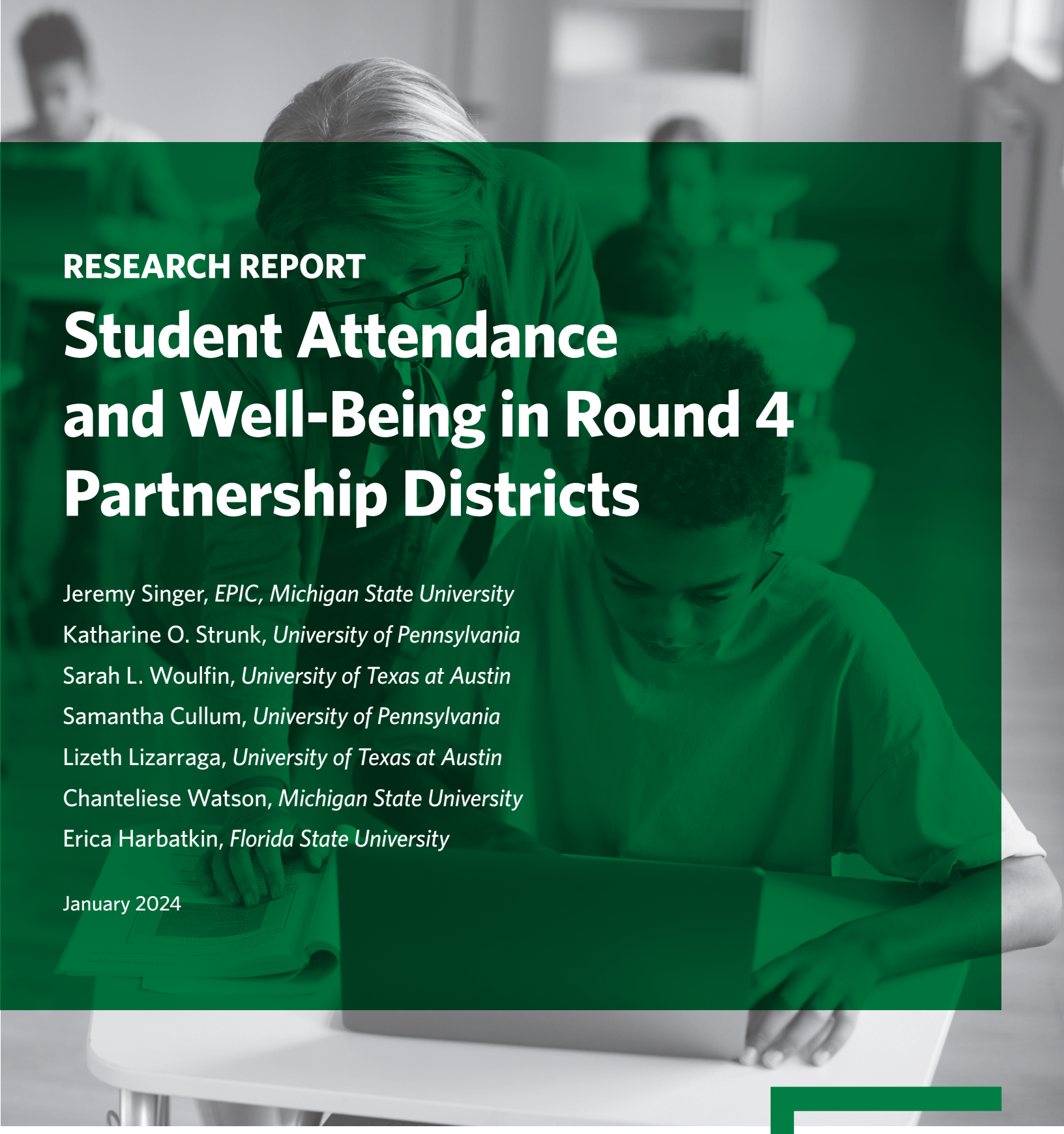

RESEARCH REPORT

Student Attendance and Well-Being in Round 4 Partnership Districts

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Section One: Introduction

The Partnership Model of School and District Turnaround provides additional support and accountability to Michigan's lowest-performing schools and districts. While the model's Theory of Change centers on improving instructional systems and practices and strengthening educator retention and quality (Strunk et al., 2022), addressing non-academic outcomes such as student attendance and student well-being is also important. Not only are students' attendance and their socioeconomic and socioemotional well-being strong mediators of their academic achievement (Gershenson et al., 2017; Kaya & Erdem, 2021), but positive child development and overall student well-being are important goals in their own right. The effect of schools on well-being and non-cognitive skills are distinct from their effect on cognitive skills and have implications for students' life opportunities and outcomes (Jackson, 2018; Porter et al., 2023). Positive school attendance is important to ensure that students benefit from school developmentally (e.g., Gottfried & Ansari, 2021); and chronic absenteeism itself can be a signal that students are facing difficult social and economic circumstances and would benefit from additional resources and support (Childs & Lofton, 2021; Pyne et al., 2023).

Non-academic outcomes are particularly important in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated chronic absenteeism and student mental health issues (Fuller et al., 2023; Lenhoff & Singer, 2024; Naff et al., 2022). Recent analyses suggest that increases in chronic absenteeism may have played a significant role in the test score declines associated with pandemic disruptions to learning (Council of Economic Advisors, 2023); and Michigan schools that have been effective in helping their students recover from the pandemic did so in part by prioritizing student well-being as a foundational condition for student learning (Hashim et al., 2023).

A major issue for Partnership districts and schools, however, is how to address student attendance and well-being while maintaining coherence in their school improvement efforts. Improving instruction or educator retention cannot be approached entirely separately from these non-academic issues, which can contribute to stressful and uncertain working conditions and hinder quality instruction (Kraft et al., 2015). Yet, schools have relatively little experience developing and improving organizational systems and practices outside of the instructional core (Lenhoff et al., 2022; Lenhoff & Singer, 2022). Thus, schools may struggle to effectively address both academic and non-academic issues coherently, especially if those issues are highly complex or great in magnitude (Spillane et al., 2022).

The purpose of this report is to provide a baseline assessment of student attendance and well-being in Partnership districts and schools during the 2022-23 school year, as well as highlight the approaches educators in those districts and schools were taking to address challenges in those areas. Key findings include:

- Partnership schools had high chronic absenteeism rates, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and attendance challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Partnership districts were implementing school attendance practices and were primarily focused on communication- and incentive-based approaches.
- Students in Partnership districts faced significant socioemotional and socioeconomic challenges. Partnership educators reported persistent concerns related to student mental health.
- Partnership districts were implementing socioemotional learning practices and turning to social workers and counselors to address these student mental health challenges.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing student attendance and student well-being in Partnership districts and schools and provide insight into the existing practices and resources that were in place before their first school year of improvement efforts under their Partnership Agreements. The findings also help illuminate areas where intermediate school districts or regional educational service agencies (ISDs/RESAs)[1], the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), and other community organizations and state agencies can provide support to Partnership schools and directly to students and families. This kind of external support is appropriate given the systemic nature of these issues and is necessary so that districts and schools can contribute to improving student attendance and student well-being while also maintaining a focus on developing and improving their instructional core.

Section Two: Data and Methods

To understand issues related to student attendance and student well-being in Partnership districts and schools, we used a convergent parallel mixed methods research design (Hewitt & Mansfield, 2021). We collected both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzed these data separately, and then integrated the findings. Using multiple types and sources of data allowed us to triangulate our findings and develop a richer understanding of the topic (Creswell & Clark, 2010). In this section, we describe our data sources and methods of analysis (see Table 2.1 for an overview).

TABLE 2.1. Data Sources

Data	Outcomes of Interest	Source	Year	Subgroups
Survey Data				
Teacher and principal surveys	Student attendance rates and practices Student socioeconomic and socioemotional challenges and practices	EPIC-developed survey	Spring 2023 *(all schools in Round 4 Partnership districts)* Fall 2018, fall 2019, spring 2021, and spring 2022 *(Round 4 reidentified Partnership schools)*	All schools in Round 4 Partnership districts Partnership schools and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts Reidentified, newly identified, released, and never identified schools in Partnership districts
Qualitative Data				
Partnership district case studies	Student well-being, attendance challenges, priorities, and practices	Interviews with district leaders and principals Teacher focus groups	2022-23 school year	TPS and charter case districts Cases of reidentified and newly identified Partnership districts
Teacher and principal open-ended survey responses	Perspectives on student attendance and student well-being	EPIC-developed survey	Spring 2023	All schools in Round 4 Partnership districts
Partnership Agreement development meetings	Student well-being, attendance challenges, priorities, and practices	Transcription-style observation notes	2022-23 school year	TPS and charter districts Reidentified and newly identified Partnership districts
Statewide Administrative Data				
Student administrative records	Student attendance and chronic absenteeism	MDE and CEPI	2016-17 through 2021-22	Students in Round 4 Partnership schools, non-Partnership CSI schools, and all other Michigan schools

SURVEY DATA

MDE first identified Round 4 Partnership schools in November 2022. We fielded our survey of all teachers and principals in Partnership districts from February through March 2023. We asked all teachers and principals a range of questions about their experiences, perspectives, and opinions of their school and district. One of the goals of Partnership is for these districts to direct their resources and efforts towards their lowest-performing schools, which are those identified for Partnership. We surveyed everyone in the district, regardless of whether they worked in a designated Partnership school or not. This approach allows us to gain insight into the different experiences and perceptions of educators in Partnership and non-Partnership schools within a given year and over time.

To conduct the survey, we worked with MDE and Partnership district leaders to identify the population of teachers and principals in Partnership districts and to obtain their contact information for survey administration. We administered the survey electronically to 9,065 teachers and 356 principals. The response rate was 44% for teachers and 48% for principals. (See Appendix A for subgroup response rates.)

We analyzed the survey data to understand student socioeconomic and socioemotional well-being as well as student attendance and chronic absenteeism in Round 4 Partnership districts and schools. For both topics, we summarized teacher and principal responses across a range of questions, including the extent of the issues, the strategies schools are using to address them, and the support they receive around the issues. For all analyses, we applied survey weights to adjust for differences in observable characteristics between respondents and non-respondents. (See Appendix B for additional details about survey items and weighting.)

In addition to analyzing responses for Partnership districts overall, we compared responses between Partnership schools and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts. We also make some comparisons based on Partnership status: reidentified Partnership schools, newly identified Partnership schools, released schools, and never-identified schools (Table 2.2). We present subgroup results when differences between groups are statistically significant for teachers at minimum (the small number of principals limits our power to detect significant differences across principal groups), or in limited instances, where we want to highlight similarities alongside differences. Otherwise, we present Partnership district-wide responses. When we present item-level subgroup results in which at least one difference is statistically significant, we use stars to denote statistically significant differences.

TABLE 2.2. Definition of Partnership Status Categories

Partnership Status	Definition
Reidentified	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and that were reidentified in Round 4.
Newly Identified	Schools that were *not* previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and that *were* identified in Round 4.
Released	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and that were *not* reidentified in Round 4.
Never Identified	Schools that were *not* identified for Partnership status in *any* of the four rounds.

