Delivering Success:
The GRAD Partnership Year Two Impact Results

Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University

IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS: OVERVIEW

The GRAD Partnership's year two impact results demonstrate that middle and high schools that implement student success (on-track) systems meaningfully reduce course failure and chronic absenteeism rates. As a result, implementation of these systems has seen more students on-track to high school graduation and post-secondary success.

Schools working with GRAD Partnership technical assistance (TA) partners or Intermediaries supported by TA partners, in the main, achieve solid levels of implementation during the first year of the partnership, resulting in substantial impacts on critical student outcomes. **During the first year of working with the GRAD Partnership to implement student success systems, schools, on average, saw an 18% decline in students failing one or more courses and a 12% decline in chronically absent students.** The year two results also show that 82% of schools receiving implementation support from the GRAD Partnership achieve solid or strong overall implementation of student success systems and that implementation is deepened in the second year of the partnership. Deepened implementation is accompanied by continued improvements in student outcomes. After two years of implementation, schools, on average, experienced a 32% decline in the percent of students failing one or more courses, and a 28% decline in chronically absent students (compared to baseline measures). These substantial improvements in critical student outcomes are not only important in themselves, they also indicate the strong potential for future gains in graduation rates, as course failures/GPA and absenteeism are the two strongest predictive indicators of high school graduation and post-secondary success.

After two years of implementation, schools, on average, experienced a 32% decline in the percent of students failing one or more courses, and a 28% decline in chronically absent students.

BACKGROUND

The GRAD Partnership is a collective effort of 12 leading organizations who partner with middle schools, high schools, and school districts to support and spread the implementation of high-quality student success (on-track) systems. Now in its third year, the GRAD Partnership has reached more than 200 districts in more than 25 states and is currently building the capacity of 15 local Intermediaries across the nation.

Student success systems combine four actions that enable schools to substantially improve student outcomes. First, schoolwide efforts are undertaken to increase school connectedness, a powerful prevention strategy that provides students with supportive adult and peer relationships and a welcoming school environment. A student success team composed of school leaders, teachers, counselors and other student support staff is established to monitor the progress of all students throughout the school year using predictive indicators to identify students who need additional support or improved learning experiences as soon as the need arises. The student success team looks for patterns, trends and associations in the data, and draws on insights from teachers, students and families to identify actionable root causes and develop strategic and evidence-based responses designed to help the greatest number of students possible. The assigned interventions are then monitored for impact and adjusted as needed until progress is made. To sustain the work, the school collectively moves toward a shared set of student-centered mindsets.

Schools partner with the GRAD Partnership to receive implementation support through technical assistance provided directly by a GRAD Partnership organization, or a local Intermediary partner who is trained by a GRAD Partnership TA provider. Schools can also participate in GRAD

Partnership learning communities and use online tools and resources provided free of charge by the GRAD Partnership.

Schools receiving technical assistance from the GRAD Partnership agree to provide annual de-identified, grade-level outcomes data on course failure and chronic absenteeism for all grades implementing student success systems. Some schools choose to begin implementation in critical transition grades, typically sixth and ninth grade; others implement school-wide from the start.

Schools also report on implementation progress using a rubric covering 10 key components of student success systems across the domains of data access and use, interventions and actions, and relationships and mindsets. For more information about implementation data collection and analysis, see Appendix II.

The GRAD Partnership is in its third year of operation. This report examines the impact of student success systems on student outcomes during the first year of implementation for middle or high schools that began implementation in either school year 2022-23 or 2023-2024. For the first year of implementation, course failure data is available from 84 grades in 53 schools and chronic absenteeism data is available from 71 grades in 47 schools.

The report also looks at the impacts achieved after two years of implementing student success systems in schools that started implementation in the 2022-23 school year. It examines two years of course failure data for 45 grades in 34 schools and chronic absenteeism data for 33 grades in 29 schools. For more information about on-track data collection and analysis, see Appendix I.

IMPACT FINDINGS: COURSE FAILURE

GRAD Partnership middle and high schools implementing student success systems in one or more of their grades see, on average, strong impacts on the percent of students failing one or more courses during the first year of implementation. Impacts continue to grow during the second year of implementation, reaching, on average, a 32% decline in students failing one or more courses after two years of implementation. Reducing the number of students experiencing course failure, on average, by a third in two years indicates the ability of student success (on-track) systems to improve student outcomes in a meaningful and substantial way and in a relatively rapid manner.

First Year of Implementing Student Success Systems

During the first year of implementing student success systems, grades in middle and high schools saw substantial declines in the percent of students failing one or more courses. **Across 84 implementing grades in 53 schools, the average percent of students failing one or more classes declined from 33% to 27%, a 6 percentage point change (18% decline).** When the median, which controls more for the impact of outliers, rather than mean, is used to examine change across the implementing grades, the gains are somewhat larger. From baseline to end of year one, the median percent of students failing one or more classes declines from 33% to 25%, an 8 percentage point and 24% decline.

