

Building and Sustaining Student Success: The GRAD Partnership Year Three Impact Results

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IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS: OVERVIEW

Over the past three years, the GRAD Partnership has helped schools implement student success systems in urban, rural, and suburban middle and high schools across the country. Three years of GRAD Partnership impact data shows that student success systems result in substantially more students on-track to high school graduation and postsecondary success. GRAD Partnership's impact results continue to demonstrate that middle and high schools that implement student success (on-track) systems meaningfully reduce course failure and chronic absenteeism rates in their first year of implementation. These reductions accelerate over the second and third years of implementation. **Course failure rates declined by twice as many percentage points between the first and second years of implementation, and again between the second and third years. School's chronic absenteeism rates declined by two thirds between the first and third years of implementation.**

During the past three years, well over one hundred middle and high school student success teams received technical assistance (TA) from either the GRAD Partnership or local implementation partners trained and supported by GRAD Partnership TA. These student success teams consistently achieved solid levels of implementation during the first year of the partnership, resulting in substantial impacts on critical student outcomes. Nearly three quarters of schools supported by GRAD Partnership technical assistance achieved solid or strong implementation during the initial implementation year. Student success teams with "solid" and "strong"

implementation in their first year achieved, on average, a 16 percent reduction in both course failure and chronic absenteeism rates.

Implementation data from student success teams in their second or third years of implementation shows that by the second year of implementation, more than 90% of teams achieve solid or strong implementation. With continued support, teams maintain these levels through a third year. Impact data shows that decline in the rates of course failure and chronic absenteeism rapidly accelerate in the second and third years of implementation. After two years of implementation, student success teams saw an average eight percentage point (23%) decline in course failures, and a six percentage point (18%) decline in chronic absenteeism. Impacts further accelerate in teams' third year of implementation, resulting in a 17 percentage point (44%) decline in course failures from the baseline year, and a 10 percentage point (20%) decline in chronic absenteeism.

Three years of GRAD Partnership impact data shows that student success systems result in substantially more students on-track to high school graduation and postsecondary success.

As schools across the nation continue to struggle with high rates of chronic absenteeism and reduced academic performance, it is encouraging that a wide range of schools—including larger urban as well as small rural schools—have been successful in rapidly implementing student success systems. This implementation results in positive impacts in the first year of operation, and impacts continue to accelerate with each additional year of implementation, reaching a magnitude rarely seen for chronic absenteeism and course failure in post-pandemic times.

These substantial improvements in critical student outcomes are not only important in themselves, they also indicate the strong potential for future gains in high school graduation and postsecondary degree and certification attainment rates. Course failures/GPA and absenteeism are the two strongest predictive indicators of high school graduation and postsecondary success. Recent research from the

Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University has shown that course failure is not only a driver of high dropout rates, but also that students who graduate high school having experienced course failure have dramatically reduced odds of obtaining college degrees, in particular when combined with a C average (Balfanz, Byrnes, and Clark 2026, forthcoming).

Table 1: GRAD Partnership Student Success System Impact on Course Failure and Chronic Absenteeism Over Three Years of Implementation: All Grades

Course Failures			
	After Year 1	After Year 2	After Year 3
N	130	51	15
Change from Baseline	33% to 30% -3 percentage points, 9% decline	35% to 27% -8 percentage points, 23% decline	39% to 22% -17 percentage points, 44% decline
Chronic Absenteeism			
	After Year 1	After Year 2	After Year 3
N	121	43	9
Change from Baseline	31% to 28% -3 percentage points, 10% decline	33% to 27% -6 percentage points, 18% decline	50% to 40% -10 percentage points, 20% decline

Table 2: GRAD Partnership Student Success System Impact on Course Failure and Chronic Absenteeism Over Three Years of Implementation: 9th Grade Only

Course Failures			
	After Year 1	After Year 2	After Year 3
N	40	18	3
Change from Baseline	32% to 26% -6 percentage points, 19% decline	38% to 28% -10 percentage points, 26% decline	51% to 28% -23 percentage points, 45% decline
Chronic Absenteeism			
	After Year 1	After Year 2	After Year 3
N	37	14	2
Change from Baseline	33% to 31% -2 percentage points, 6% decline	34% to 27% -8 percentage points, 24% decline	77% to 59% -18 percentage points, 23% decline

