

Expanding the Reach of the Full-Service Community Schools Program

National Center for Education Evaluation

The U.S. Department of Education’s Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) program aims to expand the reach of the community school approach by providing grants to school districts, community-based organizations, and universities which, in turn, support partner schools as they seek to implement the approach and provide coordinated, comprehensive supports to children and their families. This snapshot examines whether the FSCS grant program helped expand the community school approach to schools that are consistent with program priorities: schools

that are high poverty, located in rural areas, and new to or not yet fully implementing their community school approach. Analysis of recent data from the grant program and surveys of fiscal year 2023 grantees and their partner schools suggests that nearly all partner schools are high poverty and almost half are located in rural areas. In addition, the majority are new to or not yet fully implementing the community school approach and are new to the grant program.

Why This Topic?

Children in high-poverty and rural schools often have unmet academic, physical, and mental health needs.ⁱ Students in these schools frequently lack access to supports and opportunities that would address these needs. Furthermore, even when supports and opportunities exist, they are often narrowly focused and of limited duration rather than longer-term, more coordinated efforts that might better meet students’ needs.

To help meet these needs, the U.S. Department of Education administers the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant program. Grantees, typically school districts, community-based organizations, or universities, aim to transform local schools into community schools—hubs that coordinate and integrate a wide range of services and supports to meet the unique needs of children, their families, and surrounding communities. Grantees work with partner schools to implement the FSCS program.

Legislation requires the program to serve high-poverty schools. Beginning fiscal year (FY) 2022, the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) detailed separate funding opportunities for rural communities to encourage their participation in the program.ⁱⁱ The NIA requires FSCS grantees to serve at least two high-poverty schools, defined as schools that are eligible for a schoolwide Title I program (that is, schools in which at least 40 percent of students are from families with low income). The NIA also requires that grantees provide an assurance that they will focus services on these high-poverty schools.ⁱⁱⁱ The program also aims to expand the reach of the community school approach by focusing on schools that have yet to fully implement the community school approach or receive external funding for implementing this approach. The FY 2023 grant competition largely replicated the FY 2022 competition, with the addition of a new requirement to participate in a national implementation evaluation, of which this report is a part.

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education awarded nearly \$74 million to cover the first year of funding for 30 five-year FSCS grants,^{iv} representing a 17 percent increase in funding from the previous grant cycle. The 2023 grants were awarded across 21 states and territories. In total, approximately 120,000 students attend partner schools served by the FY 2023 grantees.^v

This study focuses on the FY 2023 FSCS grantees and their partner schools. It examines the extent to which implementation of the grants reflected the program’s goals to serve high-poverty schools and increase the adoption of the community school approach throughout the country, including in rural areas.

Data and Analysis

Data for this snapshot come from surveys of FY 2023 FSCS grantees and their partner schools about the initial implementation of their grants. The survey of partner schools also asked schools if they had implemented any aspects of the community school approach before the grants were awarded. The

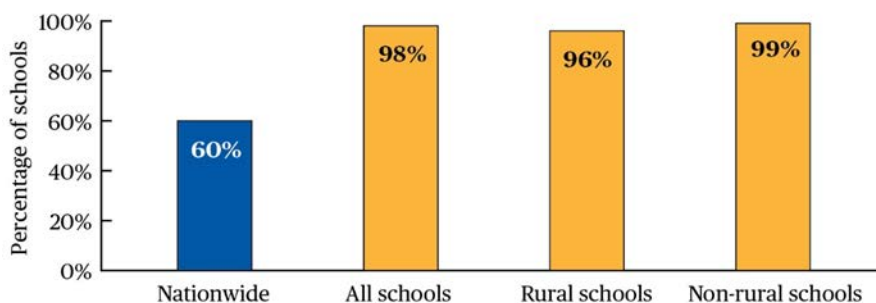
purpose of this question was to examine the extent to which grantees served schools that were not yet fully implementing a community school approach. All 30 FY 2023 grantees responded to the survey between June and July 2024, for a response rate of 100 percent. In total, 186 of the 222 partner schools responded to the survey between May and October 2024, for a response rate of 84 percent. This snapshot tallies survey responses across all responding grantees and schools to describe grantee characteristics.

Key Findings

FSCS grantees almost exclusively served high-poverty schools and almost half of schools were rural.

- **Nearly all partner schools are high poverty, consistent with program requirements.** Overall, 98 percent of partner schools are high poverty,^{vi} compared with 60 percent of all public schools nationwide (Figure 1). The extent to which partner schools were high poverty was similar across rural and non-rural areas.

Figure 1. Percentage of FY23 schools that are high poverty nationwide and by partner school location



Source: Grant award data file (https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2023/12/FSCS_Grantees_2008-2023_updated12.06.2023.xlsx) and Common Core of Data Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data School Year (SY) 2022-2023.

