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The Los Angeles Unified School District Community Schools Initiative

An Implementation and Impact Evaluation

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Research Report

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About This Report

In this report, we describe the implementation and impact of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Community Schools Initiative. Specifically, we follow the first three cohorts of the initiative, onboarded in the 2019–2020, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023 school years, through the 2025–2026 school year. Drawing on original surveys and interviews with key stakeholders, we describe the implementation of the four key pillars of the community schools strategy: (1) integrated student supports, (2) family and community engagement, (3) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, and (4) collaborative leadership and practice. Using district administrative data, we also report on the impact of the initiative on student outcomes compared with a matched comparison group. Finally, we offer recommendations for district leaders and others designing or expanding community schools initiatives.

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Summary

Community schools partner with community-based organizations to promote student achievement and whole-child well-being by embedding four key pillars in selected schools: (1) integrated student supports, such as physical and mental health services; (2) family and community engagement, such as through volunteer opportunities or parent centers; (3) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, such as more after-school programs and field trips; and (4) collaborative leadership and practice, including more shared decisionmaking across stakeholder groups. The community schools strategy has rapidly expanded nationwide in recent decades, in large part because of increased funding and promising evidence that the strategy can improve student outcomes, especially for vulnerable populations.

In 2017, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) adopted the community schools strategy—grounded in the four key pillars described above—for a select number of its schools. In this report, we evaluate the implementation and impact of the first three cohorts of the LAUSD Community Schools Initiative (CSI). Our implementation study draws on original surveys, interviews with various stakeholders, and school site visits. Our impact study uses administrative data to compare LAUSD-CSI outcomes with those of a matched comparison group.

The combination of our implementation and impact findings leads us to conclude that the perceived positive impacts reported to us by community schools staff are meaningful, but they did not translate into detectable effects on student achievement. Our findings should be of interest to leaders of community schools initiatives and other education policy leaders hoping to launch or scale the strategy in their own communities.

Key Findings

- In interviews, stakeholders—school leaders, teachers, and external service providers—largely reported that the initiative enhanced student well-being, student engagement, family engagement, and teacher well-being.
- When community school coordinators had long-standing, preexisting ties to their school, it facilitated a smooth transition into the strategy and laid the foundation for strong implementation of the four key pillars.
- Additional autonomies afforded to community schools, such as budgeting decisions and the ability to set professional development agendas, facilitated implementation of the key pillars by allowing the incorporation of more stakeholder voices in decisionmaking and allowing the schools to put resources toward emergent stakeholder needs.
- Competing district priorities and policies, such as administrative tasks or a focus on improving low test scores, created barriers to implementation and sometimes limited schools' autonomy and capacity to implement the key pillars.
- Although student outcomes improved over the course of the study, achievement improvements were not significantly different from improvements in comparison group schools, and chronic absenteeism improvement was slightly greater in comparison group schools, with some variation across cohorts.

Recommendations

- Strongly consider promoting internal school staff to the role of community school coordinator; our findings suggest that preexisting relationships, expertise on the community, and understanding of day-to-day school operations enabled a smooth transition into the CSI strategy.
- Streamline administrative processes for community school activities, such as partnerships or field trips, to facilitate implementation of the key pillars. For example, creating waivers for small businesses or pre-approvals for vetted field trip locations can support implementation efforts.
- Place greater emphasis on teacher well-being, an area largely absent from community school policies and strategic planning. Leaders of community schools initiatives should explicitly address the role of teachers and their well-being in strategic planning.
- Place greater emphasis on student attendance given our finding that CSI adoption slowed chronic absenteeism improvement. CSI leaders should support dedicated staff members to implement attendance initiatives, monitor data, and support students and families in overcoming barriers to attending school.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Community schools partner with community-based organizations to promote student achievement and whole-child well-being. The distinguishing feature of the community schools strategy is to address the unmet needs of students that otherwise create barriers to learning, especially in low-income neighborhoods (Holme et al., 2022). With government support, community schools work with community-based organizations to implement four key pillars:

1. **Integrated student supports.** Schools offer coordinated services tailored to mental, physical, and social needs, such as on-site health clinics, food pantries, or virtual therapy.
2. **Family and community engagement.** Families and community members are actively included not only as beneficiaries of services (such as adult education classes or health clinics) but also as partners in decisionmaking, which strengthens trust and builds shared responsibility for student outcomes.
3. **Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities.** School days and school years may be extended, and schools provide additional enrichment activities, such as after-school programs or field trips, which offer additional academic learning time, extracurricular experiences, and relief from child care burdens on working families.
4. **Collaborative leadership and practice.** Staff, students, families, and external service providers share decisionmaking, fostering collective trust and effective implementation of the strategy's other pillars by ensuring that all stakeholders' needs are taken into consideration.[1]

The community schools strategy has rapidly expanded nationwide in recent decades, in large part because of major federal, state, and local investments in the approach (Holme et al., 2022). One of these expansions is occurring in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), one of the largest school districts in the nation. In 2017, LAUSD's board affirmed community schools in its resolution "Embracing Community School Strategies in Los Angeles Unified School District" (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2017). In 2019, a collective bargaining agreement between United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) and LAUSD established the first cohort of the LAUSD Community Schools Initiative (CSI). In 2021, the California State Legislature passed the California Community Schools Partnership Act (California Education Code, Chapter 6), making the largest statewide investment in this strategy to date.

Similarly to other large urban community schools initiatives, LAUSD follows the four key pillars approach, with additional funding to support a dedicated full-time staff member—the community school coordinator—to lead implementation of the key pillars at the school level. LAUSD-CSI schools have more autonomy over their budgets and professional development agendas than other LAUSD schools, to theoretically provide more flexibility to meet each community's unique needs. Since the start of the initiative, the district and UTLA have continued to agree on further cohort expansions and further funding to support the initiative.

[1] For more information on the four key pillars, see Maier et al. (2017).

As the community schools strategy expands, evidence is growing that it has the potential to improve outcomes, especially for historically underserved student groups.[2] Many studies show positive impacts of community schools on student academic achievement, including

- Boston City Connects (Walsh et al., 2014)
- the Communities in Schools program in Texas, Kansas, and Florida (ICF International, 2010a; ICF International, 2010b; ICF International, 2010c)
- two Iowa-based community schools (LaFrance Associates, LLC, 2005)
- the New York City Community Schools Initiative (Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026; Johnston et al., 2020)
- the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) (Swain et al., 2025).

Community schools have also improved attendance and reduced chronic absenteeism (Arimura and Corter, 2010; Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026; Dobbie and Fryer, 2011; ICF International, 2010b; Johnston et al., 2020; Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith, 2005; Olson, 2014; Swain et al., 2025). In some studies of community schools, higher attendance precedes increased test scores (Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026; Swain et al., 2025).

In addition, community schools have improved family engagement, reduced family stressors, and improved access to services for families (Arimura and Corter, 2010; Olson, 2014). Other studies show improved school climate and relationships between adults and students (Durham, Shiller, and McDowell, 2024–2025; Johnston et al., 2020; LaFrance Associates, LLC, 2005; Olson, 2014). In some cases, community schools have reduced disciplinary infractions (Dearing et al., 2016; Dobbie and Fryer, 2011; Johnston et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2014).

However, the research also suggests that implementation matters for the effectiveness of community schools. For example, in an evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative, researchers found that variation in student outcomes was related to the degree to which each school had implemented the strategy (Adams, 2010; Adams, 2019). An implementation study of the New York City Community Schools Initiative found that some aspects of school climate (as reported by staff) positively correlated with schools' core capacities for implementing the strategy (Johnston et al., 2017). A recent implementation study of New York City's Next Generation Community Schools pilot program similarly found that collaborative school leader mindsets and trusting relationships among school leaders facilitated successful implementation of the pilot (Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026).

