPS-funded schools?

To answer these questions, the evaluation team relied on three primary data sources:

1. Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders associated with CPS model implementation, including CPS school directors, school administrators, school-based coordinators, partner agency representatives, and UCF Center technical assistants.
2. A qualitative analysis of extant documents, including CPS grant scope of work documents, certification assessments, and quarterly reports provided by schools receiving CPS funding.
3. A survey to obtain information about the types of activities students were participating in after school, the experiences they had in programming, and the way they perceived they had benefited from their participation.

Questions related to effectiveness included:

1. What effect did attending a CPS have on student outcomes compared with outcomes of students attending similar schools not implementing the CPS model?
2. What effect did attending a more mature CPS have on student outcomes compared with outcomes of students enrolled in similar schools not implementing the CPS model?
3. What effect did attending a CPS have on student outcomes among certain subpopulations of students compared with outcomes of students from the same subpopulations attending similar schools not implementing the CPS model?

To answer these questions, the evaluation team conducted a *comparative interrupted time series analysis*, relying on school- and student-level data provided by the Florida Department of Education. In light of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a decision was made by the evaluation team in conjunction with the UCF Center to assess model effectiveness for the model implementation period ranging from the 2015–16 to 2018–19 school years. In this sense, the effectiveness analysis conducted by the evaluation team represents an examination of effects from *early implementation of the CPS model* at a subset of early adopting schools.

Implementation Evaluation Findings

Shared Vision

Summary: The vision for implementation shapes the services and opportunities that are instantiated as part of the initiative. Understanding of the CPS model by all partners is key to ensuring that the vision aligns with the standards and is contextually appropriate for the school and community.

Challenges to establishing a shared vision include: (1) Turnover in key stakeholders (e.g., partner representatives, school administration, directors); and (2) When any one partner dominates the vision OR is not fully committed, resulting in a *one-legged stool* to signify the unequal nature of the partnership.

Promising practices include: (1) Implementing additional structures to ensure equal representation (i.e. partners taking turns in establishing meeting agendas); and (2) Proper onboarding of partner stakeholders to understand the CPS model and context and needs of the school and community.

Shared Decision Making

Summary: Establishing regular formal structures for authentic shared decision making among partners is a key driver of effective implementation. Ensuring shared decision making requires additional support in communication structures, formal processes for guaranteeing that the agenda is not dominated by any single partner and that frequent touch points exist among all key stakeholders.

Challenges to shared decision-making include: (1) When one partner is given the opportunity to dominate the agenda for meetings and decisions; (2) An excessive amount of formal meetings and decision-making bodies that can overburden and confuse partners; and (3) Lack of clarity around the expectations and roles of each partner according to the CPS framework.

Promising practices include: (1) School principal investment in the model and frequent collaboration with the director; (2) Having a centralized location for meeting notes, agendas, and supporting documents; and (3) Additional formal structures in place to support shared decision making, including voting rules for decision making and establishing a cadence for times when each partner leads the agenda and facilitates meetings.

Communication

Summary: In schools in which consistent formal and informal communication takes place between the school administration and director, respondents reported that the initiative was embedded in the school day. Directors who facilitated communication among partners through formal means reported greater partner cohesion.

Challenges to effective communication include: (1) Lack of opportunities to share information between directors and school administration, which can lead to a model of separate services in one school rather than a cohesive school initiative; and (2) Lack of means to share information and communicate regularly with partners, which may lead to disinvestment.

Promising practices include: (1) An “open-door policy” between the director and administration, including frequent formal and informal communication; (2) Including the director in school administration and staffing meetings regularly (e.g., administrative team, grade-level meetings) to facilitate integration; (3) Structured regular communication pathways with key partner agency stakeholders; and (4) A robust communication plan for caregivers in place via both formal methods (e.g., social media, fliers, text message) and informal (e.g., conversations at drop-off and pick up) to ensure engagement and development of trusting relationships with families..

Data Use in Decision Making

Summary: The use of data to drive decision making is built into the process of certification. All respondents noted that important data on needs, as well as progress, and program/service quality were key to ensuring successful implementation of the model.

Challenges to data use include: (1) A lack of data-sharing agreements between districts and other partners, which leads to many sites’ being unable to access key data points, such as student-related indicators; and (2) Directors’ who may lack training or background knowledge of the types of data from each partner and lack capacity and knowledge to analyze and understand data.