Note: High-poverty schools are defined as schools that are eligible for Title I schoolwide programs. These are schools in which at least 40 percent of students are from families with low income. The rural category was created using schools’ locale codes from the Common Core of Data and following the definition from the U.S. Department of Education’s Rural Education Achievement Program (<https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/formula-grants/rural-insular-areas/rural-and-low-income-school-program#RLIS-Eligibility>).

The sample for nationwide estimates includes all schools in the Common Core of Data Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey that have grade-level information, or 98,719 schools. The sample for fiscal year (FY) 2023 Full-Service Community Schools is 222 schools. The sample for location subgroups is 107 rural FY 2023 schools and 115 non-rural FY 2023 schools.

- Almost half of partner schools were in rural areas.** Forty-eight percent of all partner schools were in rural areas, compared with 38 percent of all public schools nationwide (Appendix Exhibit A.1). Although prior grant competitions (FY 2018, 2019, and 2020) awarded rural grantees additional points during the scoring of their applications, the program created separate funding opportunities specifically for rural applicants starting with the FY 2022 grant competition.^{vii} Thirty percent of FY 2023 grantees were in rural areas, compared with an average of 21 percent (with a range of 16 to 27 percent) among FY 2018–2020 grantees.^{viii}

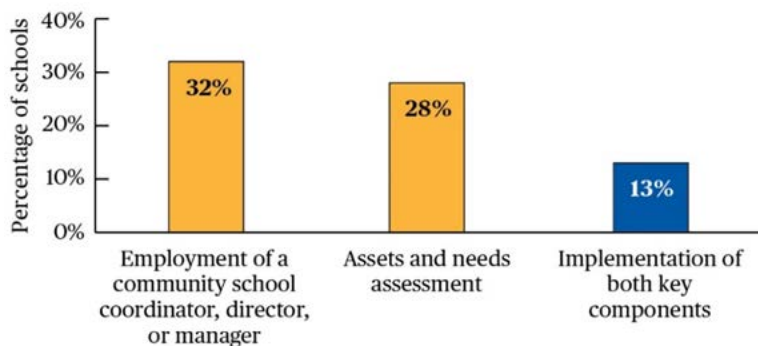
Grantees predominantly served partner schools that were not yet fully implementing the community school approach and school districts that were new to the grant program.

- A majority of partner schools did not identify as a community school before receiving the grant.** Fifty-seven percent of partner schools did not identify as a community school before they received the grant (Appendix Exhibit A.2), with 83 percent of grantees partnering with at least one such school.^{ix} Of the 42 percent of partner schools that reported identifying as a community school before the grant, most (62 percent) reported

identifying as a community school for more than three years (Appendix Exhibit A.3).

- Regardless of whether a school previously identified as a community school, most were not implementing key components of the community school approach before grant receipt.** For example, one key component of the community school approach is for schools to have a community school coordinator. Community school coordinators are expected to play a critical role in implementing the approach’s activities such as conducting leadership meetings and connecting students to services. Only about one-third of partner schools (32 percent) reported having a community school coordinator before grant receipt (Figure 2). Similarly, 28 percent of all schools report that they had completed an assessment of students’ and families’ needs and potential resources to meet those needs prior to grant award, another key component in the community school approach. Only 13 percent of schools reported implementing both key components prior to grant award, consistent with program objectives to reach schools that were not yet fully implementing key components of the community school approach before receiving FSCS funding.

Figure 2. Reported implementation of key components of the community school approach before grant award

