Off to a Strong Start: The GRAD Partnership Year 1 Student Success System/On-Track Results 2022–23

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During 2022–23, the **GRAD Partnership** began working with 49 schools across the country to implement evidence-based student success systems, which help schools meet the post-pandemic needs of all their students. These systems build on and enhance prior student support efforts like early warning/on-track systems, to enable all students to graduate from high school prepared and ready for post-secondary success. Student success systems, which have **demonstrated positive impacts**, combine predictive indicators of school success like attendance, course grades, and school connectedness, with human insights from teachers, students, and parents to quickly identify students who need additional supports or learning experiences. These systems also use improvement science to provide strategic and customized responses to identified needs at the school, grade, classroom, small group, or individual level. Importantly, student success systems emphasize the role of strong, supportive relationships among teachers, students, and families, and of creating a shared set of student-centered mindsets that unite school faculty, students, and the community around common goals and co-created solutions.

The definition and core components of **student success systems** were developed using input from hundreds of educators on what it would take to better support their students in post-pandemic times. The GRAD Partnership brings together organizations with decades of experience partnering with schools and school districts to implement early warning and on-track systems. The collective effort aims to build on its organizing partners' technical expertise and deep connections in diverse communities across the nation to create the conditions and provide the supports and capacity building needed to widely spread the effective use of student success systems.

To gauge initial and on-going impacts of student success systems on student progress towards graduation, the GRAD Partnership made efforts to collect participating schools' course failure data for each grade in the school that implemented a student success system. The common metric applied across all the schools was the percentage of students failing one or more grade level courses, as this is one of the strongest predictive indicators of high school graduation. Data were collected for the year prior to implementation (academic year 2021–22) and the first year of implementation (academic year 2022–23). When available, chronic absenteeism data — another key school success/on-track indicator — was also collected for both years.

Each of the participating schools received support from one or more of the GRAD Partnership technical assistance providers, with a coach or facilitator assigned to each school to help support schools with the implementation or improvement of their student success system. They were asked to assign a global implementation level for each school of either, **partial**, **solid**, or **strong**, based on a rubric provided (see Appendix I); as expected for an initial year of implementation, nearly all of the coaches and facilitators rated their schools as having partial or solid implementation. Three schools were rated by their coaches as achieving strong implementation. The coach or facilitator was also asked to complete a ten-item implementation reflection survey (see Appendix II).

Course Failure
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS/GRADES REPORTING DATA

Over 80 percent of the schools (41 of 49) were able to provide data on the percentage of students failing one or more courses in the grades implementing student success systems.

Most schools reported course failure rates for individual grade levels; some provided a single figure for multiple grades combined, resulting in a total of 57 course failure data points. Table 1 below shows pre- and post-implementation course failure rates by the grade level(s) reported.

TABLE 1. Course Failure Rates Pre- and Post-Implementation of Student Success Systems, by Grade Level/Cohort

Grade Level/ Cohort	N	Pre-Implementation Failure %	Post-Implementation Failure %	Failure Rate Percentage Point Change
Unknown	1	39.0%	44.0%	+5.0%
6	3	17.8%	15.7%	-2.1%
7	2	30.5%	39.0%	+4.0%
8	6	27.8%	22.5%	-5.3%
9	22	26.5%	17.4%	-9.2%
10	5	24.6%	25.8%	+1.2%
11	4	18.9%	18.0%	-0.9%
12	3	21.2%	27.7%	+6.6%
6-12	1	35.0%	39.0%	+4.0%
7–12	3	32.1%	16.5%	-15.6%
9–12	4	27.6%	22.7%	-4.8%
10–12	2	19.0%	21.1%	+2.1%
11–12	1	6.3%	5.6%	-0.7%
Total[1]	**57**	**25.5%**	**20.5%**	**-5.0%**

[1] *To calculate totals, data from each individual grade for which data was provided was counted as one unit. For example, if a school reported separate on-track data for grades 6, 7, and 8 this is treated as 3 units of data; each instance of one figure reported for multiple grades was counted as one unit (e.g. data reported for grades 6-12 combined is counted as one unit; this led to total of 57 unique units of data (including the unknown grade level). 25.5% represents the average pre-implementation failure rate across all units; 20.5% the average post-implementation failure rate across all units.*

KEY FINDINGS

- In year one of the GRAD Partnership's student success systems implementation, the percent of **students failing one or more courses declined, on average, by five percentage points, across 41 schools**, decreasing from 25.5% in 2021–22 to 20.5% in 2022–23 (see Table 1).