Because the community schools strategy allows significant autonomy at the local level, it is reasonable to assume that implementation both varies widely and matters greatly, warranting further implementation research across contexts. In this study, we dive into the implementation of the community schools strategy in LAUSD, describe stakeholder experiences with the strategy, and explore the early impacts of the initiative on student outcomes. Specifically, using a combination of survey, interview, site visit, and administrative data on the first three cohorts of LAUSD-CSI, we address the following research questions:

1. How did LAUSD community schools implement the four key pillars?
2. What were the key barriers to and facilitators of implementation of the key pillars?
3. What was the impact of LAUSD-CSI on key stakeholder groups, such as students, families, and teachers?

[2] For more-thorough reviews of the community school literature, see Heers et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017; Oakes, Maier, and Daniel, 2017; and Swain et al., 2025.

Our findings will be of interest not only to LAUSD but also to leaders of other community schools initiatives.

The report proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, we provide context on LAUSD-CSI, briefly describing its structures and components. Chapter 3 contains a brief overview of our data, sample, and analytic methodology. Chapters 4–7 address our research questions, describing the implementation of the four key pillars, barriers to and facilitators of the key pillars, and the impacts of LAUSD-CSI on key stakeholder groups. Chapter 8 summarizes our findings and offers recommendations. Finally, in the appendix, we present technical details on our analytical methods. Additional summary statistics, impact estimates, and sensitivity analyses are provided in a separate supplemental annex to this report, available at www.rand.org/t/RRA5007-1.

CHAPTER 2

LAUSD's Community Schools Initiative

In this chapter, we briefly describe the structures and components of LAUSD-CSI, including staffing, funding, and mandatory processes, to provide context on the initiative.

Although the community schools strategy is designed to be adaptable to each school's unique context, there are some components of the initiative that are required in all LAUSD-CSI schools and that proved foundational for implementation of the key pillars:

- Like most community schools initiatives, all schools in LAUSD-CSI have a dedicated staff member to oversee implementation of the strategy. This role is known as the **community school coordinator** (we refer to this person as the *coordinator* throughout this report), and the role is funded by a board resolution.
- To inform how the strategy is implemented, all community schools must periodically complete an **assets and needs assessment** (ANA). The ANA involves a comprehensive data collection process from various stakeholder groups, such as school staff, parents and caregivers, students, and community members, to determine what the greater community's needs and priorities are, ultimately informing how the strategy is uniquely implemented in each school to best serve its specific community.
- All LAUSD-CSI schools also have a **community school implementation team** (CSIT), which is composed of various stakeholder representatives, such as social workers, students, parents, teachers, and community members, and tasked with ensuring that the needs identified in the ANA are being sufficiently addressed.
- Additionally, LAUSD-CSI schools have more **autonomy over budgets and professional development agendas** than noncommunity schools in the district. This allows them to seek out trainings relevant to the particular needs of their staff and to secure contracts with external service providers that provide services identified through the ANA. Each year, CSITs must complete a self-review of their progress on implementing the strategy to report back to the district.[1]

In addition to these key components of LAUSD-CSI schools, there are two key aspects of the initiative's design that we found to be relevant to our study: school selection and coordinator staffing.

- In LAUSD, **schools voluntarily apply** to become part of CSI through a centralized application process. If a school is not selected for a given cohort, its application may be rolled over for consideration in future cohorts. The voluntary nature of joining LAUSD-CSI is different from in some other large CSIs, in which schools are assigned to the initiative by certain criteria (e.g., low academic performance, high

[1] Additionally, all CCSPP grantees must complete an annual progress report for the state to assess implementation and track continuous improvement. Although many coordinators described this process to us during interviews, we omit further discussion of it in this report because it is a statewide requirement and is not unique to LAUSD.

rates of student poverty) instead of opting in. (Examples include the state of Maryland and early cohorts of the New York City Community Schools Initiative.)

- LAUSD-CSI schools have the option to **hire for their coordinator role internally**, which is different from in some other large CSIs, in which hiring is either fully centralized at the district level (e.g., San Francisco Unified School District) or managed externally by the lead community-based organization partner (e.g., New York City Public Schools).

These LAUSD-CSI components and design decisions will be referenced throughout the remainder of the report as we present and discuss our findings.[2]

[2] Although this is not an exhaustive list of the structures and components that exist in all LAUSD-CSI schools, for brevity, we describe only those structures and components that are most relevant to our implementation study.

CHAPTER 3

Data Sources and Analytic Methods

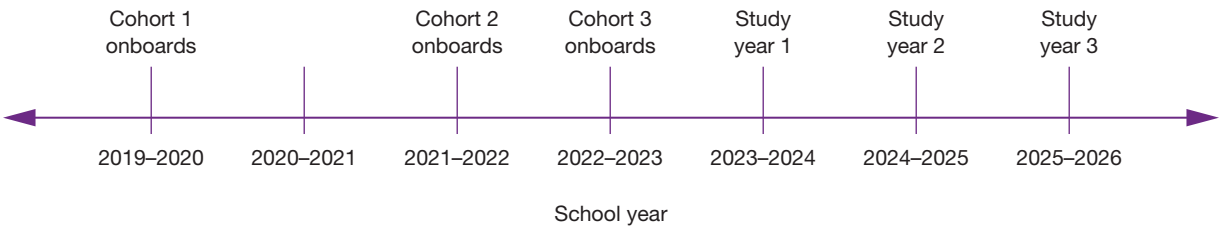
In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of our data, sample, and analytic methodology for both our implementation study and our impact evaluation. Our treatment sample consists of schools in the first three cohorts of LAUSD-CSI, which onboarded in the 2019–2020, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023 school years, totaling 34 schools. We follow these schools over a study period of three years, from the 2023–2024 school year through the 2025–2026 school year, although data collection activities vary by study year (see Figure 3.1). For our implementation study, we use original data collected via surveys, interviews, and site visits. For our impact evaluation, we use administrative data provided by the district. For more details on our impact evaluation methods, see the appendix.

Implementation Study

Data and Sample

In years 1 and 2 of our study (the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 school years), in early spring, we administered surveys to coordinators at the 34 schools in our sample. The surveys covered such topics as the coordinators' professional backgrounds, ANA processes, CSITs, implementation of the key pillars, and professional development activities. We then invited coordinator survey respondents to participate in 50-minute interviews, in which we probed further on CSI implementation through follow-on questions tied to their survey responses. In years 1 and 2, we also asked coordinators to refer us to external service providers with whom they had strong partnerships for potential interviews. Service provider interview protocols focused on identifying best practices for strong external service provider partnerships, how the CSI strategy facilitates those partnerships, and what effects service providers perceived on the students and communities they serve through LAUSD-CSI. In year 3, we also interviewed a sample of teachers about their experiences teaching under this strategy and how it influenced their well-being. Finally, in year 3, we conducted site visits to observe the implementation of the key pillars in action, beyond the scope of data collected in targeted questions in our survey and interview protocols. During each site visit, coordinators and other stakeholders guided the visit, while a researcher recorded observations focused on evidence of community school pillars in practice and the coordinators' roles, responsibilities, and interactions. We used a structured field note template to docu-

FIGURE 3.1
Timeline of LAUSD-CSI Cohort Onboarding and Study Years



ment observations of participants' behaviors and the school environment. Notes were time-stamped at five-minute intervals to support consistent and systematic data collection. Details on our sample across all aspects of implementation data collection are shown in Table 3.1.