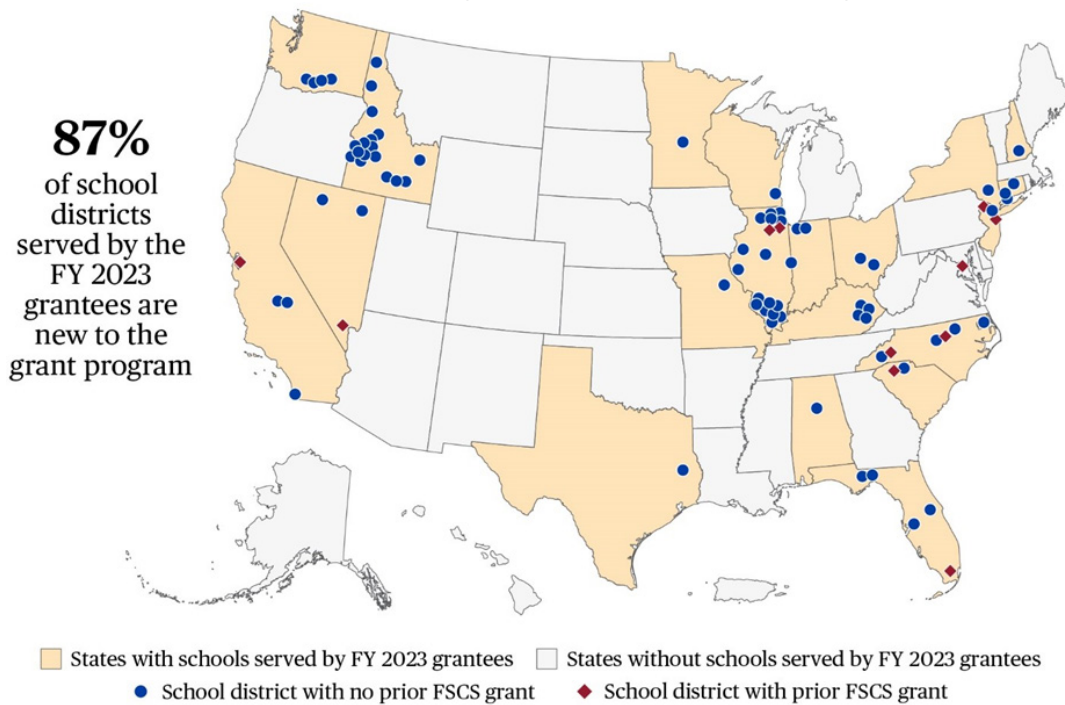


Source: Survey of fiscal year (FY) 2023 Full-Service Community Schools partner schools conducted in summer 2024.

Note: The sample for this figure includes all FY 2023 Full-Service Community Schools partner schools that responded to the survey in summer 2024 (n = 186). Data are missing for 3 percent of the sample.

- For the majority of grantees, the FY 2023 FSCS grants provided the first external funding for planning and implementing the community school approach.** Fifty-seven percent of grantees (17 grantees) reported that they had not received any external funding for planning and implementing the community school approach during the five years prior to the FY 2023 grant. The remaining 13 grantees reported previously receiving some external funding to support a community school approach,
- including through nonprofits or foundations (9 grantees), state agencies (6 grantees), the U.S. Department of Education (5 grantees), and/or a city/county agency (4 grantees).
- The FY 2023 FSCS grants expanded the geographic reach of the program to new districts.** Of the 84 school districts served by the FY 2023 grantees, 73 (87 percent) had not previously been served by an FSCS grantee (Figure 3).

Figure 3. School districts served by FY 2023 grantees, by previous funding status



Source: Grant award data file (https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2023/12/FSCS_Grantees_2008-2023_updated12.06.2023.xlsx).

- ⁱ Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2006). Closing the mathematics achievement gap in high-poverty middle schools: Enablers and constraints. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 11(2), 143-159; Bringewatt, E. H., & Gershoff, E. T. (2010). Falling through the cracks: Gaps and barriers in the mental health system for America's disadvantaged children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(10), 1291-1299; Edwards, A. M., Hung, R., Levin, J. B., Forthun, L., Sajatovic, M., & McVoy, M. (2023). Health disparities among rural individuals with mental health conditions: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Rural Mental Health*, 47(3), 163-178; James, C.V., Moonesinghe, R., Wilson-Frederick, S.M., Hall, J.E., Penman-Aguilar, A., & Bouye, K.. Racial/Ethnic Health Disparities Among Rural Adults – United States, 2012-2015. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 66(SS-23):1-9. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6623a1>; Kainz, K. (2019). Early academic gaps and Title I programming in high poverty, high minority schools. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 47, 159-168; Moore, S., Timpe, Z., Rasberry, C. N., Hertz, M., Verlenden, J., Spencer, P., Murray, C., Lee, S., Barrios, L. C., Tripathi, T., McConnell, L., Iachan, R., & Pampati, S. (2024). Disparities in the implementation of school-based mental health supports among K-12 public schools. *Psychiatric Services*, 75(1), 17-24; Morales, D. A., Barksdale, C. L., & Beckel-Mitchener, A. C. (2020). A call to action to address rural mental health disparities. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, 4(5), 463-467; Rapaport, A., Polikoff, M., Saavedra, A., & Silver, D. (2024, August). *A nation's children at risk: Insights on children's mental health from the Understanding America Study*. University of Southern California. <http://uasdata.usc.edu/education>; Reardon, S. F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New Evidence and possible explanations. In G. Duncan. and R. Murnane (Eds.). *Whither Opportunity* (pp. 91-116). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- ⁱⁱ Application for New Awards; Full-Service Community Schools Program, 87 Fed. Reg. 41688. July 13, 2022.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Application for New Awards; Full-Service Community Schools Program, 88 Fed. Reg. 37222. June 7, 2023.
- ^{iv} FY 2023 Full-Service Community Schools program grantees. <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-birth-grade-12/school-and-community-improvement-grants/full-service-community-schools-program-fscs#fscs-grant-awards>.
- ^v To identify partner schools, we read applications, conferred with the program, and—in the case of state scaling grantees—we confirmed with those grantees directly since their applications often said the grantee would finalize partner schools after grant award. School enrollment data come from Common Core of Data Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey, 2022-2023 school year.
- ^{vi} High-poverty schools are defined as schools that are eligible for Title I schoolwide programs. These are schools in which at least 40 percent of students are from families with low income.
- ^{vii} Application for New Awards; Full-Service Community Schools Program, 88 Fed. Reg. 37222. June 7, 2023. Application for New Awards; Full-Service Community Schools Program, 87 Fed. Reg. 41688. July 13, 2022.
- ^{viii} The percentage of rural grantees in FYs 2018, 2019, and 2020 were 27, 25, and 16, respectively. The percentage of rural grantees under the new competition rules in FYs 2022 and 2023 were 27 and 30, respectively.
- ^{ix} For this analysis, school survey respondents were grouped by grantee. A grantee was flagged if at least one responding partner school had not identified as a community school prior to grant receipt. The school survey included at least one responding partner school for 29 grantees, resulting in a denominator of 29 for this analysis.