Reducing the number of students experiencing course failure, on average, by a third in two years indicates the ability of student success (on-track) systems to improve student outcomes in a meaningful and substantial way, in a relatively rapid manner.

The largest declines in course failure were observed in the ninth grade. This is significant given the strong predictive relationship between ninth grade performance and readiness rates for high school and post-secondary education. After the first year of implementation, across 32 ninth grades reported, the average course failure rate declined from 30% to 23%, a 7 percentage point and 23% decline. The median ninth grade course failures shifted from 32% to 21%, an 11 percentage point and 34% decline. This says that after one year of implementing student success systems, across all 32 implementing ninth grades, the midpoint of students failing one or more courses declined from about one in three to one in five students.

After Two Years of Implementing Student Success Systems

Implementing middle and high school grades extended their year one gains during their second year. **On average, course failure rates declined from 31% at baseline to 20% after two years of implementation. This is an 11 percentage point and 32% decline.** The two-year improvement, moreover, was similar across high school, middle school and ninth grades. When medians are examined, even larger gains are observed. Across all grades that implemented student success systems for two years, the median course failure rate declined from 32% to 17%, a 15 percentage point and 47% decline. Among ninth grades, the median course failure rate declined from 33% to 20%, a 13 percentage point and 39% decline.

Table 1: Percent of Student Failing One or More Course - Average (Mean) Outcome

	First Year of Implementation Change from Baseline*				After Two Years of Implementation Change from Baseline**			
All Grades	N = 84	33 to 27%	(-6)	18% decline	N = 45	31 to 20%	(-11)	32% decline
HS Grades	N = 52	33 to 26%	(-7)	21% decline	N = 31	33 to 22%	(-11)	33% decline
MS Grades	N = 24	34 to 31%	(-3)	9% decline	N = 7	22 to 14%	(-8)	36% decline
Multi-Grade	N = 8	31 to 24%	(-7)	23% decline	N = 7	30 to 20%	(-10)	33% decline
9th Grade	N = 32	30 to 23%	(-7)	23% decline	N = 20	32 to 22%	(-10)	31% decline

Table 2: Percent of Students Failing One or More Course - Change in Median (level where 50% of schools do better and 50% do worse)

	First Year of Implementation Change from Baseline*				After Two Years of Implementation Change from Baseline**			
All Grades	N = 84	33 to 25%	(-8)	24% decline	N = 45	32 to 17%	(-15)	47% decline
9th Grade	N = 32	32 to 21%	(-11)	34% decline	N = 20	33 to 20%	(-13)	39% decline

*Includes schools/grade who started implementation in 2022-23 and 2023-24
** Includes schools/grade who started implementation in 2022-23 and continued in 2023-24

IMPACT FINDINGS: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The rapid rise of chronic absenteeism has been one of the nation's schools most vexing post-pandemic challenges. **Two years of impact data indicate that GRAD Partnership middle and high schools have found student success systems to be a reliable and effective means of meaningfully reducing chronic absenteeism.** In the main, they have been able to achieve improvements during the first year of implementation and then see progress continue through the second year of implementation. **Schools saw, on average, a two-year decline in chronic absenteeism of 8 percentage points (a 28% decline), for grades in which they are implementing student success systems with GRAD Partnership support.**

First Year of Implementing Student Success Systems

During the first year of implementation, schools using student success systems saw meaningful declines in chronic absenteeism. In implementing middle and high school grades, the chronic absenteeism rate declined, on average, from 34% to 30%, a 4 percentage point and 12% decline. In implementing ninth grades, chronic absenteeism rates declined from 37% to 32%, a 5 percentage point and 14% decline.

After Two Years of Implementing Student Success Systems

After two years of implementation, implementing grades, on average, saw chronic absenteeism rates decline from 29% to 21%, an 8 percentage point and 28% decline.

Ninth grade classrooms experience a different pattern. On average, the improvements after one year of implementation in ninth grade classrooms are the same as those experienced after two years of implementation - 5 percentage points, or a 14% decline. This is a meaningful improvement. It does suggest, though, that improving upon it may require either more focused efforts or additional people power to help schools deal with the sheer volume of student need that a 30% or higher chronic absenteeism rate in the ninth grade generates.

Table 3: Percent of Students Chronically Absent (missing 10% or more of school days) - Average Outcomes

	First Year of Implementation Change from Baseline*				After Two Years of Implementation Change from Baseline**			
All Grades	N = 71	34 to 30%	(-4)	12% decline	N = 33	29 to 21%	(-8)	28% decline
HS Grades	N = 44	37 to 31%	(-6)	16% decline	N = 23	32 to 25%	(-7)	22% decline
MS Grades	N = 23	32 to 29%	(-3)	9% decline	N = 7	22 to 15%	(-7)	32% decline
9th Grade	N = 27	37 to 32%	(-5)	14% decline	N = 14	31 to 26%	(-5)	16% decline

Table 4: Percent of Students Chronically Absent - Change in Median (level where 50% of schools do better and 50% do worse)

	First Year of Implementation Change from Baseline*				After Two Years of Implementation Change from Baseline**			
All Grades	N = 71	32 to 29%	(-3)	9% decline	N = 33	22 to 15%	(-7)	32% decline
9th Grade	N = 27	28 to 28%	(0)	No change	N = 14	25 to 15%	(-10)	40% decline

IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

A total of 65 middle and high schools reported first year implementation levels (for information on how implementation data are collected and analyzed, see Appendix II). **The strong majority (82%) of these 65 schools receiving technical assistance from the GRAD Partnership were able to achieve solid or strong overall implementation of student success (on-track) systems during their first year of implementation. Most of the schools (63%) achieved solid overall implementation.** Another one in five (18%) achieved strong implementation, and the remaining 18% ended their first implementation year with only partial 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 at least 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.