Analytic Methodology

We analyzed survey data by calculating summary statistics and comparing them across years to explore changes in implementation patterns year over year. We analyzed interview transcripts and site visit field notes using a qualitative, iterative approach that combined systematic coding with thematic analysis. We began with an initial set of deductive codes derived from the research questions and the four community school pillars, then refined and expanded those codes inductively as we revisited excerpts and identified additional patterns in the data. This approach allowed us to attend to both fine-grained details within participants' accounts and broader themes (Lareau, 2021). The codebook for site visit notes differed somewhat from the interview codebook; it relied more heavily on parent codes to capture broader themes related to the community school pillars and stakeholders, whereas the interview codebook included more child codes to capture finer-grained detail. To support inter-rater reliability and maintain consistency, the qualitative research team first independently coded an initial subset of interviews, then compared coding decisions, discussed discrepancies, and aligned interpretations before proceeding with the full dataset. Three qualitative researchers coded transcripts and site visit notes to strengthen consistency and analytic rigor (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014). We then used thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns, including similarities, differences, and contradictions across participants' experiences (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan, 2016; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2011; Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Throughout the analysis, we examined both confirming and disconfirming evidence to strengthen the credibility of our findings (Denzin, 2006).

TABLE 3.1
Implementation Study Sample

School Year	Coordinator Surveys	Coordinator Interviews	Teacher Interviews	Service Provider Interviews	Site Visits
2023–2024	29	25	N/A	4	N/A
2024–2025	30	18	N/A	6	N/A
2025–2026	N/A	N/A	15[a]	N/A	11

NOTE: The total number of schools in our sample is 34. For every school, we emailed the coordinator to invite them to participate in a site visit. Principals were copied on these email invitations but were not themselves included in the surveys or interviews. Participation in surveys, interviews, and site visits was completely voluntary. Teacher interviewees were randomly selected from lists provided by coordinators to preserve the anonymity of teacher participants from school leadership. Coordinators were compensated $30 per completed survey and $50 per completed interview. Teachers and service providers were also compensated $50 per completed interview, although some service providers refused compensation because of employer policy. Throughout the report, *study year 1* is synonymous with the 2023–2024 school year, *study year 2* is synonymous with the 2024–2025 school year, and *study year 3* is synonymous with the 2025–2026 school year. N/A stands for *not applicable* and indicates that this data collection activity did not happen during this study year.

[a] We interviewed 15 teachers across nine schools.

Impact Evaluation

Data and Sample

Our impact analysis relies on administrative records about schools across LAUSD. We focus on evaluating the impacts of LAUSD-CSI on three primary outcomes: standardized math test scores, standardized English language arts (ELA) test scores, and rates of chronic absenteeism in schools (i.e., students missing 10 percent or more of instructional days). The test scores come from students in grades 3–8 and 11 who took California's end-of-year standardized test, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). We also consider a wide variety of additional exploratory student outcomes, including meeting proficiency standards on math and ELA tests (i.e., scoring a level 3 or 4 on CAASPP) and suspension rates.

The central challenge in evaluating CSI's impact on student outcomes is that schools were not randomly assigned to the program. Schools that volunteered to participate in CSI and were selected by the district may differ from nonparticipating schools in ways that affect student outcomes. To address this, we built a matched control group. For each CSI school in our sample, we identified up to five non-CSI schools in LAUSD that were as similar as possible before the program started. When constructing this matched group, we considered any school enrolling more than 40 students with outcome data in 2022 and 2023 but excluded independent charter schools and a few schools with nontraditional grade bands (e.g., grades 11–12 only, grade 12 only). We matched schools based on a wide variety of characteristics, including demographics, prior performance, and attendance, while also prioritizing geographic proximity within Los Angeles. This matched control group serves as a stand-in for what *would have* happened in CSI schools had the program not been introduced. (See the appendix for details on our matching strategy.)

Out of 644 potential control schools in our analytic sample, we identified 132 matched control schools, benchmarked against the 34 participating CSI schools (see Figure 3.2 for their geographic distribution). Overall, the CSI and matched control schools are very similar on a wide variety of observable characteristics, as we discuss in Chapter 7 and show in Table 7.1. They also exhibit very similar trends in our primary outcomes in the years before CSI adoption (Figure 7.1).

Analytic Methodology

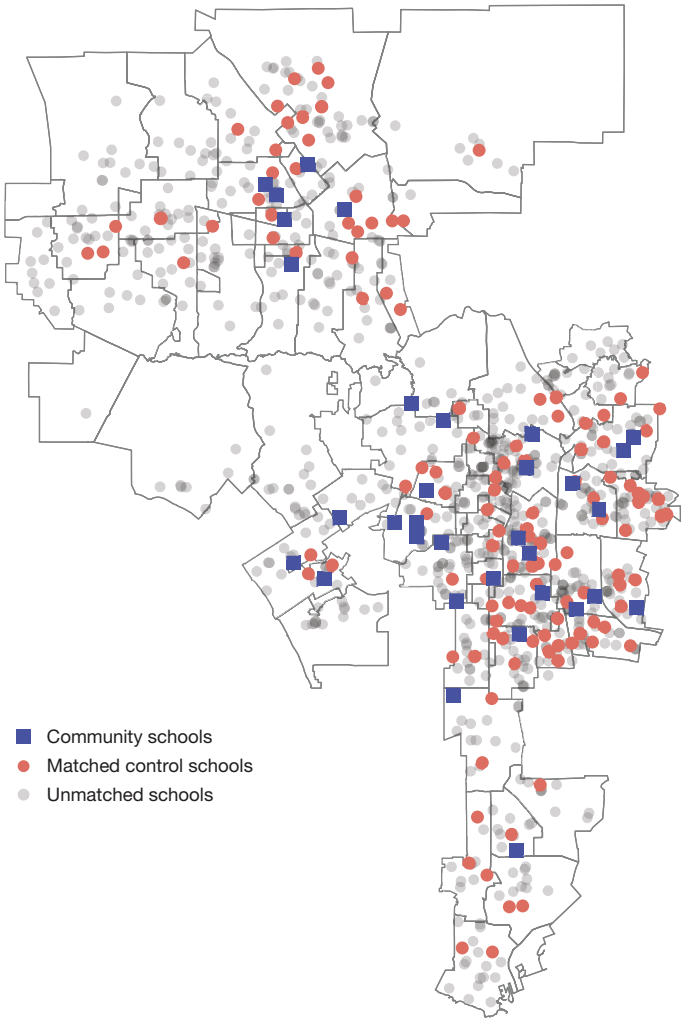
After identifying an appropriate comparison group, we used a statistical method called *difference-in-differences* to compare the average outcomes of LAUSD-CSI schools and matched control schools before and after the program began. This approach compares how outcomes changed over time in CSI schools relative to non-CSI schools while accounting for stable differences between them—a technique known as *school fixed effects*—that could otherwise skew the comparison. We also examined pre-program trends as a diagnostic check, confirming that CSI and matched control schools were generally moving in parallel before CSI began. We weighted matched control schools in our analyses based on the number of matches available for each CSI school (e.g., if a CSI school had three matched schools, each control school received one-third weight in our models).

Because CSI was introduced in three waves, we estimated impacts separately for each cohort and then combined the results into a single overall impact estimate, weighting each cohort by its enrollment size when aggregating results. Using this approach, we evaluated the average experience of LAUSD students who enrolled in a CSI school in any cohort. We focused our analysis on impacts after schools had experienced at least two or three years of CSI participation, depending on the outcome (absenteeism or test scores, respectively).