Appendix

This appendix provides additional details on the study's approach to addressing the snapshot's two research questions:

1. Do grantees primarily serve high-poverty schools in rural and non-rural areas?
2. Did FSCS grants expand the reach of the program in terms of prior implementation and geographic location?

It first describes the sample and data collection and analytic methods used to address these questions. It then presents supplemental findings to support the snapshot's main findings.

Sample, data collection, and analytic methods

The data presented in this snapshot come from surveys of FY 2023 grantees and their grant-supported partner schools. Grantee surveys were administered in June and July 2024, and partner school surveys were administered from May to October 2024. The snapshot also includes data from the Common Core of Data (CCD).

Surveys of grantees and partner schools

To learn about the extent to which grantees served schools without deep implementation of the community school approach prior to grant receipt, the study team surveyed all FY 2023 grantees and their respective partner schools. The study sent an email to the 30 FY 2023 grantee project directors and the 222 principals at partner schools, inviting them to complete the survey. The email included a link to the electronic survey and instructions for completing it. All 30 grantees responded to the survey between June and July 2024, for a response rate of 100 percent. A total of 186 of 222 partner schools responded to the survey from May to October 2024, for a response rate of 84 percent. Twenty-nine of the 30 grantees had at least one partner school complete the school survey. The figures and statistics presented in this snapshot are simple tabulations of responses to questions in the survey.

Common Core of Data

To assess whether the grant program is serving schools that are high poverty, rural, or in geographic locations that are new to the program, the snapshot uses data from the CCD to compare characteristics of partner schools with the characteristics of schools nationally.

The CCD provides information about the characteristics of all schools in the United States, including locale and schoolwide Title I eligibility, and is updated annually. The snapshot uses these data to describe the characteristics of partner schools and compare them with the characteristics of all districts nationwide (also based on CCD data). The snapshot uses CCD data from the 2022-2023 school year, the last full school year before grant receipt.

Supplemental tables supporting findings in snapshot

Exhibit A.1. Percentage of schools that are rural and non-rural among grantees and nationwide

Response category	Percentage of FY 2023 partner schools	Percentage of schools nationwide
Rural	48	38
Non-rural	52	62

Source: Grant award data file (https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2023/12/FSCS_Grantees_2008-2023_updated12.06.2023.xlsx) and Common Core of Data Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data School Year (SY) 2022-2023. The sample for fiscal year (FY) 2023 Full-Service Community Schools is 222 schools. The sample for schools nationwide is 98,719 schools.

Note: The rural category was created using schools' locale code from the Common Core of Data and following the definition from the U.S. Department of Education's Rural Education Achievement Program (<https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/formula-grants/rural-insular-areas/rural-and-low-income-school-program#RLIS-Eligibility>), which includes school locale codes of 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43.

Exhibit A.2. Percentage of schools that identified as community schools before grant receipt

	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
Yes	79	43
No	104	57
Total	183	

Source: Survey of fiscal year (FY) 2023 Full-Service Community Schools partner schools conducted in summer 2024. The sample size is 186 schools. Data are missing for 2 percent of the sample.

Exhibit A.3. Length of time schools identified as community schools before receiving FY 2023 grant among those that previously identified as a community school

	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
Less than 1 year	5	7
Between 1 and 3 years	22	31
More than 3 years	44	62
Total	71	

Source: Survey of fiscal year (FY) 2023 Full-Service Community Schools partner schools conducted in summer 2024. Only schools that said they identified as a community school before receiving the FY 2023 Full-Service Community Schools grant received this survey item. The sample size is 79. Data are missing for 10 percent of the sample.