- Three quarters of the grade levels implementing student success systems demonstrated improved course failure rates. Moreover, in one quarter of the reporting grade levels/cohorts, failure rates were at least 10 percentage points lower after one year of implementation (not shown in Table 1).

- There were no meaningful improvements in course failure rates across the three schools that only reported data for grades 10–12 or 11–12 (one school reported a very small improvement, one reported no change, and a third school's course failure rates increased by four percentage points.

- Large improvements were reported for the 9th grade. Table 2 reports 9th grade course failure rates by the implementation levels assessed by the GRAD Partnership coaches/facilitators. **Among the 22 schools reporting course failure data for the 9th grade**, **the average decline in course failure rates was 9.2 percentage points**. Multi-grade cohorts (n=8) that include the 9th grade reported average declines in course failure of 7.1 percentage points. Middle grades n = 11 had average declines of 4.4 percentage points.

- **The greatest impacts were reported for 9th grade cohorts that were assessed as solid levels of implementation in their first year. On average**, **these schools saw a 14.4 percentage point decline in 9th graders failing one or more classes**. The 11 schools that were assessed as partial implementation of a student success system in their first year saw a 6.0 percentage point decline.

- The two schools for which technical assistant coaches observed strong implementation of student success systems in the 9th grade only saw a 2.5% reduction. These schools had a much lower baseline year failure rate — 11.0% of ninth graders failed one or more courses in strong implementation schools, compared to 29.8% of 9th graders in the schools achieving solid implementation by the end of the first year.

TABLE 2. 9th Grade Course Failure Rates Pre- and Post-Implementation of Student Success Systems, by 1st Year (2022–23) Implementation Level

Implementation Level	N	Pre-Implementation Failure %	Post-Implementation Failure %	Failure Rate Percentage Point Change
Strong	2	11.0%	8.5%	-2.5%
Solid	9	29.8%	15.3%	-14.4%
Partial	11	26.7%	20.7%	-6.0%
Total	**22**	**26.5%**	**17.4%**	**-9.2%**

Chronic Absenteeism
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS/GRADES REPORTING DATA

A total of 35 schools reported chronic absenteeism data. As with course failure rates, some schools reported a single figure for a range of grade levels, and others reported a figure for individual grades, resulting in 41 separate measurements of pre- and post-implementation chronic absence.

KEY FINDINGS

- Across all schools and grades reported, chronic absenteeism declined by an average of 5.4 percentage points during the first year of student success system implementation. Almost all of the implementing grades reported a decline in chronic absenteeism; 75% of the grades reported declines of at least two percentage points. One quarter had declines of eight percentage points or higher.

- The three middle grades with solid implementation had an average decrease of 6.8 percentage points, compared to 3.4 percentage points among middle grades with partial implementation, see Table 3.

- At the high school level, the greatest gains were reported by the one high school that received strong implementation during the first year it received technical assistance. For this school, chronic absenteeism declined 14 percentage points. The nine high school grade levels rated as having solid implementation had average declines of 4.7 percentage points and the 18 with partial implementation had average declines of 6.2 percentage points. One potential reason for slightly higher outcomes in the partial versus strong implementation high school grades is that many of the high schools with partial implementation chose to focus primarily on chronic absenteeism during the first year of implementation. This focus on a single element of student success systems resulted in a partial implementation rating, but also may have resulted in greater improvements in chronic absenteeism.

- Among the 19 schools reporting data for the 9th grade specifically, the average decline in chronic absenteeism rates was 5.9 percentage points (not shown in Table 3).

TABLE 3. Chronic Absenteeism Pre- and Post-Implementation of Student Success Systems, by Grade Level and 1st Year Implementation Level

Grade Level[2]	Implementation Level	N[3]	Pre-Implementation Chronic Absence %	Post-Implementation Chronic Absence %	Chronic Absence Rate Change
High	Strong	1	61.0%	47.0%	-14.0%
	Solid	9	20.5%	15.8%	-4.7%
	Partial	18	29.1%	22.8%	-6.2%
	Total	**28**	**27.5%**	**21.4%**	**-6.0%**