In addition to the spring 2023 survey, we have four years of teacher and principal survey data from Partnership districts in Rounds 1, 2, and 3 (from fall 2018, fall 2019, spring 2021, and spring 2022). The historical survey data includes any Partnership school that was originally identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and then reidentified in Round 4. We do not have complete longitudinal data for newly identified Partnership schools, released Partnership schools, or schools that were never identified for Partnership status. (For additional details on survey methodology and response rates for prior survey waves, see Strunk et al., 2022). We use historical survey data from reidentified schools to contextualize our findings from the most recent survey wave with prior trends for student well-being and student attendance.

QUALITATIVE DATA

To complement the quantitative survey data, we draw on qualitative data from case studies, observations, and open-ended survey responses. We conducted a qualitative case study of six Round 4 Partnership districts, which we refer to with pseudonyms. We intentionally sought districts with different governance structures—traditional public schools (TPS) and public school academies (PSA or more commonly known as charter schools[2])—and both reidentified and newly identified districts. During the 2022-23 school year, we conducted a set of interviews and focus groups with our case districts to collect data related to student attendance and student well-being. We started by interviewing leaders at the district or charter management organization (CMO) levels for our cases. We then interviewed the principals of Partnership schools in the case sites. We were also able to conduct focus groups with Partnership school teachers in four of the case study districts. We asked participants directly about non-academic priorities and strategies, and we also heard about non-academic issues when asking about school practices and challenges more generally. (See Appendix C for a sample interview protocol.)

We analyzed our case study data in two stages. First, after each interview and focus group, we wrote a memo to summarize key points about the district or school's non-academic challenges and strategies as well as the way those intersected with other plans and initiatives in the district or school. Second, we compiled our findings from each interview or focus group into a matrix, which allowed us to compare student attendance and well-being across cases.

In addition, we collected data on the Partnership Agreement development process. During the 2022-23 school year, Partnership districts conducted comprehensive needs assessments, identified goal areas, and set targets for improvement to be included in their Partnership Agreements (Office of Partnership Districts, 2022). Districts received support with this process from the Office of Partnership Districts (OPD) Partnership Agreement liaisons and representatives from their ISDs, including periodic meetings to prepare and review the elements of their needs assessments and Partnership Agreements. We observed development meetings in 17 districts by taking transcription-style notes to capture data on how districts were making sense of and planning to improve their systems and practices and ultimately student outcomes. For this report, we coded and analyzed observation notes for key themes related to student well-being and attendance. This included the extent to which districts were focusing on student well-being and attendance, district leaders' perspectives on their consequences for academic outcomes, and the strategies they hoped to implement to address them. (We use pseudonyms for all districts. See Appendix D for a list of districts by pseudonym in which we conducted additional observations.)

Finally, on the survey, we asked respondents to provide open-ended responses. We asked each respondent, "If you have any additional comments, please feel free to write them in the space provided below." Thirty-six percent of respondents provided a substantive response to the open-ended question in the 2022-23 survey. Respondents who answered the open-ended question were demographically comparable to those who did not, although there were some modest differences between these groups (see Appendix E for additional details). Thus, the findings from these data should be interpreted with some caution. Still, the open-ended responses give a glimpse into the issues that teachers and principals wanted to address. We qualitatively coded the responses to categorize them into topical categories (e.g., accountability, COVID-19, culture/climate, staffing), and further analyzed the responses in those categories to note the most salient themes.[3]

In this report, we use the qualitative data in two ways. First, we use excerpts from interviews, observations, and open-ended responses as supporting evidence for a variety of findings related to student attendance and student well-being in Partnership schools and districts. Second, we present "vignettes," or snapshots, from specific case districts to provide holistic examples of non-academic challenges and strategies in Partnership district.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

We used administrative data on schools to contextualize our findings on student attendance and chronic absenteeism. We describe student attendance in Partnership schools relative to other subgroups. For this analysis, we use the reidentified and newly identified Partnership subgroups as described earlier. We also compare Partnership schools to non-Partnership schools that were identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These schools were in the bottom 5% of schools on the Michigan State Index, schools with at least one underperforming student subgroup for three years or had graduation rates below 65% and were not identified for Partnership. Finally, we created a subgroup of all other schools in Michigan. (Released schools can be in either the non-Partnership CSI or other subgroups.)

We focus on two measures of attendance in this brief: daily attendance rate and chronic absenteeism rate. Students are considered present if they are in school for at least half of the school day. This definition changed during the 2020-21 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on schooling.[3] Therefore, we omit 2020-21 from our analysis. Students' average daily attendance rates are calculated by dividing the number of days they attended school in Michigan during each school year by the total number of days they were enrolled in school in Michigan that year. Chronic absenteeism is defined in Michigan as students who are absent for 10% or more of the school year (e.g., 18 days or more in a 180-day school year). In addition to summarizing average attendance rates and chronic absences rates, we also examine the distribution of attendance rates (i.e., the share of students missing 0-9% of days, 10-19% of days, 20-29% of days, and so on). The distribution of attendance rates helps us further understand the depth of student absenteeism and how it differs across Partnership and non-Partnership schools.

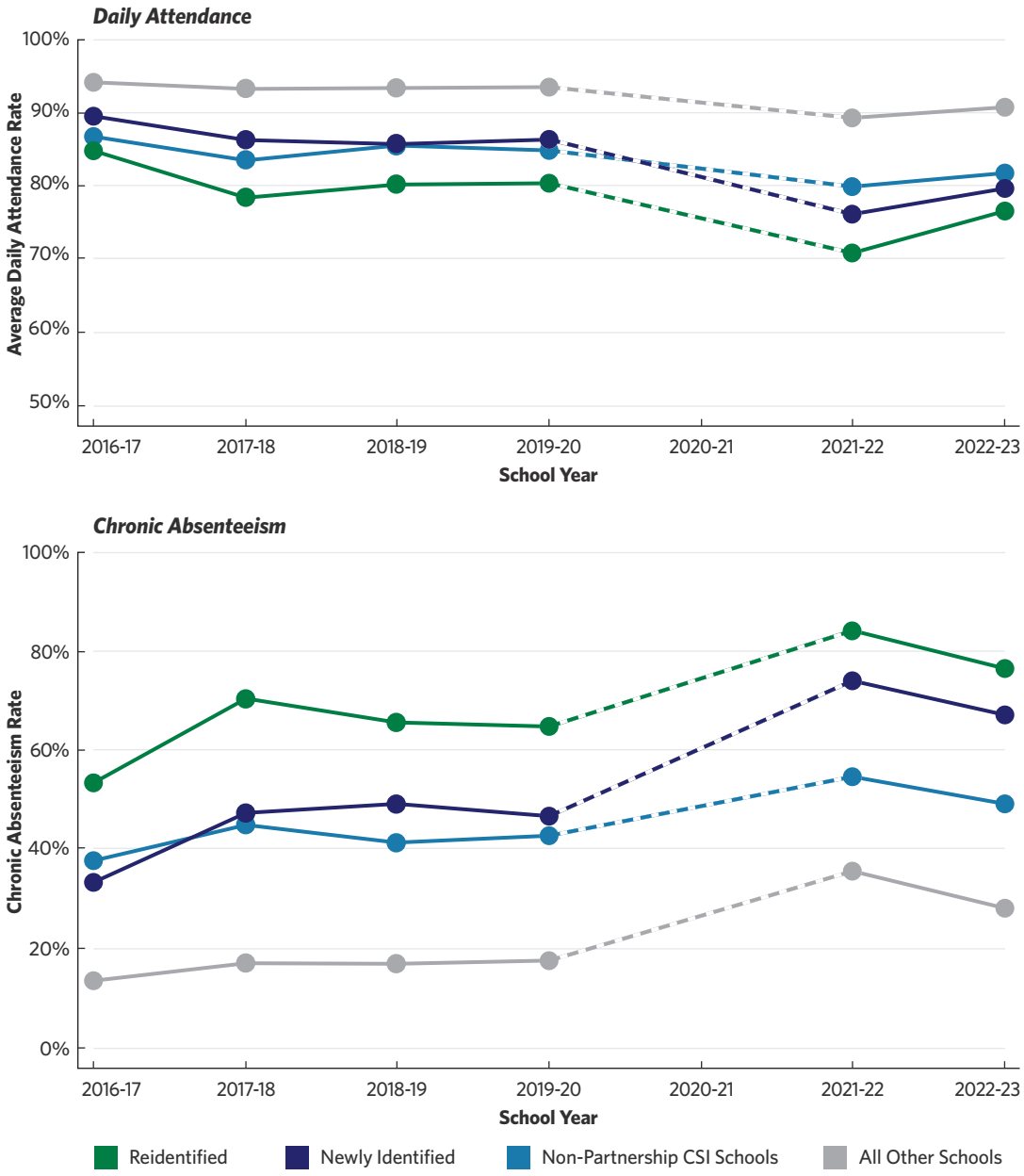
Section Three: Student Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

This section provides an overview of attendance and absenteeism rates in Partnership districts and schools as well as the practices and resources that they had in place prior to and at the time of their identification for Partnership status. Partnership schools have high rates of chronic absenteeism, including high rates of severe absenteeism, which reflect substantial social and economic barriers to student attendance (Childs & Lofton, 2021; Lenhoff & Singer, 2024; Singer et al., 2021). Survey data suggest that Partnership districts are working to address student attendance, primarily through communication-based practices. Some are also prioritizing supportive approaches that focus on identifying and removing barriers to attendance. Qualitative data also highlight that Partnership districts are developing organizational systems and routines to support attendance practices, though they vary in the extent and strength of these systems and routines.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES APPEAR TO BE RECOVERING AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Round 4 Partnership schools, on average, have had much lower attendance rates and much higher chronic absenteeism rates than other Michigan schools over time. These schools had higher rates of chronic absenteeism than other low-performing schools before the pandemic. Further, while all schools in Michigan saw declines in attendance on average during the COVID-19 pandemic, Partnership schools had sharper decreases in average daily attendance and increases in chronic absenteeism. However, reidentified and newly identified schools also improved their attendance at greater rates, on average, than other schools in Michigan during the 2022-23 school year. These trends are illustrated in Figure 3.1, which shows average daily attendance and chronic absenteeism rates for Partnership schools, non-Partnership CSI schools, and all other schools in Michigan.

FIGURE 3.1. Average Daily Attendance Rates and Chronic Absenteeism Rates for Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools Over Time



Note: Average daily attendance is calculated as the total number of days present divided by the total number of days enrolled. Students are chronically absent if they miss 10% or more school days. Attendance and chronic absenteeism data are missing for 2020-21 because Michigan adopted a modified criteria for counting student attendance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in that school year.

Reidentified Partnership schools, on average, saw some progress with student attendance during their prior Partnership round, though this progress was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, chronic absenteeism rates in reidentified schools declined from 70% in the 2017-18 school year to 65% in the 2019-20 school year. Likewise, for average daily attendance, reidentified schools improved on average from 79% in 2017-18 to 81% in 2019-20. By 2021-22, however,

the chronic absenteeism rate for reidentified schools had risen to 84%, and the average daily attendance rate had decreased to 71%.

