IMPACT REPORT:
COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CHALLENGE 2023-2024

partnershipstudentsuccess.org

WITH SUPPORT FROM
THE LEON LOWENSTEIN FOUNDATION
& THE NEW YORK LIFE FOUNDATION

PARTNERSHIP FOR
Student Success

The Partnership for Student Success (PSS), based at the Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center, is the organizer of a coalition of nonprofits, higher education institutions, and school districts working to enable all students to get the evidence-based supports they need to succeed.[1]

"Your [PSS] team brought an idea to life."

— Justin Stark, NYC District 26, 2024 Awardee

The work of PSS began in 2022 through a public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of Education, AmeriCorps, and the Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center–The National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS). Over 2.5 years, NPSS successfully supported the field to bring an estimated 323,000 additional adults into evidence-based roles supporting P-12 students as tutors, mentors, college and career advisors, and roles providing or coordinating wraparound student supports.

One of the PSS' signature programs, the Community Collaboration Challenge (CCC) is a competitive funding opportunity that awards $5,000–$10,000 to communities seeking to launch, pilot, or expand evidence-based P-12 student supports, with a particular focus on tutoring, mentoring, student success coaching, postsecondary transition coaching, and wraparound/integrated supports. Funding local connector events and small pilot programs allows the CCC to catalyze action and builds momentum for sustainable, locally driven student support solutions that can be replicated across a range of educational settings. By breaking down silos between the various stakeholders that support youth and building upon existing community assets, communities are creating enabling conditions for local collaboration between school districts, nonprofits, higher education institutions, and state/local government to work together to provide all students with the evidence-based, people-powered supports they need to succeed.

[1] Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2024). *Meeting a call to action: Increasing evidence-based, people-powered student supports: Findings from a nationally representative survey of school principals.* Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education. https://www.partnershipstudentsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2023-24-NPSS-RAND-Report.pdf

Since its inception in 2023, the CCC has supported 66 awardees—including nonprofit organizations, school districts, and higher education institutions—across 35 states and Washington, DC. A core feature of the challenge is its emphasis on cross-sector collaboration, bringing together educators, local leaders, community organizations, and other stakeholders to co-create solutions that align with local priorities. By focusing on short-term, flexible funding, the program lowers the barriers to experimentation and empowers communities to test and refine student-centered strategies.

"By providing more opportunities for these constituents to learn more about how to effectively support children, either formally or informally, the better we will be able to mobilize our community to increase student success."

— Attendee, Boston Partners in Education, 2023 Awardee

The Awardee Experience:

To ensure that awardees are supported to effectively launch pilot programs and/or host local connector events in their communities, the Partnership for Student Success establishes a cohort experience for each awardee group. Each cohort receives both individualized and group-based support, including strategy consultations, partnership development guidance, peer networking, and shared learning opportunities, as well as access to all of PSS' free and publicly available resources and technical assistance. Each awardee is paired with a dedicated PSS liaison for one-on-one support and participates in three cohort-wide meetings per cycle to exchange promising practices, celebrate progress, and foster collaboration and learning between organizations with similar goals from across the country.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

PARTNERSHIP FOR *Student Success*

- **Location:** Queens, New York
- **Organization:** New York City Department of Education District 26
- **Support Areas:** Mentors

Recognizing persistent opportunity gaps among subgroups of students, NYC Department of Education's District 26 in Queens launched a district-wide effort to expand and personalize student support through mentoring. With support from the 2024 Community Collaboration Challenge, the district launched a successful summer mentoring pilot, partnering with college students from the City University of New York (CUNY) to support students enrolled in summer school programs.

The pilot demonstrated the potential of near-peer mentoring and directly informed an expansion for the 2024–25 school year, which included 11 college mentors across six schools. The project hopes to expand to include three more schools eager to join in 2025–26. Mentoring activities vary by school, with mentors supporting students during morning arrivals, in classrooms, at lunch, during clubs, and in afterschool programming. The flexible model allows each school to tailor mentor roles based on student needs and mentor availability, while keeping relationship-building at the core.

As the district continues to scale the program, new strategies are on the horizon. In 2025, District 26's attendance coordinator hopes to pilot a targeted support initiative, pairing college mentors with students who are chronically absent. This next phase aims to strengthen student connection and belonging as a pathway to improved attendance and academic outcomes.