COURSE FAILURE RATES

On average, GRAD Partnership schools in the first year experienced a three percentage point decline in course failure rates (in the grades implementing student success systems). Schools in the second year of implementation saw an eight percentage point decline from baseline, and a 17 percentage point decline from baseline after three years. Thus, the amount of improvement in reducing course failures more than doubled between the first and second year of implementation and then more than doubled again from the second to the third year of implementation. The reduction in course failure rate is almost six times greater among schools in the third year of implementation than schools in the first year.

Looking at the results through the lens of average percent decline in course failure rates gives an additional perspective on the magnitude of the improvements over time. On average, GRAD Partnership schools after a year of implementation saw a nine percent decline in course failures in implementing grades. After two years of implementation, schools achieved a 23% reduction in course failure rates. Schools in the third year of implementation experienced a 44% reduction from baseline in course failure rates.

The strongest overall results occurred in the 9th grade. When student success systems were used in 9th grades, the average decline in course failure rates among schools after one year of implementation was six percentage points (19%), 10 percentage points (26%) after two years, and 23 percentage points (45%) after three years.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Average percentage point decline in chronically absent students is also twice as high for GRAD Partnership schools (in their implementing grades) after the second year of implementation compared to the first year, and more than three times greater after the third year compared to schools in their first year. On average, GRAD Partnership schools in the first year of implementation experienced a three percentage point decline; schools in the second year experienced a six percentage point decline, and schools in the third year experienced a 10 percentage point decline.

In percent change terms, that's on average a 10 percent decline in chronic absenteeism in the first year of implementation, while implementing grades in GRAD Partnership schools after two to three years of student success work experienced an 18 to 20 percent decline.

Declines in chronic absenteeism during the first year are strongly associated with strength of student success system implementation; student success teams with solid to strong implementation levels saw improved attendance.

Solid to strong implementation of student success systems in the first year of implementation serves as an effective strategy for achieving swift and substantial reductions in chronic absenteeism. Relatedly, data shows that incomplete implementation is not typically associated with any improvement in attendance.

First year implementation and chronic absenteeism data are available for 110 teams across 58 schools. Three quarters of teams (74%, or 81 in total) achieved solid or strong implementation of student success systems during their first year; 24%, or 29 teams, only achieved partial implementation. The teams achieving only partial implementation did not see their chronic absenteeism rate improve; in fact, on average, it worsened, increasing from baseline by four percentage points (+17%). This suggests that incomplete or limited implementation of student success systems was not sufficient to address the unknown host of factors contributing to this increase. By contrast, chronic absenteeism declined, on average, by five percentage points (-16%) where student success system implementation was solid or strong.

IMPLEMENTATION

Overall, implementation results continue to be strong as additional schools undertake GRAD Partnership implementation efforts, and as more schools sustain the work into second and third years. First year implementation data are available for 118 schools (for information on how implementation data are collected and analyzed, see [Appendix II](#)). **Nearly three quarters of schools receiving TA from the GRAD Partnership achieved solid or strong implementation of student success systems in the first year. By the second year, this grew to 94%—a level sustained through the third year.**

Table 3: Overall Implementation Levels

Implementation Year	# Schools	Partial	Solid	Strong	Solid or Strong
1 st Year	118	30%	58%	13%	70%*
2 nd Year	66	6%	67%	27%	94%
3 rd Year	37	8%	73%	19%	92%

*Solid and strong totals discrepancy due to rounding

Most of the schools (58%) achieved solid overall implementation after their first year. Less than one third (30%) achieved partial implementation, while more than one in ten (13%) schools achieved strong implementation. This shows that, with implementation support, middle and high schools are able to operationalize many of the key components of student success systems during the first year of partnership. The ability to achieve solid implementation in the first year, in turn, is likely why substantial improvements in course failure and chronic absenteeism rates also occurred in implementing grades.