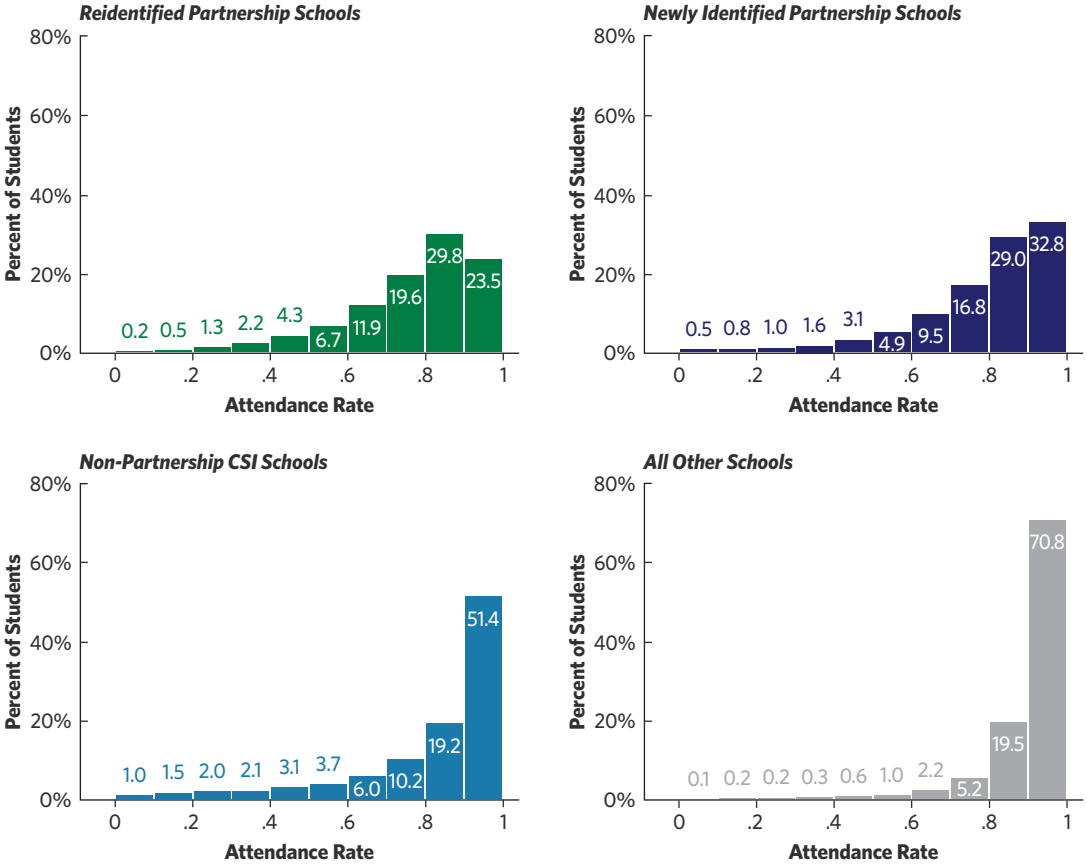
Newly identified Partnership schools, on average, experienced the sharpest increases in chronic absenteeism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, these schools had slightly higher average daily attendance rates than other non-Partnership CSI schools, though they also had slightly higher chronic absenteeism rates than those schools. Their attendance and chronic absenteeism rates remained relatively consistent between the 2016-17 and 2019-20 school years. From 2019-20 to 2021-22, however, the percentage of students who were chronically absent in newly identified schools increased by almost 27 percentage points, from 47% to 74%. This increase in absenteeism was greater than the increase in reidentified schools and non-Partnership CSI schools. The spike in absenteeism in newly identified schools likely contributed to their identification for Partnership status in Round 4, both because chronic absenteeism is one of the factors used to identify schools (Singer & Cullum, 2023) and because these absenteeism rates likely had a negative effect on students' academic performance (Council of Economic Advisors, 2023).

In the 2022-23 school year, on average, reidentified and newly identified schools had greater improvements in attendance than other schools in the state. For average daily attendance, reidentified schools improved by seven percentage points to 77% and newly identified schools improved by four percentage points to 80%. Non-Partnership CSI schools and other schools in Michigan improved by only two percentage points on average, to 82% and 91% respectively. For chronic absenteeism, reidentified and newly identified schools decreased their absenteeism rates by seven percentage points, to 77% and 67% respectively. Non-Partnership CSI schools and other schools in Michigan decreased their absenteeism rates by six percentage points to 49% and 28% respectively. Thus, while attendance in current Partnership schools remains lower than in other low-performing schools and substantially lower than other schools in the state, these schools saw more progress in the most recent school year.

The Distribution of Attendance Rates Highlights the Depth of Absenteeism in Partnership Schools

The distribution of attendance rates in 2022-23 offers a more nuanced view of the level of absenteeism in current Partnership schools. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of attendance rates in reidentified Partnership schools, newly identified Partnership schools, non-Partnership CSI schools, and all other Michigan schools in 2022-23 (the school year during which Round 4 Partnership schools were identified). Partnership schools not only had more students who were chronically absent in 2022-23, but also had a large share of those students who were severely chronically absent (i.e., missing 20% or more school days). Severely chronically absent students tend to face more dire socioeconomic circumstances than other chronically absent students, such as greater depths of family poverty (Lenhoff & Singer, 2024). Forty-seven percent of students in reidentified Partnership schools and 38% of students in newly identified Partnership schools missed at least 20% of school days in the 2022-23 school year, with many of those students missing an even greater amount of school. By contrast, about 29% of students in non-Partnership CSI schools were severely chronically absent, and only about 10% of students in all other Michigan schools were severely chronically absent. Thus, not only do Partnership schools have higher rates of chronic absenteeism than other schools, but also a greater share of their students appear to face particularly great barriers to attendance.

FIGURE 3.2. Distribution of Student Attendance Rates for Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23



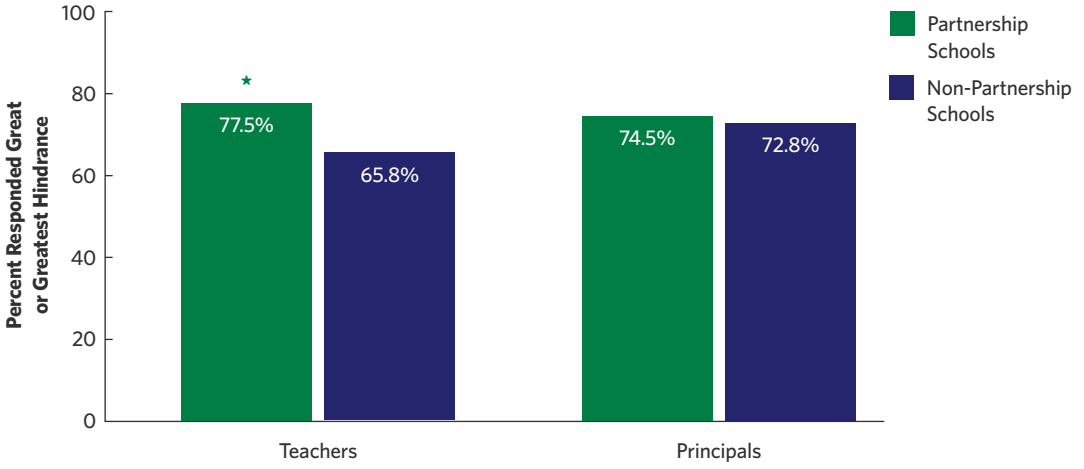
Note: Average daily attendance is calculated as the total number of days present divided by the total number of days enrolled.

Attendance Remains a Major Challenge for Students and Hindrance to School Improvement

Teachers and principals in Partnership districts characterize these high rates of chronic absenteeism as substantial obstacles to school improvement. Figure 3.3 shows that the large majority of Partnership district teachers and principals view student attendance as a great or greatest hindrance to improvement. A similar share of principals in Partnership schools (75%) and non-Partnership schools (73%) rated student attendance as a great or greatest hindrance, though a larger share of teachers in Partnership schools (77%) rated student attendance as a great or greatest hindrance than teachers in non-Partnership schools (66%). In our case studies, district and school leaders reinforced the view that student attendance is a significant challenge to school improvement. As one Blizzard district-level leader explained, an attendance problem for students *"leads to an academics problem because they're not getting the time in their classrooms that they need."*

FIGURE 3.3. Student Attendance as a Hindrance to School Improvement

for Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23

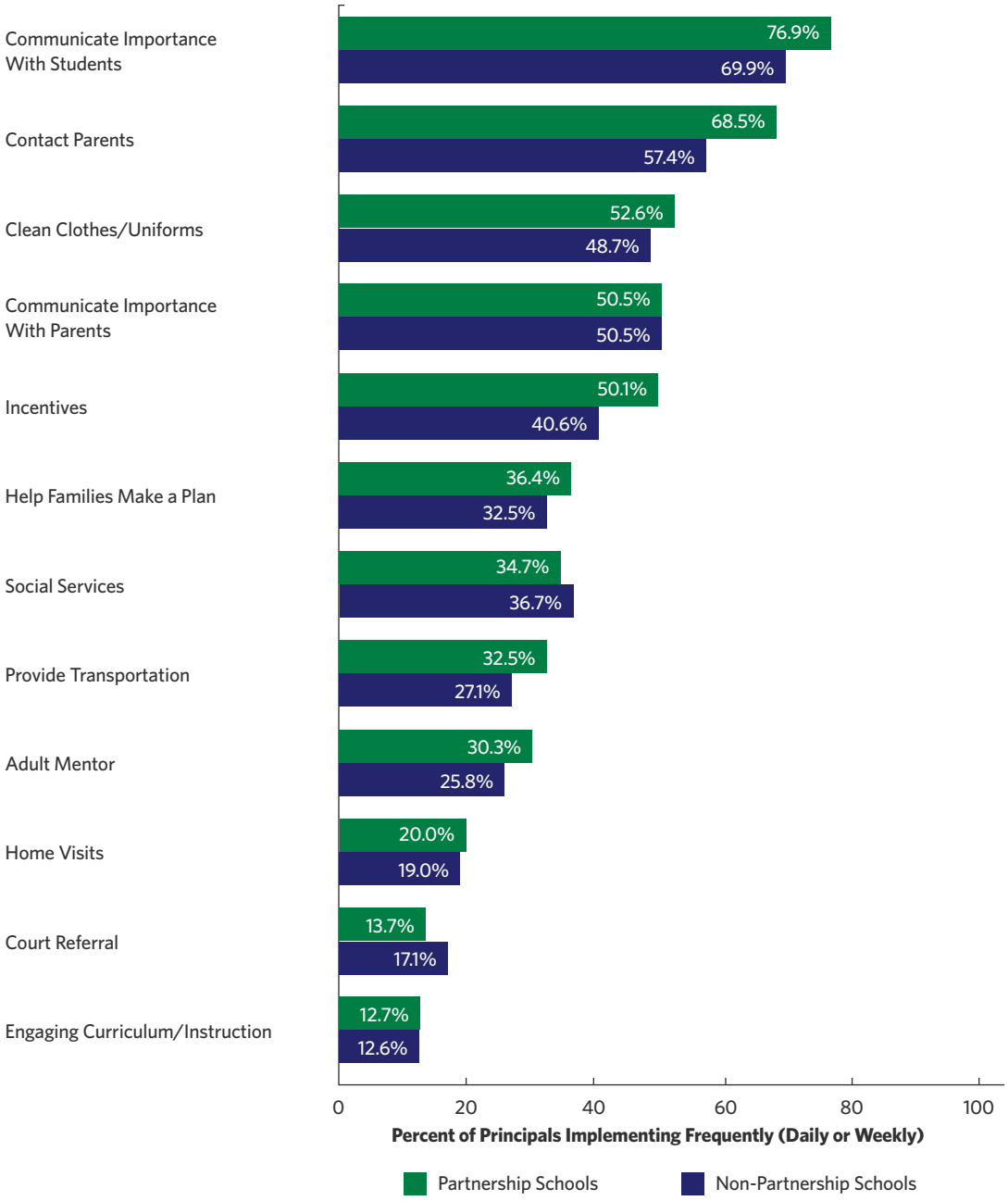


Note: Teachers and principals were asked to indicate the extent to which "student attendance" was a hindrance to school improvement. Options were: not a hindrance, a slight hindrance, a moderate hindrance, a great hindrance, and the greatest hindrance.