Promising practices include: (1) Directors leveraging the additional capacity provided by key partners in order to collect and understand related data and incorporate it into the needs assessments; and (2) School-day and program staff’ having mechanisms to contribute data (e.g., referrals, observational notes, surveys), leading to more robust understanding of needs and

implementation progress and engaging a broader group of stakeholders in continuous improvement.

Certification Process

Summary: The standards and guiding indicators in the certification process generally serve as a roadmap for schools, which then allows schools to stay focused on the key components of implementing the CPS model with fidelity. The standards were also reported in some schools to be key drivers of the vision for CPS implementation.

Challenges with certification include: (1) The large number of standards and aligned indicators and associated paperwork and evidence requirements can be onerous to compile and complete and require additional supports in order to complete the process successfully; (2) If partners are not aligned in vision or investment in the model, the certification process will be more challenging and less meaningful in driving implementation; and (3) The lack of variation in standards and requirements to better account for local context and needs, which can result in some level of disinvestment from partners in the process.

Promising Practices include: (1) Mentorship from schools that had been through the certification process; (2) One-on-one support from the UCF Center, which was noted as helpful by interviewees; (3) Partner agencies with additional internal capacity to provide directors with one-on-one supports and documents to assist with planning for certification; and (4) Directors who participated in the peer review process.

Afterschool Activity Survey Findings

Opportunities for Programming

FINDING: Students are largely being given opportunities to engage in a wide variety of programming that addresses their academic and social and emotional skills and supports growth in their postsecondary pathways. Students reported most commonly participating in activities specifically related to sports/recreation, the arts, and STEM. A smaller subset of students (approximately 20% of survey respondents) reported receiving a lot of extra help in mathematics and reading/ELA coursework.

Programming Experiences

FINDING: Most students reported having skill-building experiences while participating in afterschool programs and a positive perception of the activity leaders providing the activities they participated in during the school year. However, perceptions of other youth participating in programming were generally less positive, which is important because

students were also more apt to report an inclination to continuing participating in afterschool programming in the next school year if they reported more positive experiences with the other students attending afterschool activities.

Programming Benefits

FINDING: The most common ways students reported benefiting from participating in afterschool programming was (1) Having positive social interactions; (2) Developing new interests; and (3) Developing a better self-concept.

Key Effectiveness Evaluation Findings

FINDING: The most consistent significant, positive effects (meaning in the desired direction) associated with being enrolled in an CPS school were related to outcomes in school day attendance and discipline-related outcomes during the first year of CPS implementation. Overall, receipt of CPS funding was associated with more school days attended (2% to 6% more days or an additional 4 to 11 days of school day attendance in CPS schools) and fewer disciplinary incidents (9% to 24% fewer incidents) than in the matched comparison schools.

FINDING: Positive academic outcomes were also found for Black students in mathematics performance (+8% difference in scores) and white students in ELA assessment performance (+9% difference in scores) during the first year of CPS implementation relative to comparison students.

FINDING: Some significant negative effects were also observed in CPS schools in the first year of initiative implementation, particularly among female students in relation to school day absences and mathematics performance when compared with female students in the matched comparison groups. These findings may warrant further attention in future evaluation efforts.

Outcomes Examined

Attendance

- Days present
- Days absent
- Unexcused absences

Behavior

- Number of disciplinary incidences
- School days missed due to incidences

Academic Performance

- Mathematics assessments
- English/Language Arts assessments

Recommendations

1. **Ensure that all four partners are equally engaged in setting the vision and driving implementation of the CPS model.**
 2. **Work to facilitate data sharing agreements between districts and partners because the absence of these agreements and a lack of means to easily share data among partners creates significant barriers to implementing a model that is aligned with data-driven decision making.**
 3. **Strengthen opportunities to share best practices and strategies for addressing challenges among all partners and directors.**
 4. **Increase approaches that support the uptake of the supports that the UCF Center offers to better ensure all directors are receiving the same level of interaction and support.**
 5. **Consider adopting a point-of-service afterschool quality measure to support efforts to enhance the quality of expanded learning offerings.**
 6. **Adopt measures that will allow for the assessment of broader possible outcomes derived from implementation of the CPS model.**
 7. **Continue to take steps to capture dosage data and use this information to evaluate program effectiveness.**
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