We provide more details about the baseline equivalence and pre-program outcome trends for CSI and matched control schools, along with our main findings, in Chapter 7. We provide additional details regarding our analytic methodology, including validity and robustness checks, in the appendix.

FIGURE 3.2

Map of CSI and Matched Control Schools in LAUSD



NOTE: This figure shows the geographic distribution of the 34 CSI schools in our sample, the 132 schools in our matched control group, and the 512 non-CSI schools that did not match to a CSI school. The interior gray lines indicate high school attendance zones.

CHAPTER 4

LAUSD's Implementation of the Community Schools Strategy

In this chapter, we answer our first research question: *How did LAUSD community schools implement the four key pillars?* We draw on evidence from surveys, interviews, and site visits to describe what the implementation of the four key pillars looked like in LAUSD-CSI schools:

- **Integrated student supports:** CSI schools offered a broad array of physical, mental, and social services through integrated student supports, but in some cases, students' needs were too great to be fully addressed.
- **Family and community engagement:** Families were engaged through dedicated parent centers, parent volunteer opportunities, and outreach efforts, but some coordinators reported ongoing challenges with increasing family engagement.
- **Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities:** Students experienced expanded and enriched learning through project-based learning (PBL), field trips, and after-school programming.
- **Collaborative leadership and practice:** Collaborative leadership incorporated multiple stakeholder voices in decisionmaking and provided leadership opportunities for families and community members, but for some coordinators, incorporating so many voices in shared decisionmaking was inefficient.

Integrated Student Supports

External service provider partnerships secured with CSI funding and other district-supported initiatives brought various physical health services to LAUSD-CSI campuses.[1] Many schools provide annual dental and vision screenings to meet preventive care needs for students. In some cases, external service providers also provide free or reduced-price glasses to students identified as needing vision care. Several schools either offer on-site health clinics or are regularly visited by mobile health clinics. These clinics provide routine care, such as vaccinations and health screenings, but students, families, and community members can also use them for more-urgent health needs. In total, 93 percent of coordinator survey respondents indicated that some type of physical health service was provided for students during the 2024–2025 school year.

In addition to physical health services, CSI schools offer several resources to support mental health; 100 percent of coordinator survey respondents reported offering mental health services for students in the 2024–2025 school year. In some cases, schools have memorandums of understanding for therapy services provided on-site or off-site to students and families. In other cases, partnerships with external telehealth organizations allow students to receive therapy via an iPad during the school day. Other mental health sup-

[1] There are many district initiatives that are not specific to CSI that may overlap with the key pillars, such as school-based health centers or LA's Best after-school programming. For this reason, we are not always able to determine with clarity what is uniquely attributable to CSI versus what is attributable in part or in whole to another district initiative.

ports are less formal, such as group art therapy, mentorship programs, or dedicated safe spaces for students to take breaks on campus. For mental or physical health needs that cannot be addressed on campus, some schools also have a resource navigator who helps families enroll in health insurance and identify external service providers that can meet their needs.

Our interviews revealed that integrated student supports in CSI schools extend well beyond health services. Additional examples of services that support students' holistic well-being include food pantries to supplement groceries, community closets to supplement wardrobes, hygiene items (especially useful for homeless students or families), gift cards for local restaurants, Thanksgiving meal kits, new backpacks loaded with school supplies, and new pairs of shoes. Many of these extra services cost nothing in CSI funds; coordinators secure them by engaging local businesses, churches, or nonprofit organizations to make in-kind donations of needed items to their school communities.

Despite the variety of supports provided at community schools, several interviewees were concerned that their schools' efforts were not meeting students' needs. For some, this was because of barriers they had encountered in providing high-quality and consistent services to the student body. In our first year of interviews, for example, two coordinators described situations in which they had experienced very successful vision screenings at their respective schools. However, both of these coordinators struggled to find service providers to return to their schools for vision screening the following year. Coordinators also acknowledged that their students' needs were simply larger than their schools' resources. As one put it, "[The impact of our services is] smaller than I would like to see. . . . In all honesty, I think the problem is bigger . . . it still feels like just fighting uphill." When asked about gaps between needs and resources, coordinators voiced concerns about not being able to provide enough support around housing, basic needs, immigration resources, and mental health. For example, one coordinator shared that their school provides fresh food to students and families but said that the demand regularly exceeded the supply of available goods.

Family and Community Engagement

At LAUSD-CSI schools, coordinators make great efforts to engage families in the school community in a variety of ways. In surveys and interviews, coordinators described various strategies for increasing family and community engagement, including offering communication in multiple languages; using incentives, such as no-homework passes or gift cards, for participation in school events; and offering food at events.

Many schools also offer opportunities for family members to be more involved in both school leadership and day-to-day school activities. Our surveys indicated that 60 percent of schools that responded to our survey had parent representatives on their CSITs during the 2024–2025 school year. One coordinator partnered with a nonprofit organization to offer workshops twice a month for parents to learn organizing and leadership skills. In the first year of this partnership, parents learned the skills; in the second year, parent leaders practiced applying those skills to organize and mobilize the broader parent and family community. Sixty-nine percent of coordinators reported in surveys that their schools offered some type of leadership training to families in the 2024–2025 school year.

Some schools have dedicated parent and family centers (though for many schools, these are constrained by available space) in which parents can socialize or gather when they arrive for volunteer opportunities. These centers may include resource pamphlets, calendars of upcoming events, volunteer sign-up sheets, and refreshments. During site visits, we were able to observe the value that this type of dedicated space has for improving family engagement (see the vignette on the next page, which is drawn from our site visit notes).

CSI schools also engage family and community members by offering additional programming on campus that is available not just to students or parents but to all members of the local community. This programming includes workshops, classes, and one-on-one guidance related to such topics as technology use, health insur-

Vignette: Family Engagement

At a site visit, we observed the parent family center and found about a dozen of the parent volunteers gathered around the central table. They were chatting in Spanish, creating a lively atmosphere. The students described how helpful the parent volunteers were and how they enjoyed seeing them on campus. The principal explained how the school's parent engagement was higher than before. Before we left, one of the parent volunteers described what the school and the parent center meant to her and the other volunteers. She emphasized how the coordinator, the parent representative, and principal had been so helpful and inviting in creating a welcoming and safe space for them, and all the other volunteers nodded in agreement with her.

ance, yoga, parenting, digital literacy, and immigration rights. Many CSI schools provide English as a second language (ESL) courses to families and, for some schools, community members:

> [We] have a really pretty robust ESL program, and that has been a real boon . . . we don't just have parents of our students, but we actually have community members . . . that was kind of a hope that we would at some point become kind of like a hub and we would be a place where people could go even if their children weren't here.

Interviewees acknowledged that family engagement was a challenging pillar to implement. Coordinators described ongoing struggles with low event turnout or limited reach, often connecting only with the same small group of engaged families. Teachers, coordinators, and service providers agreed that family engagement worked best when it was built through direct, personal relationships rather than one-way school communication. Interviewees also shared that when it came to family engagement, one size did not fit all; what connected with one parent may not work for another parent. As one coordinator explained, "[We've] found that we have to hit [family engagement] from all angles because everyone's getting their information differently." Another told us, "The thing that works best is good old-fashioned phone calls and having conversations and just stopping and talking . . . it just takes a lot of time." As this quote suggests, family engagement efforts that were responsive, tailored, and relational were a resource-intensive lift. Building trust, diversifying participation, sustaining communication, and coordinating volunteers all required time, persistence, and staff capacity.

Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities

In recent years, LAUSD-CSI has increased its emphasis on integrating PBL as a key aspect of the expanded and enriched learning time pillar in CSI schools, and our survey data reflect this shift. In our first year of survey data collection (2023–2024), 68 percent of coordinators reported that their schools integrated PBL around challenges in the local community or developing solutions to those challenges. In the following year, that figure rose to 87 percent. During site visits, we observed examples of PBL that were inspired by students' interests, promoted applied problem-solving, and were a great source of pride for students (for an example, see the box on the next page, which is drawn from notes we took at a site visit).

In addition to PBL, which often occurs during the regular instructional day, CSI schools offer expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities through field trips, clubs, and after-school, weekend, and summer programming. Like PBL, these enrichment experiences are often driven by student interests or aligned to the instructional day. As one coordinator told us, "Teachers collaborate at their grade level and decide what

Vignette: Project-Based Learning

At a site visit at a high school, the students led us through the hallway, which was covered with large, official-looking science posters that showed different ways to redesign and engineer a Jurassic park and other science problems. The students explained that their science class gave them a semester to work through a science topic and present a poster on it.

One student also described her biomedical classes, in which she and her classmates applied problem-solving skills to identify and develop solutions to various health-related issues. Later, we visited a biomedical class on the second floor. The room contained two classes of students, one engineering and one biomedical. The teachers from both classes explained that they combined their classes so that they could collaborate to create a delayed-release drug pill to teach both the engineering and biomedical aspects of such a product. The room was full of the students' chatter. They had already finished making their product and were now reflecting on and celebrating it.

field trips to take. So, every child on our campus goes on at least one field trip. Most of our children go on multiple—say, three a year. The how—the way it's decided—is through student interest and teacher interest primarily, and then funding." Other examples of student-driven enrichment in CSI schools include robotics, drama, sports, dance, and music. Coordinators explained to us that some of these enrichment activities were identified through their ANA process, and others were identified through student surveys or student leadership opportunities (e.g., student council representatives advocating their peers' preferences).

Collaborative Leadership and Practice

As described in the previous chapter, all schools in LAUSD-CSI have a CSIT. The CSIT creates a built-in structure for incorporating more stakeholders in community school leadership than would typically be present on a non-CSI school leadership team. In addition to administrators (i.e., the principal and the coordinator), CSIT members often include teachers, students, parents or caregivers, social workers or psychologists, and sometimes even community members. Forty percent of coordinators reported in surveys that their CSITs include additional stakeholder roles, such as instructional coaches, union representatives, guidance counselors, or school climate specialists. The CSIT ensures that a broad array of stakeholder voices are included in tasks typically related to implementing the key pillars, such as determining which external service provider partnerships to pursue, deciding which enrichment activities to offer, developing strategies for increasing family engagement and boosting student attendance, and evaluating whether programs and services are sufficiently serving the needs identified in the ANA.

In addition to creating leadership opportunities for parents and caregivers (described above in the "Family and Community Engagement" section), CSI schools create leadership opportunities for students and community members. Sixty-nine percent of coordinators reported that they operate an elected student body, and 60 percent reported that students serve on the CSIT. Coordinators and teachers are also encouraged to invite local community members to speak to classes or at school assemblies or to hold events on campus. Eighty-three percent of coordinators reported in surveys that an external organization led a community event at their school in 2024–2025 (up from 75 percent the prior year), 77 percent reported that a local community leader came to campus to speak to students about real-world problems, and 45 percent indicated that a local community partner led a teacher training (up from 34 percent the prior year).

However, the incorporation of multiple stakeholder voices in decisionmaking was not always easy or efficient. In some cases, it lengthened the time it took to complete necessary tasks or created substantially more

work for the coordinator. For example, one coordinator described how getting approval of the budget from multiple stakeholder groups substantially slowed down progress:

> One of the big things was people wanted more transparency around the budget process at our school, so one thing we did this year was we created a separate budget committee. . . . And now, you know, we were going through the budget . . . with our shared decisionmaking meetings, but when we were voting on the budget, some of the people on the councils, they wanted to go back and, like, check in with their constituent groups before they voted. And it's like, look, we've been working on this for a month, we've been talking to our stakeholder groups, we need to vote.

Similarly, many coordinators described the challenges of not being able to make everyone happy all the time, such as parents having different preferences for meeting or event scheduling or students having different preferences about which sports are offered after school.

CHAPTER 5

Factors Influencing Implementation of the Key Pillars

In this chapter, we answer our second research question: *What were the key barriers to and facilitators of implementation of the key pillars?* We find that when coordinators had preexisting ties to their communities, these ties facilitated a smooth transition into the community schools strategy. We also find that the additional autonomy afforded to community schools facilitated implementation, but competing district priorities sometimes constrained that autonomy. Finally, we show that principals' support for the strategy was critical to implementation success.

Coordinators' Long-Standing and Preexisting Ties to Their Schools' Communities Facilitated Implementation

In surveys and interviews, we asked coordinators about their professional backgrounds and histories with their current school communities. We found that most coordinators were previously teachers at their schools and therefore already had established relationships with school leadership, other staff members, students, and families and were experts in their schools' day-to-day operations. Because those coordinators were already familiar with their school communities, they could access and leverage networks more easily and effectively to provide services and resources to students and families. As one service provider explained when describing the coordinator role, "What I realized not too long ago was that he's been at that site for quite some years, so he knows the history of the school, the structure of the organization, and how it has changed."

Some coordinators were also integrated into their school communities in other ways that deepened their expertise and facilitated their ability to carry out their role. For example, many coordinators lived in their schools' neighborhoods, some participated in or served on other local community organization boards (e.g., city council meetings, neighborhood watch meetings), some had children enrolled in the school, and some were even alumni of the school. Throughout our interviews with all stakeholder groups, we repeatedly heard that such deep ties to the community enabled coordinators to successfully implement the CSI strategy. One coordinator told us that, when stepping into the role, she was "pretty in tune with what stakeholders were needing" and that people would not hesitate to come to her because they already knew and trusted her.

One specific benefit of coordinators being previous teachers in their schools was that it gave coordinators the opportunity to participate actively in the application process to make their schools community schools, giving them a sense of expertise and ownership over the community schools strategy from the beginning. One coordinator explained how she advocated the approach with her staff, guided the community to make the decision to apply collaboratively, and was ultimately identified by the community as the right person to lead the strategy:

> I knew about community schools when the board first introduced a resolution [about community schools], and I started reading about community schools since then. I did a whole conversation and vote with my staff regarding the strategy and did we want to approach it and try it as a team. And so prior to becoming a community school, we got together an implementation team and then began having forums, talking to

> the staff one on one, talking to parents, making sure parents understood what a community school was and why we wanted to be part of the strategy. . . . At the time of our application, our team and staff had a discussion and decided that I was the right person. If we had an opportunity to hire inside that I would be the right person for the position. I loved teaching, but I agreed, we decided together, so I agreed.

Another coordinator described a similar process of, as a teacher, working with her principal and colleagues to write their school's CSI proposal. Once their school was accepted, this person became the coordinator and found it an easy role to move into, given their well-established history of advocating for their students and families.

When talking about why they felt compelled to take on the coordinator role at their school, one coordinator shared,

> I just thought, "Well, who is gonna take the job?" It has to be somebody who knows the school . . . . So I just thought, "Okay, I need to apply for it," . . . because it sounded like a really hard job. We didn't want somebody new who didn't have any relationships already established.