PARTNERSHIP DISTRICTS HAVE PRIORITIZED COMMUNICATION-BASED AND INCENTIVE-BASED ATTENDANCE PRACTICES

To improve student attendance, Partnership districts are using communication-based strategies as well as incentive-based strategies, and to some extent supportive approaches that focus on removing barriers to attendance. As shown in Figure 3.4, principals in Partnership districts are most frequently implementing strategies that involve communicating with students and parents. Seventy-seven percent of Partnership school principals and 70% of non-Partnership school principals reported communicating with students about the importance of good attendance on a daily or weekly basis. Contacting the parents of students who are struggling with attendance and communicating with parents about the importance of good attendance were also among the most frequent activities. In addition, 50% of Partnership school principals and 41% of non-Partnership school principals reported frequently creating incentives (e.g., rewards, awards) to motivate students to come to school. Far fewer principals reported frequently working on providing resources that might help families overcome barriers to attendance (e.g., social services, transportation). An exception is providing clean clothes or uniforms to students, which was a relatively frequent practice and addresses one potential out-of-school barrier. Approximately 50% of Partnership school principals and non-Partnership school principals reported frequently providing clean uniforms to students. Finally, referring students or parents to court for truancy was among the least frequent activity, though 14% of Partnership school principals and 17% of non-Partnership school principals reported doing so on a weekly or daily basis.

FIGURE 3.4. Principal-Reported Attendance Strategies for Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23



Note: Principals were asked, "How often do staff members in your school use the following practices to improve student attendance?" Options were: never, once or twice a year, once or twice a month, weekly, or daily. We considered a practice to be implemented frequently if a principal selected weekly or daily.

In our case studies and observations, district and school leaders described these communication-based practices in detail. Some district and school leaders described communication to notify parents about their children's attendance. For example, a Kraken principal explained that *"teachers call [the parents of absent students] every day, and we have auto calls [to the parents of absent students]."* Similarly, a Hornets district leader explained that they *"have someone here in district providing emails and letters to send out to students who've been out [of school for] many days."* Others described explaining the importance of attendance to students or parents. For example, a

Hurricanes principal explained that their school frequently uses mini-conferences with students to try to encourage them to improve their attendance: "*We'll meet with the kids, and we have grade-level meetings…We'll bring up research, the importance of attendance, the direct correlation of attendance and learning, attendance and grades, things like that.*" As these examples show, communication practices are often one-directional and place an emphasis on informing or motivating parents and students.

While these forms of one-way communication with families can result in a small improvement in attendance (Bergman & Chan, 2021; Himmelsbach et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2018; Swanson, 2022), they are unlikely to significantly decrease chronic absenteeism rates. In addition, incentive-based initiatives, such as rewards or awards, for attendance have little supporting evidence (Balu & Ehrlich, 2018) and in some cases can have unintended negative consequences (Robinson et al., 2021). Existing research suggests that the most effective strategies to improve student attendance involve intensive work to understand and address a student's unique barriers to attendance (Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018; Stemler et al., 2022), though these approaches require significant time commitments, personnel, and other resources.

Some Partnership districts did provide examples of a supportive and case-oriented approach that focused on removing barriers to attendance and providing resources to students and families. For example, a Blizzard district leader shared their approach:

> *[A team of district-level community liaisons] talk with the county, and they make home visits and figure out why. Well, maybe it's because the students didn't have any clean clothes. So they do things to address those problems, so our students can be here so they can get back in the classroom. Attendance is one of our focuses…especially because we have a lot of students who are experiencing poverty or even homelessness.*

Similarly, a Thunderbirds principal described a case-by-case approach to uncovering and addressing student barriers to attendance that they want to expand:

> *[This year] we're sending out our school liaison and enrollment coordinator, five families at a time…the goal is to bring parents in. We've had fifteen parent meetings where we called the parents in because we were concerned…We go deeper and find out why [their children are missing school], for example housing insecurity. We go look for partners to help provide resources to families…For next year we want to have this system/approach for attendance in place on the first day.*

These case-work approaches to improving attendance differ from communication- and incentive-based approaches that other districts most frequently reported. Though, as the examples from Blizzard and Thunderbirds also highlight, such efforts are costly and time-intensive, often requiring dedicated personnel. These resource and capacity issues contrast with low-cost and easier-to-implement communication strategies.

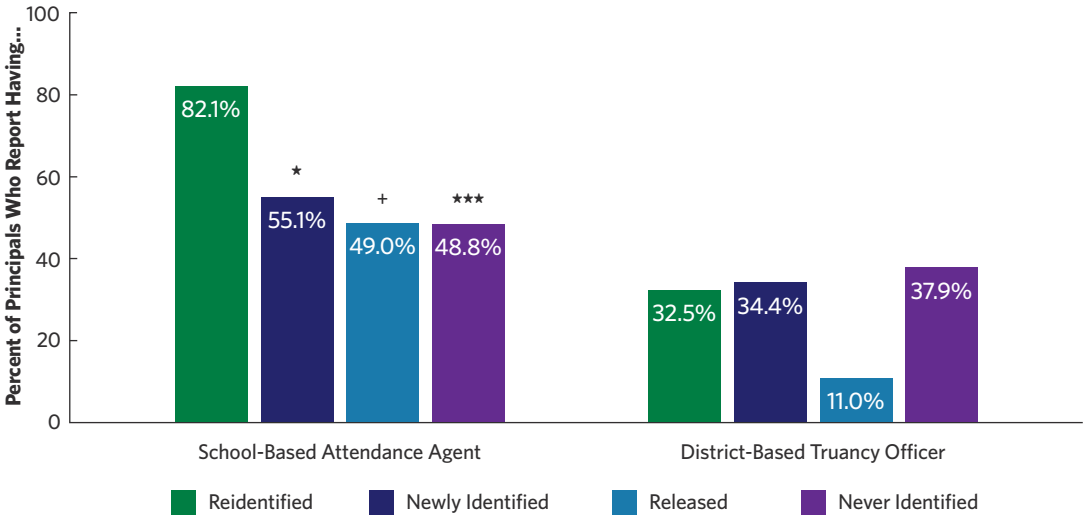
PARTNERSHIP DISTRICTS HAD VARIOUS

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT IN PLACE TO SUPPORT STUDENT ATTENDANCE

As Partnership districts seek to implement a range of attendance strategies, they are also establishing new systems, routines, and roles related to attendance. They differ in terms of the extent to which they already have these organizational elements in place and the challenges they faced in creating or maintaining them.

One example is whether districts and schools have personnel dedicated to working on attendance issues. Figure 3.5 shows survey responses from principals about attendance agents and truancy officers in their schools and districts. Eighty-two percent of reidentified school principals reported having a school-based attendance agent, compared to 55% of newly identified school principals, 49% of released school principals, and 49% of never identified school principals. Though the greater presence of school-based attendance agents in Partnership schools could simply reflect the greater magnitude of challenges, the gap between reidentified and newly identified schools may indicate that reidentified schools (and their districts) may have made concerted investments in their attendance-related organizational infrastructure during their prior round of Partnership status. Finally, a similar share of principals across schools reported the presence of district-level truancy officers. (Fewer released school principals responded that they had district-level truancy officers, though the difference was not statistically significant.)

FIGURE 3.5. Presence of School-Based Attendance Agents and District-Based Truancy Officers by Partnership Status, 2022-23



Note: Principals were asked, "From the following list, please identify the services that are made available to your students by your school/district." This graph shows answers by Partnership status for two items: "school-based attendance liaison or attendance agent" and "district-based truancy officer."

Partnership districts also differed in terms of the presence and implementation of systems for addressing chronic absenteeism. Across our case studies, we observed that some districts were in the early stages of developing attendance-related systems and routines. For example, the Hornets

district leader shared that while there are several initiatives happening at the high school level, their district does not *"have any consistent approaches to improving attendance."* They expanded on this by saying:

> *Our high school has several actions that they're working on to improve their attendance, and one of that is utilizing our school resource officer. We do have that in the district, and I think we're going through another process of trying to figure out how that person can best support the entire district…I haven't heard of anything happening at the middle school anymore or even at the elementary, but I know that we all want to get on board of having a uniform approach to dealing with student absenteeism and trying to tackle that in the younger grades where we can change those behaviors for students and parents.*

Other Partnership district leaders explained that they have had attendance systems in place but want to strengthen implementation. For example, an Aces district leader said:

> *[We're focused on] resetting expectations for attendance communications and chronic absence interventions. The district has expectations for what we do for attendance, but it has not been implemented with fidelity…This includes attendance committees, team responsibilities, tighter processes for attendance tracking and reporting, staff communications, more home visits and family meetings, incentives and family communications about importance of attendance.*

Finally, some districts had well-established attendance systems and routines. Yet, the magnitude of attendance issues created issues for implementation. A Ducks district leader put it this way:

> *Our attendance teams [at each school] have processes for what they do, steps once they have 3 absences, 5 absences, 10 absences. Here's all the things you do. The problem is that we get so far into it that we're like, "Well, what do we do for the students who have 32 absences?"… Looking at this year, we're kind of expecting things to be back to normal. Attendance is not, and it's a whole different beast now. We have to go back to the drawing board and figure out if we need to do something different. We have been talking about that at a district level, honestly, we haven't landed on something that we know is gonna work. It's a big problem, and we don't necessarily know how to solve it.*

In sum, Partnership districts varied in terms of personnel, practices, and systems to improve student attendance. Some have not yet established consistent approaches within their districts, while others have systems and practices they are still working to implement. Yet, even in Partnership districts with well-defined plans and existing infrastructure for attendance initiatives, the sheer magnitude of student absences can create difficulties for their efforts. Together, these data suggest the need for increased resources and support to assist Partnership districts in addressing student absenteeism.