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Grade Level[2]	Implementation Level	N[3]	Pre-Implementation Chronic Absence %	Post-Implementation Chronic Absence %	Chronic Absence Rate Change
Middle	Strong	0	-	-	-
	Solid	3	21.7%	14.8%	-6.8%
	Partial	4	18.8%	15.4%	-3.4%
	Total	7	**20.0%**	**15.1%**	**-4.9%**
Middle/High	Strong	0	-	-	-
	Solid	0	-	-	-
	Partial	2	33.0%	21.5%	-11.5%
	Total	2	**33.0%**	**21.5%**	**-11.5%**

Implementation Reflection Survey

Coaches from the GRAD partnership organizations who supported the first-year implementation of student success systems in 49 schools during the 2022-23 school year completed implementation reflection surveys for their assigned schools. The survey had ten questions pertaining to student success team formation and the degree to which those teams engage with the core components of student success systems (see Appendix II).

STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM DATA ACCESS, USE, AND ANALYSIS

In 96% of the schools implementing student success systems, teams used two or more predictive indicators (e.g., course grades, attendance) at the student level to identify students who may need additional support. During the first year of implementation, the GRAD Partnership facilitators reported that 37% of the schools

used the more advanced practice of analyzing patterns and trends in on-track indicators at higher levels of aggregation (e.g., sub-group, grade, and school level).

Encouragingly, in 71% of the schools, student success data were updated and analyzed at least monthly. One-fifth of schools reported bi-weekly analysis, and an additional 27% of schools reported that data analysis occurred quarterly.

The implementation reflection surveys reveal that challenges remain in easily accessing student success/ on-track data. Only 37% of the facilitators reported that the student success teams in the schools had regular access to user-friendly, on-track data from their student information systems. In 59% of the schools, student success data had to be assembled and made user-friendly by a member of the student success team or an administrator. As a result, sometimes the data was

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[2] *"High" includes individually reported high school grades, as well as combinations of grades 9 through 12. "Middle/High" includes data reported across multiple grades spanning both middle and high school grades.*

[3] *Four schools provided chronic absenteeism data but no implementation assessment, leaving 37 units from 35 schools included in Table 3.*

not available or updated. The more positive news is only two schools - 4% - reported they did not have regular access to student success data.

STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM ORGANIZATION AND ACTIONS

During year one of implementation, a majority of schools (59%) established well-functioning student success teams consisting of teachers, student support personnel, and administrative support. These teams met regularly throughout the school year, with contributions from all team members. Another five schools (10%) reached more advanced levels of team engagement by consistently incorporating student, family, and community input into their efforts. **This means more than two-thirds (69%) of the implementing schools achieved substantial establishment of student success teams during their first year of implementation**. An additional 29% of schools reported emergent student success teams, primarily composed of counselors and other student support personnel, who met regularly and were sometimes supported by teachers and administrators. This staffing pattern indicates that these may be primarily schools who are working to evolve their student success systems beyond more traditional Multi-Tiered Student Support (MTSS) student support models in place. Only 12% of schools reported limited formation of student success teams, with teams meeting infrequently and/or inconsistent team member participation.

In 90% of the schools, teachers and student support personnel went beyond analyzing predictive indicator data to engage in the critical student success team practice of sharing their knowledge and insights about students identified using predictive indicators. In 47% of schools, student success teams engaged in the more advanced practice of utilizing team members who held stronger relationships with particular students to talk with students to better understand their challenges.

In 87% of the schools, facilitators reported that student success teams customized interventions/action to individual students. They also reported that **half of the student success teams took the more advanced step of trying to identify the most strategic point of intervention/action, where the greatest number of students could be helped with a manageable level of effort**. Four schools reported the most advanced level of strategic action planning where students, families, and community members were engaged in creating solutions.

Nearly all schools (92%) followed the progress of students who have been supported by student success teams and implemented new and/or different interventions and actions when necessary. However, only 37% reported they had a formal recording and tracking system for the interventions and actions recommended. This is typical for first-year implementation, when the focus is often on helping more students with the system in place rather than improving the student support system itself. Tracking impact will remain important as schools' strategies develop and systems become embedded.

RELATIONSHIPS AND MINDSETS

The implementation reflection surveys suggest more work is needed in two areas: strong relationships and student-centered mindsets, both of which are crucial to student and school success in pandemic-impacted times.

Facilitators noted that in two-thirds of the schools, student success teams worked to promote the importance of relationships in their first year of implementation. However, in only a quarter of the schools, actions were taken to gather data on the strength of relationships in the school and then formulate and lead efforts to improve them where needed.