"Initially, we applied for free technical support. We just needed a thought partner around how we could recruit and integrate mentors into our existing school system. The [Community Collaboration Challenge] grant aligned with what we wanted to do, which was to bring in mentors–particularly mentors who are college students in Northeast Queens–and figure out ways to train them and make them available for our schools during school hours.

Then, we wanted to find schools that were willing to accept them and had a plan of action for their use to support students. It was a natural flow from technical assistance and helping us formulate a plan, to applying for the grant so that we could have some funding and a community of leaders–both within New York and really the entire country–to hear ideas, share ideas, and build a program which we were very proud to do last spring."

— Justin Stark, NYC District 26, 2024 Awardee

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CHALLENGE
IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

PARTNERSHIP FOR *Student Success*

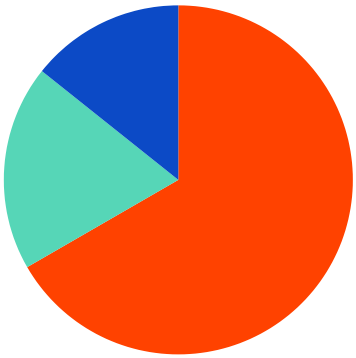
2023 IMPACT:

21 AWARDEES

115 APPLICANTS FROM

35 STATES

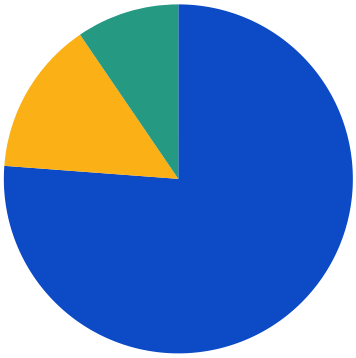
$105K IN AWARDS



14 Urban

4 Rural

3 Suburban or Mixed



16 Nonprofits

3 Higher Ed. Instituions

2 Schools or Districts

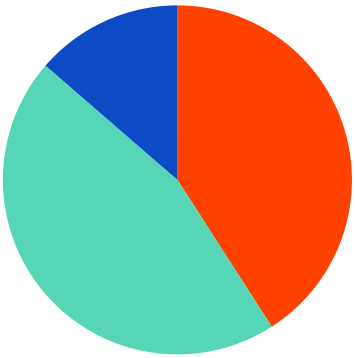
2024 IMPACT:

22 AWARDEES

93 APPLICANTS FROM

38 STATES

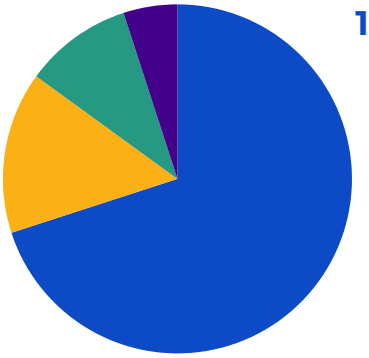
$175K IN AWARDS



9 Urban

10 Rural

3 Suburban or Mixed



14 Nonprofits

4 Higher Ed. Instituions

3 Schools or Districts

1 Local Government

Impact to Date:

Each year, PSS collects output and outcome data from all CCC awardees through final reporting structures to understand the short term effectiveness of the awards in meeting the CCC's goals of expanding evidence-based and people-powered student supports through locally driven collaboration and strategies. To better understand the medium to long term impact of these awards, PSS conducted interviews with 16 of the 2023 and 2024 CCC awardees using a structured interview protocol in the spring and summer of 2025. These interviews were conducted on Zoom and via survey and asked questions about progress towards stated future goals, how the work has (or hasn't) continued, and perceived impact.

Feedback from past awardees indicates that many communities involved in the CCC have successfully continued their initiatives beyond the conclusion of the CCC funding period. Awardees report that the initial CCC investment often enables organizations to pilot and validate their ideas—providing the proof points needed to secure additional, more sustainable funding, generate interest and buy-in, and/or build lasting partnerships.

2023 and 2024 awardees report a range of successes in the 1-2 years following the conclusion of their CCC awards, including:

- 38 percent have experienced increased participation from schools and students in student support programs,
- 36 percent indicted deeper engagement with families and/or communities,
- 65 percent have experienced broader program reach via new partnerships among community based organizations, and
- 13 percent have been able to secure additional funding.