Section Four: Student Socioemotional and Socioeconomic Well-Being

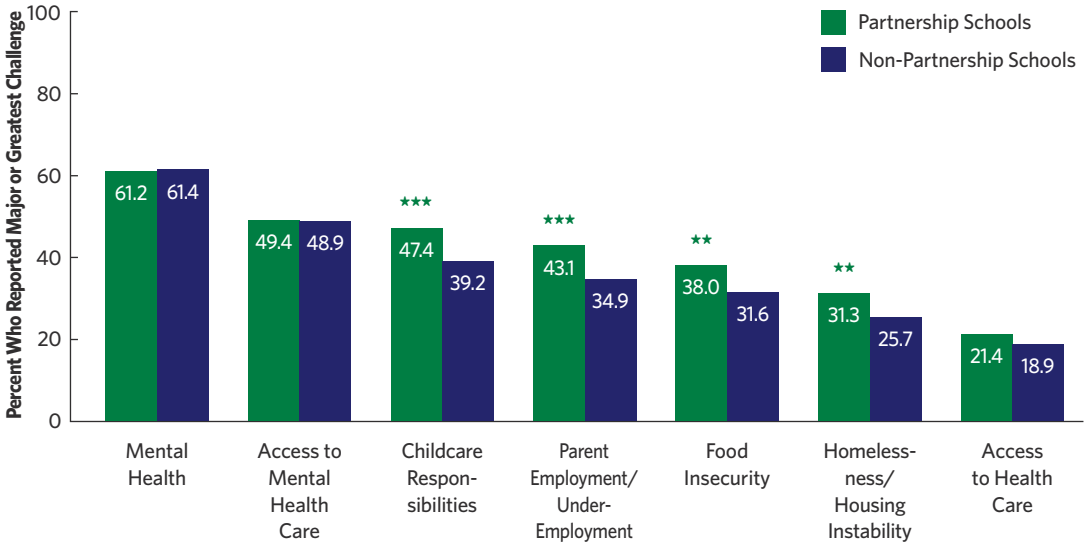
This section provides an overview of issues related to student socioeconomic and socioemotional well-being in Partnership schools. Since we did not directly survey or interview parents or students, we rely on teachers' perceptions of student well-being (as reported in their survey responses) and therefore we interpret these results with caution. Partnership district teachers perceive high levels of socioeconomic and socioemotional challenges for students, and especially reported student mental health as a great and persistent challenge for students. To meet these student needs, Partnership districts are working to implement socioemotional learning practices and have hired social workers and school counselors.

PARTNERSHIP DISTRICT TEACHERS REPORT MAJOR CHALLENGES TO STUDENT WELL-BEING

Teachers in Partnership districts report that their students face substantial hardships, which negatively affect their well-being. As shown in Figure 4.1, teachers perceived especially high levels of mental health challenges. About 60% of teachers in both Partnership and non-Partnership schools reported that mental health was a major or the greatest challenge that students faced. In addition, nearly 50% of teachers in Partnership and non-Partnership schools reported that accessing mental health care was a major or the greatest challenge for students.

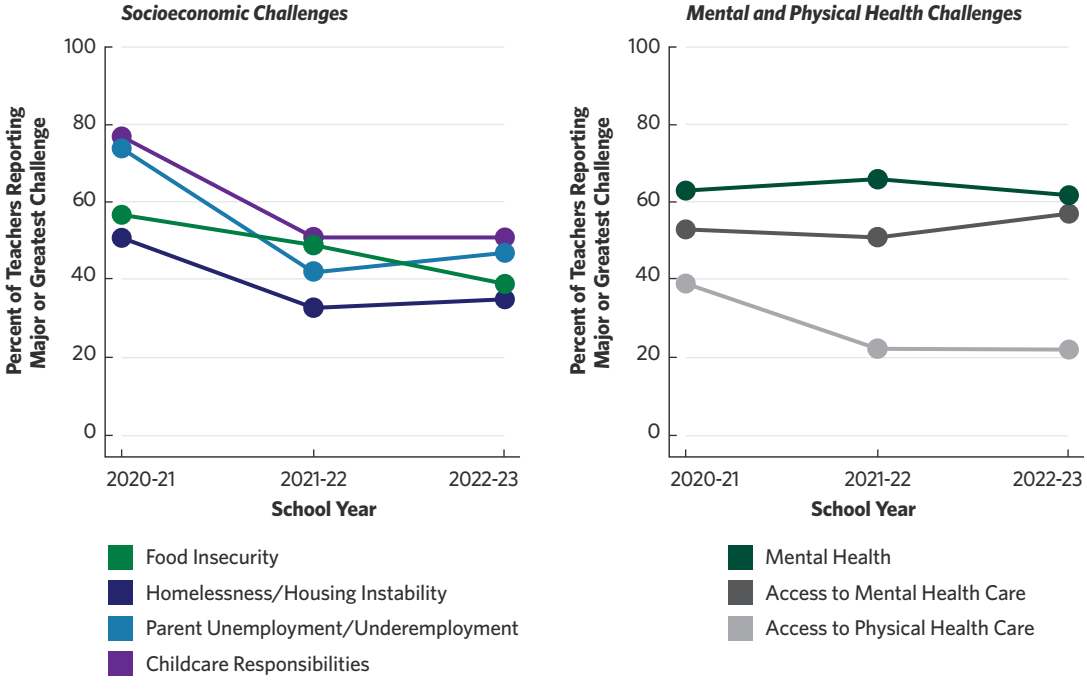
A substantial number of teachers also reported major socioeconomic challenges for students. We asked teachers about the challenges they perceive their students facing related to childcare responsibilities, parent unemployment or underemployment, food insecurity, and homelessness or housing instability (Figure 4.1). For each of these items, a greater percentage of Partnership school teachers than non-Partnership school teachers perceived that these socioeconomic issues were a major or the greatest challenge for their students.

FIGURE 4.1. Teacher-Reported Challenges to Student Well-Being for Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23



Note: Teachers were asked, "To what extent have each of the following been a challenge for your students this school year?" The options were: not a challenge, a minimal challenge, a moderate challenge, a major challenge, the greatest challenge, and not sure. Results displayed in this graph exclude respondents who selected not sure. $^{+}p<0.10$, $^{*}p<0.05$, $^{**}p<0.01$, $^{***}p<0.001$

FIGURE 4.2. Teacher-Reported Challenges to Student Well-Being in Reidentified Partnership Schools Over Time



Note: Teachers were asked, "To what extent have each of the following been a challenge for your students this school year?" The options were: not a challenge, a minimal challenge, a moderate challenge, a major challenge, the greatest challenge, and not sure. Results displayed in this graph exclude respondents who selected not sure.

Longitudinal survey data from reidentified Partnership schools that we began collecting during the COVID-19 pandemic help contextualize how these challenges have changed over time. While teachers' reports of student socioeconomic challenges have declined slightly since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, they believe mental health challenges have persisted (Figure 4.2). The left panel of Figure 4.2 includes socioeconomic challenges, and the right panel includes mental and physical health challenges.

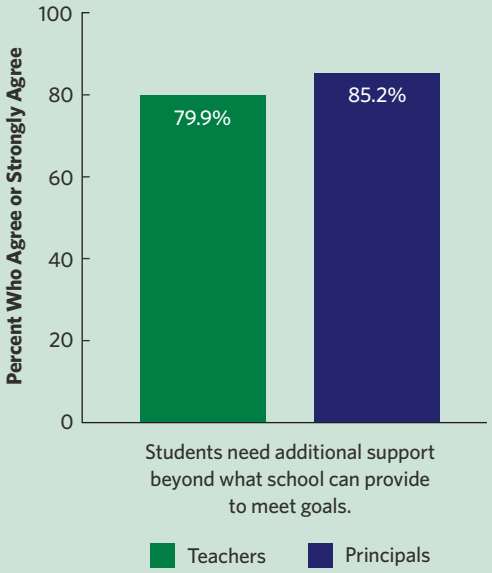
The percentages of teachers reporting socioeconomic issues and access to healthcare as a major or the greatest challenge for students in 2022-23 were at a similar level as the previous school year and lower than in 2020-21. The percentage of teachers reporting mental health and access to mental health care as challenges, however, have remained high since 2020-21. (Though the graph shows an increase for mental health care access as a challenge in 2022-23, the difference from prior years is not statistically significant.) These findings underscore that student mental health is an ongoing challenge in Partnership districts.

In our case studies, some district and school leaders described these socioemotional and socioeconomic challenges as interconnected and related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the severity of socioeconomic challenges for students and their families may have decreased since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, those factors may help explain why student mental health issues have persisted. As a Blizzard district leader shared:

We have more students who have experienced poverty or homelessness and other sorts of trauma at home. Some of it is COVID-related and still ongoing because they may have lost a parent or other loved ones or because they didn't have access to medical care…We just have a lot of socioemotional learning needs in our student population.

These challenges to student well-being can ultimately make it more difficult for schools to meet their improvement goals. As shown in Figure 4.3, the large majority of Partnership district teachers (80%) and principals (85%) agreed that in order to meet their school improvement goals, their students need additional support beyond what their schools can provide. Thus, in addition to challenges with human capital (Singer et al., 2023), instructional systems and practices (Woulfin et al., 2023), and student attendance (discussed earlier), the fact that a large number of students face major socioeconomic and socioemotional challenges is yet another hindrance to school improvement.

FIGURE 4.3. Partnership District Educator Belief That Students Need Additional Support Beyond What Their School Can Provide, 2022-23

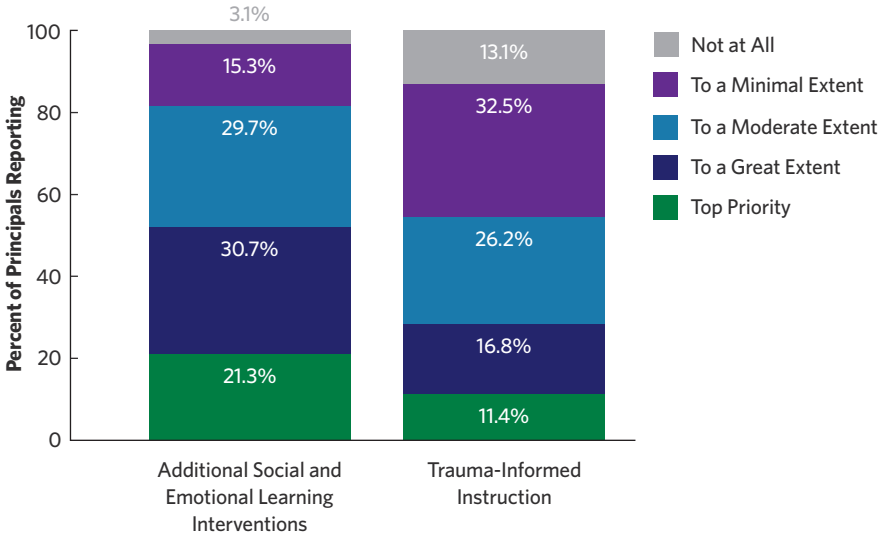


Note: Teachers and principals were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Our students need additional support beyond what our school can provide if we are to meet our school improvement goals." The options were: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

MANY PARTNERSHIP DISTRICTS ARE PRIORITIZING SOCIOEMOTIONAL LEARNING, BUT FACE SOME CHALLENGES

We asked principals the extent to which they were using certain strategies to address student needs in 2022-23. As shown in Figure 4.4, more than half of Partnership district principals reported that they were using additional socioemotional learning interventions to a great extent or that it was their top priority. Fewer than 20% of principals said they were not at all or only minimally using such interventions. A smaller number of principals indicated that they were using trauma-informed instruction to a great extent or that it was a top priority, which aligns with a prior finding that Partnership district teachers reported relatively infrequent professional development on addressing traumatic experiences in students' lives (Woulfin et al., 2023).