Change in Implementation Levels Across 10 Components of Student Success Systems

Year One to Year Two

Implementation data (as seen in Table 4 below) shows that most schools deepened implementation of one or more of the components of student success systems during their second year of working with the GRAD Partnership—all but one component showed increases in the share of schools reaching a strong or solid implementation level from the first to the second year of implementation. Increases range from four to 28 percentage points. This demonstrates that while schools can implement enough components in the first year of implementation to achieve an overall level of “solid” implementation, achieving solid or strong implementation for all 10 components of a high-quality student success system is a multi-year process.

Areas with the biggest improvements from year one to year two included accessibility of holistic, actionable data by student success teams, and combined use of predictive data like attendance and course grades with human insights on

factors behind the data. Student success teams having easy access to actionable holistic data, including measures of well-being and school connectedness, rose from 43% of schools in year one to 70% in year two (+28 percentage points). Schools achieving a “solid” or “strong” score on combining use of predictive and human insight data rose from 48% in year one of implementation to 67% in year two (+19 percentage points). Strategic decision making in response to data (as opposed to seeking individualized responses for each student) rose from 85% of schools doing so in the first year to 94% in the second year (+9 percentage points). This is particularly notable given that developing and implementing strategic actions are one of most critical shifts schools need to make in order to build and sustain a high-quality student success system.

The two components with the lowest year one implementation levels are those that often require multiple years of work, particularly as they involve changes across the whole school or grade level. That said, schools demonstrated substantial improvements in these areas between their first and second years of implementation. Creating strong supportive relationships across the school and with families saw more than one third (37%) of schools achieving solid or strong implementation in year one, increasing to almost half (48%) in year two. Only about one in ten (11%) schools achieved solid or strong implementation for developing student-centered mindsets across the school in year one, but this more than doubled to 28% in the second year (+17 percentage points).

Table 4: Implementation Improvement from Year One to Year Two: Number and Percent of GRAD Partnership Schools with Solid or Strong Implementation, by Domain and Component

Implementation Component	Solid or Strong		
	Year 1	Year 2	Change*
Data Access and Use			
Student success team uses predictive data and human insights	48%	67%	+19
Student success data is sufficiently/frequently updated	94%	98%	+4
Student success data is regularly analyzed sufficiently/frequently	69%	83%	+15
Actionable holistic data is easily accessible to members of the student success team(s)	43%	70%	+28
Improvement Actions			
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	65%	72%	+7
Steps are taken to understand what drives student actions/root cause	87%	93%	+6
Interventions/actions taken by student success team are strategic	85%	94%	+9
Student success teams track the impact of their actions and make adjustments as needed	93%	89%	-4
Relationships/Mindset			
Student success teams work to create supportive relationships across the school and with families	37%	48%	+11
Student success teams work to spread student-centered mindsets in the school	11%	28%	+17

*Totals may not sum due to rounding

Year Two to Year Three

This is the first year GRAD Partnership has implementation data for a third consecutive year of implementation. These data come from the first cohort of schools to work with the GRAD Partnership to implement student success systems, who began work in 2022–2023. Year three implementation data is available for 37 schools.¹ This launch cohort is considerably smaller than subsequent cohorts starting in 2023–24 and 2024–25. As a result, year-to-year changes in implementation levels reported can be more strongly influenced by large shifts in relatively few schools. Thus, the direction of the results is likely more informative than their magnitude suggests.

The third year of implementation is a progression, during which core practices can deepen and move towards institutionalization. It is also when changes in school leadership or changes in student success team personnel can create a regression in the implementation of one of more key components of student success systems. Data suggest both these forces may be at work across the components of student success systems as student success teams move from the second to third year of implementation.

Student success teams in their third year of implementation obtained higher levels of implementation in five key components of students success systems (see Table 5 below). A strong majority (86%) of teams achieved solid or strong implementation of using both predictive data and human

¹ 2 of the 37 schools with year three data do not have year two data, and so are not included in Table 5.

insights to identify students in need of support—a 23 percentage point increase from year two. A strong majority (83%) of teams also had solid or strong implementation of effective team structures (frequent and regular collaborative work time, ability to make student support decisions etc.). This is an increase of 17 percentage points from year two.