As this coordinator intuited, in the rare cases in which coordinators were new to their schools because of turnover or a decision to hire externally, they reported feeling much less prepared to step into the role. As one such coordinator remarked, "I didn't even really know what a community school was. . . . I didn't know what I was getting into when I applied for this job." This relative lack of preparedness among newly hired coordinators reinforces the potential value of filling the role through internal promotion.

Pillar Implementation Was Supported by Budget Autonomy but Constrained by Competing District Priorities and Policies

Several coordinators described how the ANA process informed their budgeting decisions. Autonomy over part of the budget facilitated implementation of the collaborative leadership pillar by allowing multiple stakeholder groups to have input in the budget and enabling schools to pay staff for collaborative planning time. As one coordinator explained, "We're paying our teachers; our teachers get three hours of collaborative time per week, and we pay for two of those hours." Budget autonomy also facilitated implementation of the integrated student supports and family and community engagement pillars by creating the flexibility to offer the services that students, families, and staff needed. As one coordinator explained, "I call it the liberation of funds . . . ensuring that . . . every little cent that we're spending is actually because we have a plan and because there's a need . . . . So the money is better aligned and we are prioritizing things that we feel kids, parents, and staff need." These perspectives demonstrate how additional autonomy facilitated implementation of the strategy by providing enough flexibility for shared decisionmaking and determination of how to allocate resources.

However, competing or changing district priorities sometimes undercut the autonomy that CSI schools were promised in their collective bargaining agreement. One reason some schools in our sample lost some of their CSI autonomy was that they received the "priority school" designation, given to schools with low performance on such metrics as academic achievement and attendance. Regarding how the priority school designation impeded implementation of collaborative leadership, one coordinator explained, "[Collaborative leadership] doesn't always work. Sometimes [because] there's a lot of stuff that comes up being kind of top down in LA Unified, and because we're a priority school. Sometimes that kind of takes over everything else." Another coordinator described to us how the designation impeded implementation of expanded and enriched learning time: "First semester, the only thing we offered [for expanded and enriched learning time] was tutoring because that is what the district tells us we have to do. Like, 'Okay, no, you can't do chorus or you

can't have this because your test scores have dropped.'" In this case, because of the school's prior academic performance, the school limited after-school programming to tutoring instead of offering student-driven enrichment activities.

Priority schools were not the only ones that faced implementation challenges caused by district demands. A few coordinators explained that although their contracts stipulated autonomy over professional development agendas, this autonomy was not always realized. As one coordinator explained, "Demands from the district are always a challenge . . . mandated [professional development activities] even though we're not supposed to have them, getting backed from the union on what's in our contract has been challenging." The coordinator expressed frustration that their limited professional development time was being allocated to district-mandated professional development instead of the professional development that was determined by the school to best meet its unique needs.

Both coordinators and external service providers reported another implementation challenge stemming from the paperwork and insurance policies required by the district to bring external service providers to the school site. Over the course of our study, the district implemented a policy requiring large insurance coverage to protect against liability. One coordinator explained, "We have a lot of small businesses around here, but they're not necessarily allowed on campus because they have to go through the contracting procedure . . . and now they've added another layer where you have to have a $1 million insurance policy."

A service provider who had worked with schools in the district for decades explained that the paperwork required to maintain partnerships had become increasingly complicated over the years, particularly since the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the district was largely unaware that this organization was working with schools, and the arrangement rested on a "handshake" agreement with the principal. The service provider described how things have changed since then:

> Every principal explained to us there used to be a handshake between us and you guys, but now the district is requiring, because of insurance purposes, that you go through a process. So we've lost the autonomy to do that. Now, every six months, I guide the principals through the constantly evolving . . . process that I have to figure out as an outsider.

Partnerships with service providers are integral to the community schools strategy, but, as these quotes highlight, the additional processes and insurance policy requirement put in place following the pandemic were burdensome, and in some cases—especially for small local businesses—these burdens were large enough to prohibit small businesses from partnering with schools altogether.

Principal Buy-In Was a Key Factor in Implementation Quality

In interviews, the role of principals emerged as a key factor affecting implementation of the LAUSD-CSI strategy, particularly when it came to the collaborative leadership pillar. In response to questions about the implementation of that pillar, coordinators frequently described their principals' leadership styles. As one coordinator explained,

> I'm very fortunate to . . . have such a good working relationship with my principal. I am one of those coordinators that does not have a contentious working relationship with their principal. For the most part, we are thought partners on everything that we do. . . . It's never just an admin decision . . . you have to have feedback and thought partners in what we do. So in terms of collaborative leadership, no big deal, that's just what we've always done.

Similarly, teacher interviews showed that teachers valued leaders who communicated clearly, built trust, shared responsibility, and responded to teachers' and students' needs. Three teachers at the same school all described their principal positively. For example, one said,

> [The principal] is very supportive. The best thing about her is that she talks to us, and you can talk to her. . . . If we have any needs and she can't do something, she explains why it's not in her power or she doesn't have the resources. She's very honest about the budget, the school needs, and the overall vision of the school. . . . She knows every single staff member by name and most of the families—really, almost all of them—by name. She's truly invested in building relationships with the community.

The other two teachers similarly emphasized the principal's transparency, community relationships, and support for teachers. These themes, echoed throughout our interviews, suggest that principals—not just coordinators—played a key role in fostering collaborative leadership through communication and visible responsiveness, which helped create trust and a stronger sense of support.

In some schools, principals were not as enthusiastic about the CSI strategy. One coordinator who held the role across two principals' tenures described the contrast: "So, like, I've had two principals doing community schools, and the difference is like night and day. . . . I think my first principal, I loved [them], but [they] just didn't have the same kind of vision, I would say." Another coordinator described their struggle with a principal who lacked buy-in: "I think that none of this will work if the principals aren't completely buying into the program, and unfortunately, I have a principal that doesn't buy into it." This coordinator went on to describe that their suggestions on how to lead more collaboratively or better support staff were dismissed or not prioritized. For example, the principal continued to hold school leadership meetings with only the assistant principal on a weekly basis, despite the coordinator's request to include additional staff members in the meetings.

Similarly, some teachers described less positive experiences with school leadership, including micromanagement, inconsistent communication, and instability. For example, one teacher described a new principal whose leadership emphasized mandates and test performance over teacher input:

> We don't feel like we got a good introduction to who [the principal] is, what [their] philosophy is, or what [their] mindset is toward our community and how to move forward. What we've gotten instead are just district mandates that [they've] been pushing, all about data, data, data. . . . Especially with this new administration we have at our school . . . we've been fighting to get equal access to planning time and professional development because now the focus has been heavily placed on English—getting those scores up—and math. So, we've been feeling a little left out this year.

In this case, the principal was determining the school's priorities, and teachers were feeling "left out" of decisionmaking. These accounts suggest that when CSI principals fail to communicate a clear vision for the strategy or fail to implement collaborative leadership, staff feel less supported and lack clarity on how CSI implementation will move forward.

CHAPTER 6

Perceptions of the Impacts of LAUSD-CSI on Key Stakeholder Groups

In this chapter, we present findings from our interview data to answer our third research question: *What was the impact of LAUSD-CSI on key stakeholder groups, such as students, families, and teachers?* We present perceived impacts on students, families, and teachers in turn. While interviewees largely reported positive impacts on stakeholder groups, implementation of the strategy sometimes created additional responsibilities for teachers, and the perceived impacts on student academic outcomes were mixed.