Figure 4.4. Principal-Reported Prioritization of Socioemotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Instruction, 2022-23



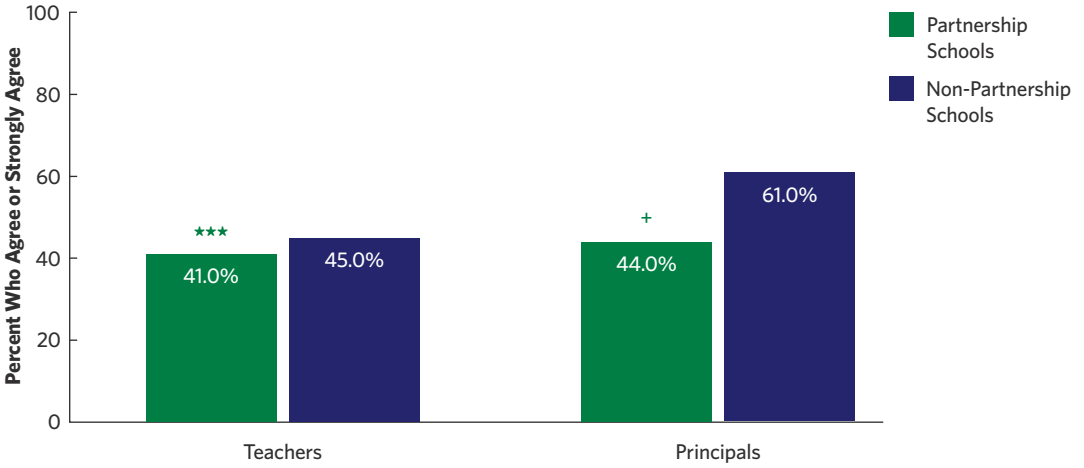
Note: Principals were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "To what extent is your school using each of the following strategies to accelerate learning and/or address student needs in the 2022-23 school year." The percentages in each column may not add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Despite the overall strong emphasis on socioemotional learning, many Partnership district teachers and principals expressed concerns about their ability to meet the socioemotional needs of their students. As shown in Figure 4.5, less than half of teachers in both Partnership and non-Partnership schools agreed that their school does a great job of meeting students' socioemotional needs. Similarly, fewer than half of Partnership school principals agreed, though a larger share of non-Partnership (61%) principals agreed.

Part of the challenge may be that districts need to use professional development time on academics and instruction rather than socioemotional and trauma-informed practices. As we discussed in a prior report, more than 80% of teachers responded that they infrequently or never receive

professional development on addressing traumatic experiences in students' lives (Woulfin et al., 2023). Teachers may feel that their schools are unequipped to meet students' socioemotional needs in part because they have not received adequate training to do so.

FIGURE 4.5. Educators Beliefs About Meeting Students' Socioemotional Needs in Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23



Note: Teachers were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "This school does a great job of meeting students' socioemotional needs." The options were: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. $^{+}p<0.10$, $*p<0.05$, $**p<0.01$, $***p<0.001$

The following vignette, from the Ducks district, helps illustrate the kinds of socioemotional learning and trauma-informed practices that Partnership districts are using, the organizational infrastructure they developed to support those practices, and some of the challenges they face in implementing these practices in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ducks District's Implementation of Socioemotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Instruction

01/
Case Study Vignette

During their initial round as a Partnership district, the Ducks district developed a strategic plan that continues to guide their improvement efforts, and a focus on socioemotional learning is a key component of that plan. The district has developed guidelines and systems to incorporate it into school culture efforts and via socioemotional learning lessons. A district leader described on how they had invested in such efforts prior to the COVID-19 pandemic:

> *We've created a trauma-informed guidebook. That took about a year to create, which works through an SEL lens, or trauma-informed lens, for attendance and behavior. It looks at how we utilize the student success team, what those systems should look like…We also have a positive school experience team…We use our guidebook to really look at all the SEL needs of our students.*

A Partnership school principal reiterated the district's focus on socioemotional learning, stating that they were *"at the forefront of socioemotional learning…Three days a week, we do socioemotional lessons with our students. They were doing it before I came [and] we've continued that."*

Challenges that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, have interrupted the implementation of such practices. As one district leader explained:

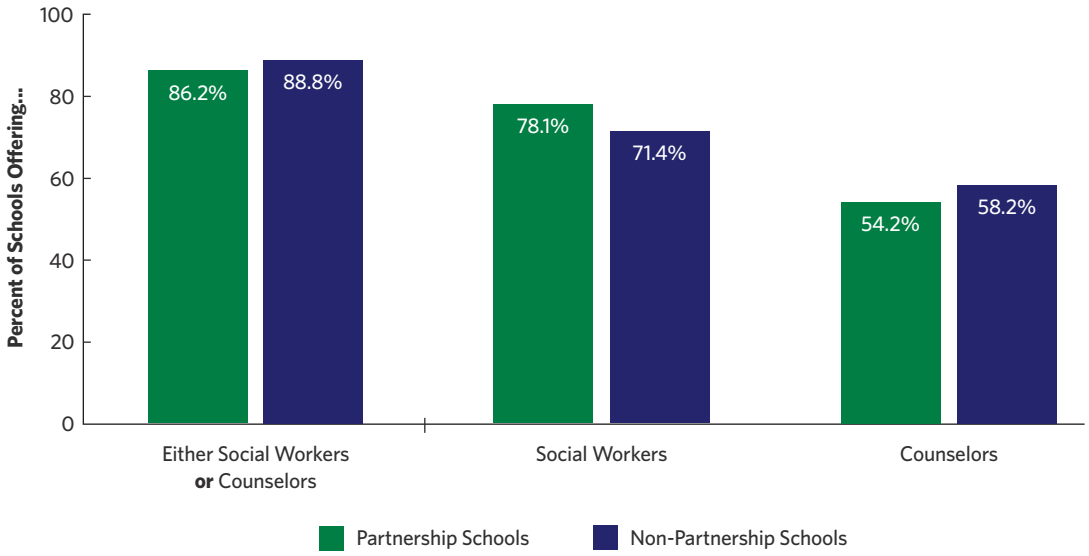
> *Essentially, our plan now really is building off of the work that we've been doing. However, the last couple years through the pandemic, we have really fallen short. This year, what we found is that we have to start over with a lot of different places.*

Ongoing staffing issues are one major reason that implementation progress had stalled (Singer et al., 2023). While schools had made progress with socioemotional learning system and practices, teacher turnover led to a greater strain on schools in general, and new teachers need the same training that prior teachers had received over the past few years. The district is currently focused on addressing these gaps to strengthen its socioemotional learning interventions. As one district leader put it, *"Now, trying to figure out how to—I don't wanna say streamline, but get it back to a baseline where it's more proactive. In some schools, it absolutely is. The resources are there."*

SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS ARE A CENTRAL PART OF STUDENT WELL-BEING EFFORTS

In addition to implementing socioemotional learning strategies, Partnership districts are employing social workers and school counselors to support student well-being. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Partnership districts in prior rounds increased their use of social workers and counselors to provide socioemotional support and help mitigate socioeconomic hardships (Strunk et al., 2022). Figure 4.6 shows the percentage of schools that offered a social worker and a counselor in 2022-23. Based on principal responses, 78% of Partnership schools and 70% of non-Partnership schools offer a social worker. In addition, about 54% of Partnership schools and 58% of non-Partnership schools offer a counselor. Looking at the overlap between these two positions, about 86% of Partnership schools and 89% of non-Partnership schools offer either a social worker or a school counselor. Thus, most schools employ at least one social worker or school counselor. For those that employ neither a social worker nor a counselor, challenges with hiring are a likely explanation (Singer et al., 2023).

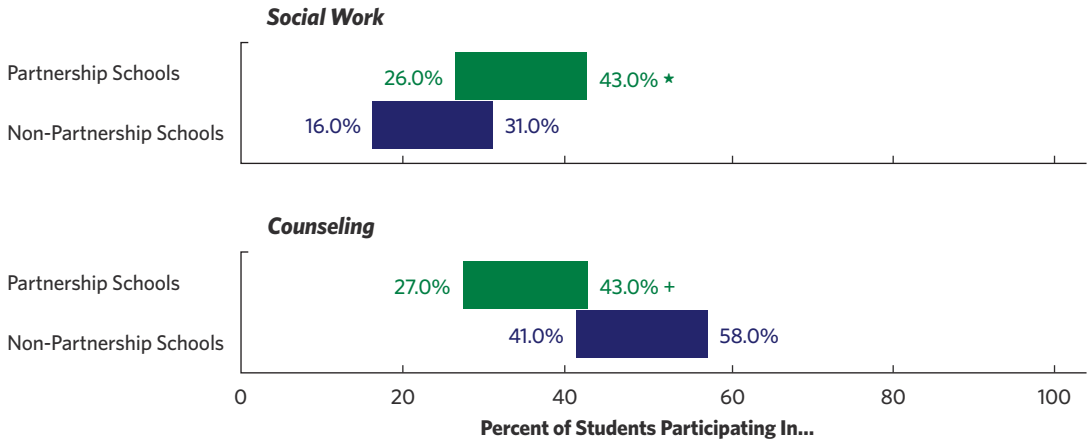
FIGURE 4.6. Principal-Reported Social Worker and Counselor Offerings in Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23



Note: Principals were asked to identify whether their school offered "a social worker" and "a counselor who provides social and emotional supports" to students. A separate item asked about academic counselors.

According to principals, a meaningful share of students in Partnership districts have participated in social work or school counseling services. Figure 4.7 shows, for those schools who do offer a social worker or counselor, the average principal-reported percentage of students who participated in social work or school counseling in 2022-23. More students in Partnership schools (26-43%) participated in social work than students in non-Partnership schools (16-31%). For counseling, however, more students in non-Partnership schools (41-58%) participated than in Partnership schools (27-43%). Overall, the survey results suggest that a significant share of the student population in both Partnership and non-Partnership schools received some school-based socioemotional and socioeconomic support from social workers or counselors.

FIGURE 4.7. Principal-Reported Social Work and Counseling Participation in Partnership and Non-Partnership Schools, 2022-23



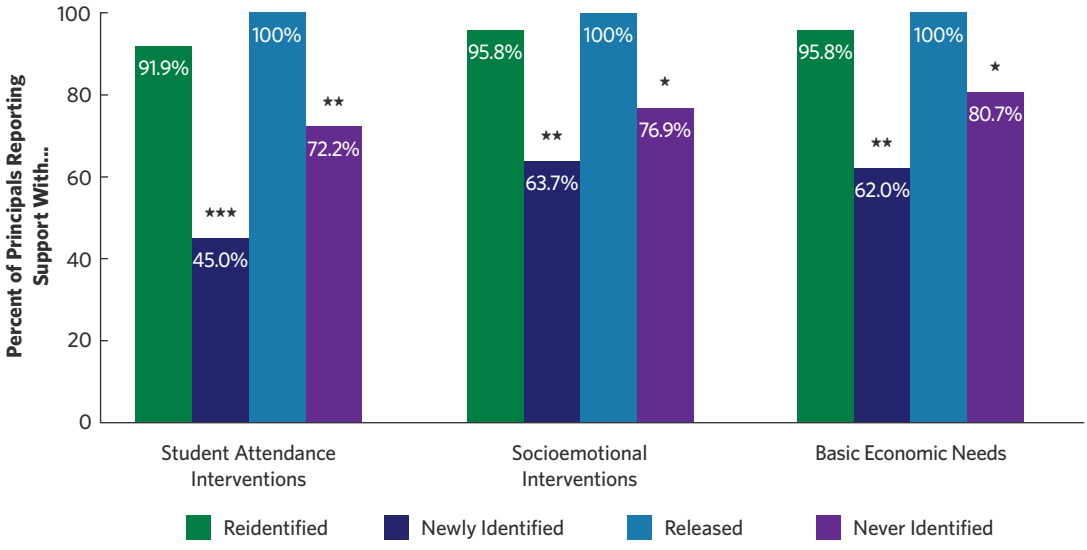
Note: Principals who indicated that their school offered a social worker or a counselor were asked to indicate the percentage of students who received or participated in that service. The options were: less than 10%, 10-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-90%, and greater than 90%. The percentage of students participating is based on midpoint values from selected ranges (e.g., 17.5% for 10-25%). $^{+}p<0.10$, $*p<0.05$, $**p<0.01$, $***p<0.001$

Still, it is possible that there are gaps in the provision of social work or counseling, given the extent of students' socioemotional and socioeconomic challenges described earlier. If social workers and counselors are regularly working with all Partnership district students who need their support, the amount of time they can dedicate to each student may be limited due to large caseloads. This fact was echoed throughout teachers' open-ended survey responses, with calls for more social workers and more counselors. As one teacher explained, *"most schools [in our district] have one to three counselors and social workers with a ratio of one to three-hundred students. They are spread too thin."* Thus, while social workers and school counselors are a critical part of Partnership districts' effort to meet students' socioemotional and socioeconomic needs, their capacity may be jeopardized by high levels of need and large caseloads.