"It's not common in our community for all educational levels, from PreK to high school, to convene and discuss current trends. Everyone learned they were observing similar patterns in both elementary and high school students, such as the increase in screen time since COVID and its mixed effects, and the number of students who could benefit from one-on-one interactions."

— Cherokee County Health Services Council, 2024 Awardee

"Not only has the program expanded the number of students it serves, Trekkers' community partnership also expanded. There are five new community partner programs that provide learning and volunteering opportunities to the two school-day cohorts."

— Trekkers, 2024 Awardee

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

- **Organization:** Hopeloft
- **Location:** Bridgeton, New Jersey
- **Support Area:** Wraparound/Integrated Student Supports, Postsecondary Training

With support from the 2023 Community Collaboration Challenge, Hopeloft hosted a two-day event that served as a "Community as a Campus" convening. The purpose of the convening was to kick-off a formal collaborative that includes multiple partners including the City of Bridgeton, Rowan College of South Jersey, area schools, the local Prosecutor's Office, AmeriCorps, United Advocacy Group, Give Back, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and several other partners to map out a plan for a city-wide campaign to enroll youth into area programs, opportunities, and services.

The event culminated in a commitment to enter into formal agreements between the partners, adopting a collective impact framework. Partners mapped out the basis of a multi-partner agreement that outlines each partner's role in the effort that will lead to a county-wide youth enrollment, tracking, and outcome measurement effort.

Partner's early investment has strengthened collaboration among organizations, enabling them to support one another more intentionally and fill programming gaps caused by funding cuts. This coordination has led to more effective mapping of community needs and services, resulting in a seamless experience for young people who now receive wraparound support, postsecondary training, and other services without needing to navigate multiple systems.

Among awardees interviewed, all projects launched or planned as part of the CCC remain active in some form. For example, the Next Education Workforce Initiative at Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College brought together leaders from across Yuma from a range of fields, which included educators, district leaders, tribal leaders, and community educators from businesses, community organizations, and local Yuma industries for the first Community Collaboration Summit, utilizing funds from their 2023 award. Having a space to bring together a range of stakeholders to collaborate and plan was invaluable to this community. Many original participants are still meeting regularly, and the group has grown, continuing to collaborate with local community leaders to expand services to students in the Yuma area. MENTOR Vermont utilized CCC funds from 2023 to bring a youth mental health component to their annual mentoring symposium. There was so much interest that the pilot was rebranded and fully launched with continued monthly meetings and support and training offered to mentors and program leaders.

Another awardee, Step Up Tutoring, used 2024 CCC funds to partner with the Greater Los Angeles Education Foundation to host a webinar sharing best practices for engaging college students through Federal Work-Study funding. Building on this momentum, the organization expanded its partnerships across California and began piloting its program in New York and Arizona. In the 2024–25 school year, Step Up Tutoring matched more than 3,200 students with tutors—an increase from over 1,700 the previous year—ensuring more students have access to consistent, one-on-one, high-impact tutoring. Additionally, Step Up Tutoring is on track to have Federal Work-Study partnerships with at least 32 universities across 15 states in the 2025-26 school year, making them the largest Work-Study powered tutoring corps in the country.

"The importance of intentional partnerships between organizations was highlighted; exemplar programs described multi-faceted partnerships as critical to address challenges and tackle all aspects of program delivery including design, implementation, tutor recruitment, training, curriculum, and data collection and assessment."

— Attendee, George Washington University's Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service, 2023 Awardee

Several interviewed organizations have since secured new funding to sustain their work based on the concepts and results developed through their CCC-supported pilots. 2024 Awardee, Virginia Learns, was recently awarded funding to support the Virginia Learns Innovation Network (VaILN). This opportunity will create the space to discuss high school design and thoughtful incorporation of high impact tutoring as a design element. The Foundation for Art & Health, another 2024 awardee, has sourced other funding that has increased their capacity and bandwidth to do more collaborative work. Their focus continues to be collaborative work through grant funded projects to provide mental wellness directly to youth.