In 71% of the schools, student success teams discussed and promoted the importance of developing a shared set of student-centered mindsets. **However, in only 12% of the schools, actions were taken to collect data on the extent to which faculty and administrators had a shared set of mindsets, and where needed, worked to create them**.

Summary

Year one of the GRAD Partnership's implementation of student success systems, the next generation of early warning/on-track systems, occurred in the year following what many teachers and school leaders called the most challenging year of their career. While it was hoped that 2021-22 would bring a return to normalcy for schools, it did not. The pandemic continued to cause students to quarantine and class cancellations were not infrequent throughout the year. Moreover, as students returned to school, the full impact of the pandemic on their mental, social-emotional, and academic well-being became apparent. Chronic absenteeism spiked to all-time highs with **two-thirds of students** attending a school where 20% or more of enrolled students were chronically absent. Absenteeism and behavior challenges consumed educator attention in the midst of staff shortages and leadership turnover. Simply put, the first cohort of schools to implement the GRAD Partnership's student success systems did so at a time of heightened and unparalleled student need.

The year one implementation data from the first cohort of the GRAD Partnership schools indicates that student success systems were up to the challenge. In the majority of implementing schools, substantial levels of implementation led to strong results. This is especially true for the make-or-break 9th grade year where nearly all implementing schools saw improvements in on-track rates and average gains of nine percentage points. Moreover, the nine schools that were able to achieve solid implementation for the 9th grade showed even higher average gains - 14 percentage points. Across all implementing schools and grades, there was a five percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism during the first year of implementation. This is a timely outcome. Alarm bells are being raised about post-pandemic levels of chronic absenteeism; the White House, governors, local leaders, community groups and parents are expressing concerns and calling for action.

The results from coaching reflection surveys, which shed light on key aspects of implementation, show that most schools in their first year were able to get many of the core elements of student success systems in place. They formed student success teams that included teachers, counselors, and school leaders, and met regularly. They accessed predictive indicator data to identify students in need of support and then pooled their collective wisdom about students to select the most effective interventions. The results also show that work remains for year two, particularly in developing strategies to strengthen all relationships and working towards a shared set of student-centered mindsets to create a collective understanding around the *why* of the work. Finally, there is more work to do to provide student success teams with easier access to actionable data. The majority of schools reported they were dependent on a team member or school leader to prepare the actionable data and could not directly access the information from the school's student information system or other data tools.

Overall, year one results are very encouraging. In a challenging environment, with record levels of student needs, middle and high schools across the nation in urban, suburban, and rural environments implemented student success systems and their students benefited in real, tangible, and meaningful ways.

GLOBAL IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL RUBRIC

The coaches or facilitators from the GRAD Partnership organizations who supported implementation at the school were asked to provide a global implementation rating based on the following rubric:

Partial Implementation schools are working to implement a student success system, but have not yet implemented all the core components of effective on-track systems. Examples of partial implementation include: a) when student success teams are mainly composed of student support staff-counselors, mental health workers, and administrators and do not yet include multiple teachers (which often occurs when a school is transitioning from a multi-tiered student support, MTSS, model to a student success system); b) when the school decides in the first year of implementation to only focus on a single predictive indicator, most often chronic absenteeism; or c) when a school is only able to have student success team meetings on less than a monthly basis, or does not have consistent access to student data.

Solid Implementation schools are implementing the core components of effective on-track systems. They have student success teams that include teachers, and are progress monitoring all students in the grades implementing them, using multiple predictive indicators (e.g. attendance and course grades on regular and on-going basis). Student success teams are drawing on multiple sources of data to determine the best support or intervention to provide at the most strategic level/place, and interventions are recorded and tracked for effectiveness. Solid implementation schools are also beginning to implement one or more of the key features which distinguish student success systems from on-track systems e.g. focus on relationship-building within school and with parents/community, co-creation of interventions and supports with students/families, and/or building a shared set of student-centered mindsets among adults in the school.

Strong Implementation schools are actively working to implement all the components of student success systems, which include all the elements associated with effective on-track systems plus: a) a focus on relationships in all directions; b) progress monitoring all students with actionable holistic data which includes measures of well-being such as agency, belonging, and school connectedness, along with established predictive indicators like attendance and course grades; c) improvement systems driven by strategic data analysis to identify patterns and trends, teacher, family, student insights and co-creation of solutions, continuous improvement methods; and d) shared student centered mindsets.

COACH IMPLEMENTATION REFLECTION SURVEY

GRAD Partnership coaches/facilitators completed the following questionnaire for each of the schools they were working with.