Section Five: Support for Non-Academic Efforts in Partnership Districts

Finally, for student attendance and student well-being, we asked principals to share the extent to which they received support from their district, educational agencies (e.g., MDE, ISDs), and external organizations (e.g., community organizations). Principals' responses by Partnership status are displayed in Figure 5.1. Notably, a large share of principals in newly identified Partnership schools reported receiving no support with these non-academic issues. Only 45% of newly identified school principals reported receiving any support related to attendance interventions; and just over 60% of newly identified school principals reported receiving any support for meeting students' socioemotional and socioeconomic needs. Given that this is a baseline measure for these schools, we anticipate principals in newly identified Partnership schools to report increased support in future surveys as their support is scaffolded up through the Partnership Model. By contrast, nearly all principals at reidentified (and released) schools—who were part of the Partnership Model in previous rounds—reported that they receive at least some support with these three areas. Thus, as newly identified districts move into the implementation phase of the Partnership Model, they may especially benefit from additional support in the forms of both direct supports and resources for schools and in building district capacity to lead and monitor progress on attendance and student well-being.

Figure 5.1. Principal-Reported Support Related to Non-Academic Needs and Outcomes by Partnership Status, 2022-23



*Note: Principals were asked to indicate which of the following organizations provided support for student attendance interventions, student socioemotional and mental health initiatives, and social supports and services for students' basic economic needs: district or charter management organization, ISD, MDE, community-based organization, external educational organization, or none of these. Principals could select all that applied, though the none of these option was mutually exclusive of the other options. $^{+}$p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001, compared to reidentified schools.*

Section Six: Key Takeaways and Policy Recommendations

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Though Partnership district educators are focused on improving their instructional systems and practices (Woulfin et al., 2023), chronic absenteeism and other threats to student well-being pose an obstacle to school improvement. For student attendance, Partnership schools have had lower average attendance rates than other low-performing schools in Michigan, including a much larger share of students who are severely chronically absent. This aligns with national evidence, which shows that chronic absenteeism rates tend to be higher where students and families face greater degrees of social and economic inequalities (Singer et al., 2021). Though student attendance improved in the 2022-23 school year, chronic absenteeism rates remain high, and the large majority of Partnership district teachers still reported student attendance as a great hindrance to school improvement.

For student well-being, teachers in Partnership districts (and especially those in Partnership schools) reported challenges related to student mental health that have persisted through the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, while socioeconomic challenges may have decreased somewhat since the height of the pandemic, a large share of teachers continue to report their students face great challenges related to parental employment, childcare, food access, and housing.

Partnership districts are implementing new systems and practices—especially focused on communicating with students and families—to improve attendance. In addition, they are using socioemotional learning practices and employing social workers and school counselors to meet students' socioemotional needs. Yet, with limited time and resources overall and given the magnitude and complexity of these non-academic issues, their efforts to address those issues may put a strain on their overall capacity and coherence, ultimately jeopardizing their school improvement efforts (Spillane et al., 2022). Alternatively, Partnership districts may struggle with implementation for non-academic systems and practices given the time and resources dedicated to improving instruction. Indeed, even Partnership districts that already have some organizational infrastructure for addressing student attendance and well-being reported implementation challenges related to resource and capacity constraints.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations focus on how MDE and ISDs can support Partnership districts with student attendance and well-being and how districts can carefully evaluate efficacy and implementation related to non-academic outcomes. These kinds of approaches to non-academic issues in Partnership districts and schools could help meet important student needs while allowing leaders and teachers to remain focused on instructional improvement to meet their academic goals.

MDE and ISDs Can Explore Models of Cross-Sector Collaboration to Increase Student Resources and Supports

A core element of the Partnership model is that MDE and ISDs increase their support for and engagement with Partnership districts (Strunk et al., 2020). In the long term, MDE and ISDs could leverage their relationships with Partnership districts to promote turnaround approaches that involve a greater integration of community supports and services into schools or continue to advocate for increased direct resources from state agencies to students and their families. This aligns with the original intention behind the Partnership Model as a more collaborative and community-based approach to school turnaround. In the short-term, Partnership Agreement liaisons and OPD leadership can help Partnership district and school leaders identify and acquire community-based and state agency resources that can help with student attendance and well-being. This could include helping districts make use of resources such as new funding for school social workers and counselors (MDE, 2023).

The "community schools" model is one approach that districts might explore in order to meet students' academic and non-academic needs. Community schools involve integrated student supports and increased family and community engagement to address out-of-school barriers to learning and engagement, especially those related to poverty and inequality (Maier et al., 2017). Research has shown that the community schools model can have a positive effect on student attendance and, over time, student academic achievement (Covelli et al., 2022; Maier et al., 2017).

One challenge in implementing the community schools model in Partnership districts and schools is that schools must demonstrate improvement within a three-year window under the terms of their Partnership agreements (Singer & Cullum, 2023). Establishing partnerships with wraparound service providers can take an entire school year or more, and positive academic effects may not emerge for several years (Covelli et al., 2022). Therefore, adopting a community schools model (and adjusting accountability parameters to accommodate districts that do so) may be a long-term goal. In the short term, however, Partnership Agreement liaisons and ISD personnel working with Partnership districts can help Partnership districts and schools cultivate some community school elements specifically targeted toward student attendance and well-being. For example, they might identify and help broker partnerships with community-based organizations and state agencies, as well as take on a facilitator or leadership role as districts and partners plan to integrate services and supports into schools. Our findings suggest that newly identified Partnership schools especially need help identifying community partners who can provide socioemotional and socioeconomic support, though a meaningful share of reidentified Partnership schools also reported no current support from community-based organizations.

Another model for cross-sector collaboration includes state agencies taking on greater responsibility for providing direct resources to students and families, with schools as a key site for interaction. The main benefit for this kind of approach would be to relieve some of the burden on districts and schools for developing new infrastructure and marshalling new resources for non-academic challenges that other agencies or organizations might be better positioned to address, potentially helping those districts and schools maintain coherence in their academic improvement efforts. The difference from a community school model is that educational entities (e.g., districts, schools) would have less responsibility for securing, delivering, and managing such resources. Instead, schools would serve as a venue and partner as another agency took on that role. Importantly, the complexity of attendance and well-being issues mean that adequate resources and services need to be available to caseworkers and other agency personnel for them to successfully meet student needs (Sugrue et al., 2016). Whether districts or state agencies are the central actors for these efforts, strong coordination between the sectors would be necessary.

Michigan's "Pathways to Potential" initiative, spearheaded by the Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), resembles this approach. MDHHS places a Success Coach into schools, who turn to available state resources (e.g., food assistance, access to healthcare, access to transportation) and look for additional community-based resources, coordinating with school personnel to identify students in need (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). While there are currently 240 Success Coaches statewide, only about one-third of Partnership schools have a Success Coach assigned to their school (MDE, 2022; Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). In the short term, the legislature could allocate additional funding to provide a Success Coach to every Partnership school. Some Partnership districts could also consider reassigning current Success Coaches to their Partnership schools. More generally, lawmakers and agency leaders should implement policies that provide greater resources and supports, rather than past unsucessful efforts at revoking existing benefits from families with chronically absent students (Levin, 2023). In the long term, MDE, MDHHS, and state lawmakers can work together to improve and expand programs and identify other ways that the agencies can collaborate to reduce persistent out-of-school inequalities and directly meet student and family needs.

Partnership Districts Should Build Upon Their Attendance Efforts From an "Ecological" Perspective

Understanding absenteeism ecologically means recognizing that individual, family, school, neighborhood, and broader factors shape students' attendance patterns (Lenhoff & Singer, 2022; Singer et al., 2021). As Partnership districts and schools build new organizational systems and practices related to student attendance, they should adopt an ecological perspective. Likewise, MDE and ISDs can orient their support around an ecological approach.

For Partnership districts, an ecological approach starts with appreciating the magnitude of socioeconomic challenges that Partnership district students and families face and considering what resources a district or school can provide to address those barriers to attendance. Partnership districts and schools will ultimately need state agencies and community partners to provide additional direct resources and support beyond what schools can offer. Indeed, one reason that schools may prioritize communication and incentives over interventions that can more meaningfully remove barriers to attendance is that those efforts may be beyond the scope of what schools can provide,

absent additional resources for wraparound social services. Educators have lots of experience communicating with students and parents about a host of different aspects of their education, but they do not have expertise nor direct authority over resources and services that can help address social and economic inequalities. In addition, personnel working closely with families would ideally have caseloads of less than 20 students (Stemler et al., 2022), but most students in Partnership schools need intensive attention given the high rates of chronic absenteeism.

Yet, even if schools prioritize practices more in line with their capacity and expertise—such as communication and relationship-building with families—an ecological conception of absenteeism can guide the way that educators approach these efforts. For example, schools can adopt supportive messages and sustained, two-way communications (e.g., Stemler et al., 2022), rather than conveying solely informative or even punitive messages through one-way communication.

MDE and ISDs can promote an ecological approach to attendance through the direct support they provide to Partnership districts and schools and the educational resources they make available. For example, they can foreground an ecological perspective in coaching and planning sessions with district and school leaders. They can also design professional development sessions for educators that demonstrate how to analyze and respond to attendance data from an ecological perspective. Finally, in official MDE and ISD resource banks, they can design materials that encourage an ecological approach. Our findings suggest that newly identified schools especially need support around attendance, though MDE and ISDs should continue to support reidentified schools, where current initiatives may not be informed by an ecological approach.

Partnership Districts Should Closely Monitor the Efficacy and Implementation of Attendance and Well-Being Practices

Finally, as Partnership districts develop new practices to improve student attendance and meet students' socioemotional and socioeconomic needs, they should closely monitor the efficacy of these approaches. Educators have spent decades upon decades gaining expertise and developing systems to monitor and improve instruction (Peurach et al., 2019). New sets of attendance interventions or socioemotional learning practices might help decrease chronic absenteeism and increase well-being, but schools need robust processes and routines to ensure they are implemented with fidelity and strong data systems to assess their effect. Developing this organizational infrastructure itself will require additional time, resources, and personnel, on top of those dedicated to improving instructional systems and practices (Woulfin et al., 2023).