Perceived Impacts of LAUSD-CSI on Students

CSI Services and Activities Improved Students' Physical and Mental Well-Being

A majority of teachers described their schools' wraparound services and resources as important mechanisms for responding to students' basic needs and supporting their well-being. Teachers viewed such services as vision care, dental care, clothing closets, food banks, and free health services as improving student readiness and strengthening school-family connections. One secondary teacher emphasized the significance of these services:

> It's been really cool to see the resources that community schools provide. Even in my role as an adviser, I have the opportunity to connect students to on-campus resources that I've never seen at other schools, like dental or physical health services. . . . So many students need glasses but can't get them because their parents don't have time, insurance, or resources. . . . The dental exams also help a lot. Some students really need dental work, but it hasn't been a priority for them or their families.

Similarly, a coordinator told us that they had a large share of their students see the dentist through their school and that, after a schoolwide screening for glasses, a large share of students qualified for free eyeglasses, "so they were able to see the ophthalmologist, pick out their frame, [and] receive their glasses." The coordinator also spoke of the specific value of having health services take place in the school setting, where teachers are aware of and invested in the services their students are receiving. In this case, teachers were able to ensure that students were not only receiving but actually wearing their glasses in class. Other school staff also played integral roles in connecting students and families to services. For example, a coordinator shared how effective it was for the school nurse to have an initial conversation with families about vaccines, and then for the coordinator to follow up on that conversation, and then for the agency administering the vaccines to be on-site at the school.

Several coordinators also said that their schools' services and activities contributed to students' mental, emotional, and social well-being. Participation in enriched learning activities in particular bolstered students' self-esteem and connected them to their peers through shared interests. One coordinator described the effect of these services as follows:

> [The enrichment experiences] really [have] built a lot of confidence. I was very happy to see some people that I wouldn't have expected, like, say, for example, in Shakespeare, really step up, and you could . . . tell that these students were very nervous about it. . . . So that has been incredibly heartening to see, a sense of confidence, a sense of, like, "I can do this."

Another told us, "[I]t's just been really nice to see kids who are shy or maybe didn't have a lot of connections building friendships."

Coordinators also drew connections between the services their schools provided and decreases in both the mental health needs and the behavioral challenges their students were experiencing. One coordinator explained, "[What] I do see is behavior in students is better. We still have some issues, but there's a huge reduction in the number of disciplinary actions that are needed." Another shared, "[W]e've seen [a] decrease in the need for mental health services or we've been able to catch them before they get worse . . . that's definitely been something that I've seen improvement in."

CSI Services and Activities Had a Positive Influence on Student Engagement, Connection, and Attendance

Coordinators and teachers alike credited their schools' services and activities with increasing engagement among the student body. In some cases, interviewees said that the health impacts described in the previous section in turn improved students' ability to be present and focused on learning. Teachers widely recognized that many students faced barriers to accessing essential services outside of school and that those unmet needs could interfere with learning. For example, two teachers highlighted how receiving glasses helped students see the board and engage more fully in class. As one explained, "I've personally seen students receive glasses through these programs, and it completely changes their learning experience. Being able to see the board makes a huge difference. Sometimes, when students appear disengaged or tired, it turns out they just couldn't see."

Coordinators also said that accessing the schools' integrated student supports and expanded learning time (ELT) resources had a direct impact on students' sense of belonging and enjoyment at school. One coordinator spoke about how PBL in particular had changed how students related to their learning: "[T]he projects have increased [students'] motivation and their engagement. And being able to go out of class and do different things has increased their motivation and their engagement; knowing that they can extend what they're doing after school has increased their motivation and engagement." Other coordinators focused on ELT, such as field trips and after-school programs, sharing stories like this one about a science class so popular it had a waiting list:

> [The students] made pickles. They deconstructed food. They did experiments with vinegar and oil and different things. And just made science fun, where kids are now asking, "When's another science after school?" Where, before, they dreaded science. So [the teacher is] very excited about that. And the kids are excited about that. . . . It's a win-win for everybody . . . and it was a way to address it rather than, "Oh, you scored low on science."

Another coordinator similarly contrasted the current ethos of fun and engagement in their enrichment activities with a previous, more deficit-focused approach. This person shared that "[some students] may struggle a little bit in other areas, but they're shining in those [after-school clubs]. And it's nice because, before, [after-school] was just focused on remediation."

According to several interviewees, student engagement was fostered not only by students having more fun and interesting school experiences but by a deeper sense of belonging and safety in school spaces. One coordinator explained, "Students know that they have safe spaces [at school]. Students utilize our Wellness

Center. They come to find their counselors. They know them by name." Service providers viewed this sort of relationship-building between youths and adults as a particular value-add of their work in community schools. They described how their partnerships with schools enabled a wider network of support for students. One service provider described the importance of "third adults," explaining,

> I think it's really special to have an adult in your life who isn't paid to be there—like, not a teacher or a parent. . . . A lot of times students are amazed, like, "What do you mean this adult is just here because they're volunteering?" And I tell them, "Yeah, they're just here to hang out with you."

Similarly, another service provider shared, "If [students] see that we're present here [at our organization] but also present at their school, it's easier to build a relationship because it's like, 'I have multiple people on my sides who are cheering me on.'"

For some young people, engagement endured over time and went beyond the school walls. One coordinator shared that several former students were now working with the community organizations that their school partnered with, showing "the legacy of the program and how it's kind of still playing out, you know, how those kids are still involved in the neighborhood and still giving back." This was something we also heard in our interviews with service providers, some of whom pointed to long-term or ongoing relationships with young people as a signal of their organizations' impact. They spoke of students they had worked with in high school who were now working at their organizations or coming to speak with current students, or simply students who saw enough value in the service providers' services to return to them over the course of their academic careers: "For the rest of the four years, they keep coming back. We know, right there, we've done something good if they came back."

Improved student engagement may have also contributed to increased student attendance. Several coordinators credited their schools' services and activities with getting students to school in the first place. As one explained, "[Students] that are involved in these after-school activities are definitely more apt to come to school. There's no question about that." Coordinators also described activities their schools implemented with the specific goal of decreasing chronic absenteeism. Such services as home visits and proactive phone calls when students were late made a notable difference in attendance rates, as did a shift from punitive to encouraging responses to student absenteeism. One coordinator described that shift as follows: "I remember five years ago when kids were late, I was like, 'Hurry up, come on, get to class'. . . . And now it's like, 'Oh, you're here. Good job.'"

Perceptions of CSI's Impact on Academic Outcomes Were Mixed or Inconclusive

When asked about the impacts of integrated student supports and ELT at their schools, roughly one-quarter of the coordinators with whom we spoke reported feeling like they did not yet have clear enough data to be able to make a statement about the academic impacts of their schools' CSI strategies. In some cases, this was because our interviews took place before coordinators had received testing data for that school year. And one coordinator shared that the data they had received thus far were inconclusive: "[W]e seem to go one step forward, two steps back. . . . Maybe we do really well in ELA and then we struggle in math and we devote to math. I don't really know the impact of all these things on academics. We haven't had our state tests for this year yet."

Two coordinators did describe observable increases in student test scores. For example, one coordinator expressed the view that their school's efforts around tutoring were responsible for "significant improvements" in their students' testing data; another shared, "We saw big strides from the beginning-of-the-year testing to the middle-of-the-year testing, and we saw strides in the state test results from last spring." Likewise, the ser-

vice providers we interviewed told us about the growth they had seen in the students they worked with, citing academic outcomes, such as graduation and college enrollment rates. One service provider explained, "It's rewarding to see students who came to us as ninth-graders grow through their senior year. Watching them progress academically and personally, and seeing them dream bigger without limitations, is what makes it all worthwhile."