One of the most notable improvements was for a component which takes time to implement: the student success team collaborating with adults across the school to increase supportive relationships with students and families. A little more than a third (37%) of teams typically achieve solid or strong levels of implementing this component in one year, and about half (48%) of teams achieve it by year two (see

Table 4). By year three, more than three quarters (77%) of student success teams reported having solid or strong implementation of work to foster supportive relationships. Spreading student-centered mindsets throughout the school is perhaps the most difficult component to achieve, as it requires shifts in the behavior of multiple adults in the school. By year three, nearly half (49%) of the student success teams reported achieving solid or strong implementation in building a student-centered mindset among school staff. This is a 14 percentage point increase from year two (34%) and a large improvement from a typical year one result of 11% (see Table 4).

Table 5: Implementation Improvement from Year Two to Year Three - Number and Percent of GRAD Partnership Schools with Solid or Strong Implementation, by Domain and Component

Implementation Component	Solid or Strong		
	Year 2	Year 3	Change*
Data Access and Use			
Student success team uses predictive data and human insights	63%	86%	+23
Student success data is sufficiently/frequently updated	100%	83%	-17
Student success data is regularly analyzed sufficiently/frequently	77%	83%	+6
Actionable holistic data is easily accessible to members of the student success team(s)	71%	71%	0
Improvement Actions			
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	66%	83%	+17
Steps are taken to understand what drives student actions/root cause	91%	83%	-9
Interventions/actions taken by student success team are strategic	97%	74%	-23
Student success teams track the impact of their actions and make adjustments as needed	100%	63%	-37
Relationships/Mindset			
Student success teams work to create supportive relationships across the school and with families	51%	77%	+26
Student success teams work to spread student-centered mindsets in the school	34%	49%	+14

*Totals may not sum due to rounding

Teams reported substantial declines in implementation strength for three components between year two and year three of implementation: frequency and sufficiency of student success data updates (-17 percentage points); being strategic in choosing actions/interventions (-23 percentage points); and tracking impact of actions and making adjustments as needed (-37 percentage points). In all three cases, these are components in which student success teams in the first cohort of GP schools achieved near-universal solid or strong implementation in year two and then experienced double digit declines in year three. Such a pattern may indicate staffing changes or shifts in responsibilities; for example, the person responsible for updating the data or documenting the actions may leave the team, and their responsibilities may not be taken up by another team member.

CONCLUSION

The GRAD Partnership's collective vision remains the same: that student success systems are the norm in schools and districts across the nation. During the last year, the GRAD Partnership increased its footprint across states. This bodes well for our vision, as students receive the evidence-based supports they need to graduate high school and achieve postsecondary success.

Three years of implementation results support GRAD Partnership's approach to scaling student success systems. School teams receive the most intensive support during the first two years of implementation, and this is associated with solid or strong implementation of most student success system components across most schools. From the third year forward, implementation support becomes more tailored to the evolving needs of the school. The dip in implementation strength for three components across a subset of schools

from year two to year three, perhaps as the result of staffing shifts, demonstrates the need for this continued tailored support. It also underscores the importance of GRAD Partnership's practice of continuing to collect annual implementation and impact data from participating schools.

More broadly, year three impact and implementation results indicate that three things are true. Across three cohorts of year one schools, enough key components of student success systems were implemented in the first year to achieve noticeable improvements in student outcomes. By year two, a strong majority of schools are achieving solid or strong implementation across most of the key student success system components, and impacts increase. By year three, the components that typically take the longest time to implement (because they involve changing school practices and adult mindsets more broadly) are reaching solid or strong implementation in the majority of schools, and impacts continue to increase. Year three implementation data also shows that constant vigilance and the ability to access customized supports from the GRAD Partnership network or local student success ecosystems is needed to maintain and continue increasing student success system implementation levels and impacts—especially as implementation slips can occur when staff, leadership, or school priorities shift.

Once implemented, student success systems support improvements in multiple student outcomes, helping schools address new and ongoing challenges. When nested in a regional ecosystem, student success systems support community development, including increased postsecondary attainment and workforce development. The GRAD Partnership continues to be grateful to its many partners who collaborate on building and sustaining these ecosystems.