Partnership districts and schools should therefore monitor these non-academic initiatives with coherence and capacity in mind as well as effectiveness. For example, an intervention might be successful at a small scale but prohibitively expensive or too challenging to implement at a larger scale; or an intervention that is affordable and easy-to-implement school- or district-wide may ultimately have a small effect (Kraft, 2020). Relatedly, dedicating time and resources to develop an organizational infrastructure for non-academic interventions may jeopardize the coherence of other school improvement efforts (Spillane et al., 2022). Partnership districts and schools cannot afford to ignore student attendance or student well-being, but they will need to continue to be thoughtful about balancing the magnitude of challenges they need to address with the scope of reforms they undertake.

ENDNOTES

1. Hereafter, all references will only mention ISD as this is the more common term used among policymakers.

2. In Michigan, public school academies are publicly funded schools that operate independent of a traditional school district, often referred to as charter schools. We refer to these schools as "charter schools" as that is the more commonly used term.

3. State guidance on attendance during the 2020-21 school year can be found at the following website: https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/Year/2021/04/08/Michigan_School_Accountability_Planning_and_Response_to_COVID-19.pdf

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY RESPONSE RATE

TABLE A1. Partnership Survey Sample and Response Rates for Round 4 (i.e., Cohort 3), 2022-23					
	By Partnership Status		By School Type		TOTAL
	Partnership	Non-Partnership	TPS	Charters	
Teachers	46.4% (1,246)	43.3% (2,763)	43.1% (3,487)	53.3% (522)	44.2% (4,009)
Principals	61.5% (67)	42.5% (105)	44.7% (136)	69.2% (36)	48.3% (172)
Total Wave 5	*47.0% (1,313)*	*43.3% (2,868)*	*43.2% (3,623)*	*54.1% (558)*	*44.4% (4,181)*

TABLE A2. Partnership Survey Sample and Response Rates for Rounds 1, 2, and 3 (i.e., Cohorts 1 & 2)							
	By Partnership Status		By School Type		By Cohort		TOTAL
	Partnership	Non-Partnership	TPS	Charters	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	
WAVE 1 (2018-19)							
Teachers	42.3% (1,116)	35.9% (1,602)	38.0% (2,578)	45.0% (140)	42.6% (361)	42.1% (755)	38.3% (2,718)
Principals	28.3% (28)	28.8% (53)	25.8% (68)	68.4% (13)	16.7% (5)	33.3% (23)	28.6% (81)
Total Wave 1	*41.8% (1,144)*	*35.6% (1,655)*	*37.5% (2,646)*	*46.4% (153)*	*41.7% (366)*	*41.8% (778)*	*37.9% (2,799)*
WAVE 2 (2019-20)							
Teachers	57.1% (1,325)	44.8% (1,899)	49.0% (3,079)	52.5% (145)	59.3% (471)	56.0% (854)	49.2% (3,224)
Principals	50.7% (39)	31.4% (49)	35.6% (78)	71.4% (10)	48.0% (12)	51.9% (27)	37.8% (88)
Total Wave 2	*56.9% (1,364)*	*44.4% (1,948)*	*48.6% (3,157)*	*53.5% (155)*	*58.9% (483)*	*55.9% (881)*	*48.8% (3,312)*
WAVE 3 (2020-21)							
Teachers	43.3% (1,070)	35.2% (1,272)	37.8% (2,184)	51.5% (158)	46.4% (387)	41.8% (683)	38.5% (2,342)
Principals	66.0% (66)	33.6% (50)	45.0% (104)	66.7% (12)	65.5% (19)	66.2% (47)	46.6% (116)
Total Wave 3	*44.2% (1,136)*	*35.2% (1,322)*	*38.1% (2,288)*	*52.3% (170)*	*47.0% (406)*	*42.8% (730)*	*38.8% (2,458)*
WAVE 4 (2021-22)							
Teachers	31.7% (835)	28.5% (1,009)	29.3% (1,699)	38.2% (145)	32.5% (296)	31.3% (539)	29.9% (1,844)
Principals	39.8% (39)	21.8% (32)	27.2% (61)	47.6% (10)	35.5% (11)	41.8% (28)	29.0% (71)
Total Wave 4	*32.0% (874)*	*28.3% (1,041)*	*29.3% (1,760)*	*38.7% (155)*	*32.6% (307)*	*31.6% (567)*	*29.8% (1,915)*

APPENDIX B: SURVEY MEASURES AND ANALYSIS

Item-Level Analysis

In all waves of survey administration, the EPIC's survey of Partnership district principals and teachers focused on the following areas of the Partnership Model and related school and district contexts:

- understanding and awareness of the Partnership Model
- understanding and perceptions of school and district improvement goals
- perceptions of support from various organizations
- perceptions of school and district effectiveness and implementation
- perceptions of challenges, with a particular focus on staffing
- school culture and climate

A copy of the 2022-23 surveys can be found at
https://epicedpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Yr5_Partnership_OnlineAppendix_Surveys2022-23.pdf

In interpreting findings from these survey items, it is important to note that responses to the questions about student challenges are perceptions only and are therefore framed by teacher experiences. Analyses of data from these survey responses should be interpreted as teacher perceptions that necessarily include some degree of uncertainty. Over the past few years, we had one teacher survey and one principal survey, where many, but not all, of the items were aligned across the teacher and principal surveys. For example, we asked only teachers about their school leader effectiveness and school instructional practices, and we asked only principals about district and school strategies for teacher recruitment and retention.

Weighting

In all analyses (both item and construct level), we weight teacher and principal survey responses separately by year using sampling and nonresponse weights. We calculate the sampling weight using the school-level coverage of our sampling frame and calculate the nonresponse weight as the inverse probability of response within schools (for teachers) or districts (for principals). We do so based on demographic characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender) for both teachers and principals, certification type (i.e., elementary, secondary) for teachers, and Partnership identification round for principals.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

We conducted semi-structured interviews—following a set of questions but allowing for additional probing questions and follow-ups with participants based on their answers. All our interviews and focus groups in 2022-23 lasted about one hour. We recorded each interview or focus group, which were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

District and School Leader Interviews

1. Please describe your district/school strategic priorities for the year.
2. It would be helpful to hear about the initiatives you are implementing this year to improve outcomes. How did you select or develop those initiatives? What do you believe are the strengths of those approaches? Any weaknesses? Are there differences in what you're implementing in Partnership Schools versus non-Partnership schools?
3. We understand you have been/are becoming a Partnership district. What are your perceptions of the Partnership Model? Could you also tell us about your engagement with the Office of Partnership Districts?
4. Can you tell us about your district's approach to reading/ELA curriculum? And to math curriculum?
5. Could you tell us about your district's approach to professional development? What is the nature of the professional learning system?
6. What is your district's approach to non-instructional issues that you are trying to address?
7. Overall, how would you describe working conditions in this district for teachers, staff, and principals?
8. What is your district approach to teacher recruitment and retention? What initiatives are you implementing to address this?
9. How does your district/school use data and evidence in planning and daily activities? What are your expectations for schools' use of data and evidence?
10. From your vantage point, what are 2-3 of the district's biggest, current challenges?
11. What have been the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on your district/school?
12. Historically, when your district/school has sought to implement a new improvement initiative, how well-prepared have you been to do so? What have the biggest obstacles usually been?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about the Partnership Model and your efforts to implement Partnership this year? Partnership this year?

Teacher Focus Groups

1. We are interested in the infrastructure—or things your school has in place— for improving instruction, including curriculum, instructional frameworks, professional development, leadership, and other resources. We'd like to hear from each of you, what you notice about strengths and gaps in your school's approaches to help improve teaching and learning.
2. It would be great to hear more about leadership in your school/district. How would you describe the support from district and school leaders on instruction? And could you share a few ways your district and school leaders are working to retain teachers?
3. We're looking at the Partnership Model across schools in Michigan and would like to hear about how you're making sense of Partnership reform. What do you know about this state initiative? What are your perceptions of Partnership?
4. We are aware this is a challenging time for teachers. In your context and networks, to what degree are teachers considering switching schools or leaving the teaching profession? What is shaping their decisions to leave the district/profession? What changes or supports could prevent teachers from exiting the district/profession? Why are other teachers choosing to continue serving as a teacher at their school?

APPENDIX D: DISTRICT PSEUDONYMS FOR OBSERVATIONS

TABLE D1. Partnership District Case Study Sites

District Pseudonym	Sector	Round 4 Identification Status	Case Study District
Aces	Charter	Newly Identified	No
Blizzard	TPS	Newly Identified	Yes
Blue Jackets	TPS	Reidentified	No
Canucks	TPS	Reidentified	No
Condors	Charter	Newly Identified	Yes
Coyotes	Charter	Reidentified	No
Crunch	Charter	Newly Identified	No
Ducks	TPS	Reidentified	Yes
Hornets	TPS	Newly Identified	Yes
Hurricanes	Charter	Reidentified	Yes
Jets	TPS	Reidentified	No
Kraken	Charter	Newly Identified	No
Narwhals	TPS	Newly Identified	No
Penguins	TPS	Reidentified	No
Predators	Charter	Reidentified	No
Rangers	Charter	Reidentified	Yes
Thunderbirds	Charter	Newly Identified	No

APPENDIX E: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY DATA

Table C1. Comparison of Open-Ended Respondents and Non-Respondents Among Survey Completers in Wave 5 (2022-23)		
	Non-Respondent (N=2,683)	**Respondent (N=1,498)**
Demographics		
Female	77%	80%
Black	30%	22%***
Hispanic/Latino	3%	3%
White	64%	70%***
Other Race	4%	5%
Grade Level		
Lower Elementary (K-2)	30%	30%
Upper Elementary (3-5)	32%	29%
Middle School (6-8)	28%	28%
High School (9-12)	32%	33%
School Perceptions and Experiences		
Staff at this school work hard to build trusting relationships with parents.	69%	70%
Students pay attention and listen to teachers and staff.	36%	30%***
There is a high degree of staff turnover.	41%	49%***
There is a high degree of student mobility.	45%	51%***
Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.	66%	67%
Students in this school are struggling with academic content given pandemic-related interruptions to learning.	76%	80%**
Students in this school are struggling to exhibit appropriate behavior given pandemic-related interruptions to schooling.	71%	76%***
Working Conditions		
I feel overwhelmed by my job.	39%	53%***
I spend my preparation periods subbing for absent teachers.	14%	17%*
I have extra students in my class due to teacher absences.	10%	12%*
I am satisfied with my job.	67%	55%***
I feel I am working too hard on my job.	52%	62%***
I have enough time within designated school hours to do my job well.	31%	23%***
I feel prepared to teach in this kind of school environment.	70%	64%***

*Note: Teachers and principals who did not submit an open-ended response or who submitted a non-substantive response were coded as non-respondents. All perceptions, experiences, and working conditions variables in this table are binary (i.e., 0 or 1), with 1 indicating the teachers "agree" and 0 indicating teachers are "neutral" or "disagree". †p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001*

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