> **"Through this opportunity, we have been able to work across the institution with new teams/departments."**
>
> **— West Virginia University Foundation, 2024 Awardee**

Despite these positive outcomes, challenges remain. Many organizations continue to face funding uncertainty with 63 percent of respondents citing funding as a major challenge. 25 percent highlighted challenges with cuts to Federal programs and 13 percent struggle with building and sustaining school partnerships. Staff reductions and turnover have also impacted the capacity of 19 percent of respondents, slowing progress and weakening collaboration in some cases.

These findings underscore both the promise and the ongoing value of flexible, early-stage funding to support local innovation and scale student-centered solutions. New challenges bring new uses for community collaboration microgrants. Recent federal funding cuts have scrambled existing non-profit, university, school district, and community organization ecosystems and created the need to figure out both new funding streams and the means to provide the people power needed for evidence-based student supports. Breaking down silos between the various stakeholders that support youth and building upon existing community assets, enabling the community to work together on this, is critical. Microgrants, such as those awarded through the Community Collaboration Challenge, can give communities the funds to create the time and space to bring community partners together to create community wide solutions to maintain and ultimately expand effective local efforts.

> **"We must strengthen the connection between schools/ teachers and students' families at home. The more we understand and address what students are facing when they leave campus, the better we can address the full scope of their needs."**
>
> **— Attendee, The Carrie Meek Foundation, 2023 Awardee**

Looking Ahead:

The Community Collaboration Challenge microgrant program's outcomes to date have shown how these relatively small grants, with planning support, can both foster local collaboration and catalyze design, expansion, or improvement of evidence-based and people-powered P-12 student supports in a range of communities across the United States. However, we are hearing from organizations that the sustainability of the work they begin through the CCC is challenged now given increased uncertainty around funding sources that many organizations have traditionally relied on, such as AmeriCorps, 21st Century Community Learning Challenges, and Full Service Community Schools grants.

Given this feedback and the demand signaled by the substantial increase in applications in 2025 with over 250 applications received, PSS is looking to expand the CCC for the 2026 award period and support organizations in working through that sustainability, creating a space and place for organizations to step back and analyze their current landscape.

We are exploring themes such as program expansion and creating the space and place to strategically plan for expansion, increasing volunteer engagement, and we are looking into partnerships with organizations that can provide planning support in addition to our financial support.

"We must strengthen the connection between schools/teachers and students' families at home. The more we understand and address what students are facing when they leave campus, the better we can address the full scope of their needs."

— Attendee, The Carrie Meek Foundation, 2023 Awardee

"Given the success of the event in meeting our key objectives, there is a strong desire to hold more convenings of this nature, either virtually or in-person, to continue the conversations that were started during the symposium."

— Attendee, Teach For America Appalachia, 2023 Awardee

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

- **Location:** Bernalillo County, New Mexico
- **Organization:** ABC Community School Partnership
- **Support Area:** Mentors, Wraparound/Integrated Student Supports

With support from the 2024 Community Collaboration Challenge, the ABC Community School Partnership in Bernalillo County deepened its efforts to strengthen community engagement through the All Hands In initiative—part of the county's Full-Service Community School strategy serving three Albuquerque Public Schools campuses, from pre-K through graduation. The CCC award kicked off this work by supporting the All Hands In Community School Council Convening on June 11, 2024. This event brought together students, families, school staff, and community members to discuss local challenges and opportunities, ultimately launching a yearlong effort to co-create a "Profile of a Graduate"—a community-driven vision for what students should know and be able to do by the end of their PK–12 education.

One year later, the graduate profile is now complete. Highlights include:

- **Community-Driven Design:** The graduate profile was developed through 29 focus groups with families, staff, and students across elementary, middle, and high schools.

- **Collaborative Facilitation:** Trained facilitators led sessions at each site, supported by community school coordinators.

- **Data + Art:** Local partner Future Forward led analysis of the focus group data, and a New Mexico-based artist brought the final profile to life through a powerful visual representation.

- **Catalyzing Engagement:** The CCC funding helped incentivize early engagement and sustained momentum throughout the process, culminating in two rounds of feedback and a completed profile by the end of the 2024-25 school year.

Now, the ABC Community School Partnership is turning its focus to implementation. They are looking to answer guiding questions, including: What does this shared vision mean for teaching and learning? For students feeling a sense of belonging? For family and community partnerships? From classrooms to cafeterias, the next phase is about bringing the vision to life across the entire PK–12 experience.

View the school based art interpretations of the county's profile of a graduate.

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