1. **What data do student success teams use?**

    a) Teams do not use predictive indicators at student level.

    b) Teams use two or more predictive indicators e.g. the ABC's -attendance, behavior, or course performance, at the student level-to identify students who may need additional support.

    c) Teams use multiple predictive indicators at student level, analyze their trends and distribution at school level, can look at aggregations by sub-groups.

    d) In addition to c) teams use predictive indicators for post-secondary readiness, also look at school climate/survey data, and data on agency, belonging, and connectedness to gain holistic understanding of student success and where support/improvements needed.

2. **How frequently are student success data updated?**

    a) Annually

    b) At least quarterly

    c) At least monthly

    d) At least bi-weekly

3. **How frequently are student success data analyzed?**

    a) Infrequently and not consistently

    b) At least quarterly

    c) At least monthly

    d) At least bi-weekly

4. **How accessible and actionable are the data available to members of the student success team(s)?**

    a) Neither predictive or holistic data is regularly available to the team.

    b) One person on the team or an administrator has to assemble the data from multiple sources or make it user-friendly for others to use and sometimes it is not available.

    c) The school's student information system provides all student success team members with regular access to user-friendly data on attendance, behavior, and course performance, which the team supplements with other data sources to create a holistic look at each student.

    d) The team has regular access to an integrated data set, with ABC data, post-secondary preparation and outcome data, student survey results and other data e.g. school connectedness which provide holistic data on all students. Students and parents also have access to relevant data.

5. Do student success teams have a structure, on-going participation by team members, regular and frequent time to work together, and the authority to make decisions?

    a) The team meets infrequently and team members' attendance is not consistent.

    b) Most of the work is done by a small group of counselors or student support staff who meet regularly , sometimes supported by a teacher or administrator.

    c) There is one or more student success team, which includes teachers and other student support staff and meets regularly throughout the school year; all members contribute and team efforts are supported by administrators.

    d) In addition to all the elements in c), teams regularly incorporate student, family, and community insights into their efforts.

6. What steps are taken to understand what drives student actions?

    a) Student success teams do not discuss the source of student actions and assign interventions based on pre-established data cut points.

    b) Teachers and student support staff present at the meeting will briefly share what they know about the student(s) identified as needing additional support.

    c) In addition to b), a student success team member who has a relationship with the student(s) will talk with them to better understand a root cause.

    d) Team has established a process to solicit input from teachers, school staff, students, parents, and community members to gain deeper understanding of a root cause.

7. How strategic are the interventions/actions taken by the student success team?

    a) Teams have little or no ability to customize interventions/actions and for each ABC and level of need; there is a pre-set intervention.

    b) Nearly all interventions/actions are customized to individual students.

    c) Team tries to identify the most strategic point of intervention/action where the most students will be helped for a manageable level of effort – could be at individual, small group, classroom, grade, or school level.

    d) In addition to c), the team has an established process to engage administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members in the co-creation of solutions.

8. How do teams track the impact of their actions and make adjustments as needed?

    a) Teams do not follow up to see if suggested actions are implemented or effective.

    b) Teams follow the progress of students they have supported; if they do not improve, new interventions/actions are proposed.

    c) Teams record the intervention/action suggested, check to see if it is implemented, and make adjustments as needed until improvement occurs.

    d) In addition to c), teams analyze implementation and impact data of the interventions/actions at regular intervals to gain deeper understanding of which actions work for which students, under what circumstances.

9. How do student success teams work to create supportive relationships?

   a) Teams do not work to create supportive relationships.

   b) Teams share information with administrators/teachers on the importance of strong student-teacher, student-student, teacher-family relationships and some general tips on how to improve them.

   c) Teams gather data on the strength of these relationships in the school, and where needed lead efforts to strengthen them.

   d) In addition to c), teams have an established process for gaining insights from teachers, students, parents, and community members on how relationships can be strengthened.

10. How do student success teams work to spread student-centered mindsets in the school?

   a) Teams do not focus on the importance of mindsets.

   b) Teams share information with school on the value of being proactive and preventative rather than reactive and remedial, asset rather than deficit based, empathic rather than blaming and other key student centered mindsets?

   c) Team collects data on the prevalence of student-centered mindsets, and helps organize efforts to create the conditions and experiences needed to make high priority shifts.

   d) In addition to c), team has an established process for engaging administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community in co-creation of efforts to spread student centered mindsets.