Table 5: Implementation Level Achieved During First Year* of Working with the GRAD Partnership

Number of Schools	Partial	Solid	Strong	Solid or Strong
65	12 (18%)	41 (63%)	12 (18%)	53 (82%)

*Includes schools/grade who started implementation in 2022-23 and 2023-24

More detailed implementation data shows that most schools deepened implementation of one or more of the key components of student success systems during their second year of working with the GRAD Partnership. All the components 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 *five to 27 percentage points.* This demonstrates that while schools can implement enough key 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 student success teams combining predictive data like attendance and course grades, with human insights on factors behind the data. Schools achieving solid or strong on this component rose from 48% in year one of implementation to 70% in year two (+22 percentage points). Student success teams having easy access to actionable holistic data, including measures of well-being and school connectedness rose from 48% of schools in year one to 75% in year two (+27). Being strategic in choosing which actions to take in response to the data in order to help the largest number of students possible, rather than seeking

individualized responses for each student, rose from 84% of the schools doing so in the first year to nearly all (98%) in the second year (+14). This is particularly notable given that developing and implementing strategic actions are one of most critical shifts that schools need to make in order to develop and sustain a high-quality student success system.

The two components with the lowest rates of implementation in year one are the two for which multiple years of work are often required, as they involve changes across the whole school or at least implementing grades. Both also saw substantial improvements from year one to year two of school implementing student success systems. Creating strong supportive relationships across the school and with families saw a little more than a third of schools achieving solid or strong implementation in year one, and this increased to nearly half of schools in year two. Only one in seven schools achieved solid or strong implementation for developing student-centered mindsets across the school in year one but this more than doubled to 30% in the second year (+16).

Table 6: 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 teams uses predictive data and human insights	48%	70%	+22
Student success data is sufficiently/frequently updated	95%	100%	+5
Student success data is regularly analyzed sufficiently/frequently	68%	82%	+14
Actionable holistic data is easily accessible to members of the student success team(s)	48%	75%	+27
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	61%	70%	+9
Steps are taken to understand what drives student actions/root cause	86%	93%	+7
Interventions/actions taken by student success team are strategic	84%	98%	+14
Student success teams track the impact of their actions and make adjustments as needed	91%	100%	+9
Relationships/Mindset			
Student success teams work to create supportive relationships across the school and with families	36%	48%	+12
Student success teams work to spread student-centered mindsets in the school	14%	30%	+16

Implementation data is available for two years of implementation for 44 GRAD Partnership schools - these schools began implementation in 2022-23 and continued it in 2023-24. This table compares implementation levels from the last implementation record of year one to the last implementation record of year two. See Appendix II for more information about measuring implementation levels.

CONCLUSION

This is the GRAD Partnership's second impact report. Consistent with its first impact report, it demonstrates that schools working with the GRAD Partnership to implement student success systems are able to meaningfully reduce their students' course failures and rates of chronic absenteeism. These results indicate the strong potential for future gains in graduation rates, as course failures and absenteeism are the two strongest predictive indicators of high school graduation. They are also strong indicators for post-secondary success.

Schools are achieving these results in the first year of implementation by establishing student success teams who drive the work. Furthermore, schools build on first year progress in the second year by continuing to use holistic data and teacher, student, and family insights to identify and implement strategic actions that address student needs. Critically, the teams also build relationships and mindsets that create a school culture committed to student success.

The GRAD Partnership's collective vision is that student success systems become the norm in schools and districts across the country. The GRAD Partnership continues to expand its capacity by increasing the number of technical assistance and Intermediary partners supporting districts and

schools, and creating a national network of school district student support offices. This bodes well for the future as the Partnership reaches more schools and delivers the evidence-based supports and learning experiences that students need to succeed in school and beyond.

Students, educators, families and communities are facing a range of issues that impact the long-term success of their students. These issues are often complex, multi-faceted and specific to local contexts. For example, skills required for success in the workforce are constantly evolving, many students face mental health challenges that affect their ability to focus, engage and succeed academically, and many are struggling with motivation, particularly in environments where they feel disengaged or disconnected.

Student success systems are critical for addressing issues facing schools and students. Encouragingly, the GRAD Partnership impact results show that, with the proper support, schools can implement student success systems that ensure students not only stay on-track through high school completion, but thrive throughout, and are propelled into post-secondary and adult success.