Perceived Impacts of LAUSD-CSI on Families and Communities

CSI Services and Activities Provided Access to Essential Resources for Families and Community Members

Interviewees agreed that community school services provided families with tangible and necessary resources, including those to which families might not have otherwise had access. Resources included physical and mental health services, practical education and information, and such basic needs as food, clothing, bus passes, and transitional housing. One service provider noted that families had come to rely on their school as a trusted, no-strings-attached source of fresh fruits and vegetables, describing how families now "see the school as a resource beyond academics."

Teachers said that they viewed community school services as helping families access knowledge and supports they might not have otherwise sought out. One teacher described this as a form of generational change, observing that parents in their community who had previously avoided discussing mental health because of cultural stigma were now openly talking about mental wellness and healthy eating: "It's been really nice to see that now parents are more open about [those topics]. The fact that stigmas and barriers are disappearing—that's huge. We're eliminating a lot of the hesitation that used to exist in this population to accept help."

The CSI Strategy Strengthened Connections Between Schools and Families

Beyond resource access, interviewees perceived community schools as strengthening families' senses of connection to and trust in their schools. One coordinator captured the impact of their school's family engagement efforts with a story about a parent who "used to hide from the school" when staff tried to reach out. Now this parent, who used to screen calls from the school, spent time in the front office "chatting with everybody" and no longer seemed to view office staff as authority figures who were "out to get them." Another coordinator shared a similar shift, in which school staff who had previously called parents only because their children were in trouble now reached out for a variety of nonpunitive reasons (e.g., to invite families to events).

Interviewees shared that building trust and connection between schools and families also led to increased family engagement at school events. One coordinator explained, "Parents feel like this is a place that they can go, and they've talked to other parents," ultimately doubling the number of parents attending one of the classes offered by the school.

Perceived Impacts of LAUSD-CSI on Teachers

Community School Resources Helped Improve Teachers' Working Environment

Among the 15 teachers interviewed, nine perceived that integrated student supports helped address student needs and, in turn, improved their working environment. They noted that access to such resources as a clothing closet, food banks, free health services through partnerships, and additional staffing gave them reassurance that they had somewhere to turn when students or families needed help. One elementary teacher highlighted this relief:

> Once our students' basic needs are met, there's more room for learning, right? They're not worried about where their next meal is coming from. We also have a lot of students who are homeless, and when they get vouchers to sleep in a hotel bed, that's huge. That's life-changing. To me, that's the most important work that the community school is doing right now.

At the same time, three teachers noted that integrated supports and related staffing generated additional responsibilities. Two teachers noted the work of identifying students in need and coordinating with families around supports, such as housing, food, clothing, and health care services. For these teachers, this work often required considerable relational and administrative attention, including, at times, helping families overcome the stigma associated with accepting aid. However, one of these teachers described this additional labor as meaningful rather than burdensome when it directly benefited students, suggesting that teachers may be more willing to absorb additional work when it aligns with their values and sense of purpose.

Community Schools Generally Improved Teachers' Morale and Well-Being

When asked directly whether community schools made a difference in their well-being, 14 of the 15 teachers said yes. Most explained that community schools helped their students and families first, and those benefits, in turn, improved teachers' own experiences at work. For example, one teacher expressed the belief that her community school was "what has allowed me to continue feeling good about prioritizing family when I need to, being open with my staff about needing to miss a day. I think it helps to have a community school and to have the support that we currently have." Her account suggests that having broader supports in place made it easier to manage personal needs with less stress or guilt. Teachers also recognized the importance of distributing the workload across staff and partnerships to expand access to resources that addressed whole-child needs. As one explained,

> I think [community school] helps with a lot of those things that burden us as teachers that we don't have control over or connections to. It helps support us. If we're trying to focus on the academics of the kid, it's able to support the other parts that go into that whole child.

Similarly, this teacher explained how the role of the coordinator and the additional student supports available at her school improved her own well-being:

> Having resources available for students is huge, especially considering the community we serve. I can't imagine knowing the needs of our students and not being able to meet them. It would be heartbreaking. So it helps my well-being knowing that students have access to support and programs that can help them. Our community school coordinator has also been incredibly helpful. He's resourceful and is always connecting students to what they need. He builds relationships with students and bridges connections between staff, resources, and families. Honestly, being part of a community school has been a positive contributor to our overall well-being.

The reliability of and resources provided by the coordinator through community schools alleviated this teacher's concern for her students and, in turn, improved her well-being.

In addition to providing resources, school leaders, including the coordinator, served as important liaisons between teachers, students, and available resources. Although these leaders did not always work directly in classrooms, teachers who had built relationships with them described feeling better supported and more informed about services that could make a meaningful difference for students. One teacher described how school staff and community partners came together to provide groceries and gifts for families during the holidays through local donations. Reflecting on these efforts, she remarked, "The entire school feels more

responsible for each student as opposed to maybe just the individual teacher. . . . I definitely think we're more cohesive now." For her, access to these coordinated supports contributed to a stable working environment and a stronger sense of collective responsibility, collegial cohesion, and social support.

Community Schools Promoted Teachers' Intent to Stay at Their Schools

Although most teachers described community schools as supportive of their well-being, they varied in the extent to which they believed those supports influenced their decisions to remain at their schools or in teaching. Nine teachers perceived positive impacts from community schools on teacher well-being that strengthened their motivation to remain at their schools. In these accounts, teachers appeared more motivated to stay when they saw the community schools strategy providing material benefits for themselves and their students.

For some teachers, this connection was especially strong. For example, this teacher described how her current school's community environment reduced her interest in seeking other jobs:

> I know I mentioned those job alerts, but I'm checking them less now that I'm at this school. At my previous school, it felt isolating and disconnected, like an island. Here, the community aspect makes all the difference. It's what keeps me happy and grounded. . . . I know teachers who have already left, and others who are trying to leave because they're in schools or environments where they have no support. It's just them alone.

These accounts suggest that teachers were more likely to view community schools as supportive of teachers when the strategy was enacted through visible, responsive relationships and concrete structures, often facilitated by strong coordinators.

Limitations of the Implementation Study

Our implementation findings are subject to limitations related to both sample participation and the nature of self-reported data. First, because our implementation data rely heavily on surveys and interviews with coordinators, teachers, and service providers, these self-reported data are potentially subject to social desirability bias, recall bias, or selective reporting, which may influence how participants describe their experiences with CSI. Second, our sample participation rates varied across CSI cohorts; participation rates were higher in cohort 1 schools than in cohorts 2 and 3. Because cohort 1 schools had more years of experience with the strategy, our qualitative findings may reflect a greater depth of experience or more established practices, potentially overrepresenting schools further along in implementing the CSI strategy. Conversely, perspectives from newer CSI schools may be underrepresented, limiting our ability to fully capture the experiences and early implementation challenges of these cohorts. Finally, there are many district initiatives that are not specific to CSI that may overlap with the key pillars, such as school-based health centers or LA's Best after-school programming. For this reason, we are not always able to determine with clarity what is uniquely attributable to CSI versus what is attributable in part or in whole to another district initiative. These factors should be considered when interpreting our implementation study findings and when applying our findings to broader contexts.

CHAPTER 7

The Impact of LAUSD-CSI on Student Outcomes

In the prior chapter, we presented qualitative findings representing interviewee perspectives on the impacts of CSI on various stakeholder groups. In this chapter, we present quantitative findings on the program's impacts on students, using administrative data to compare outcomes in participating schools with outcomes in matched comparison schools. Achievement scores rose and chronic absenteeism declined in both groups after CSI began. However, we find no statistically significant differences in achievement gains between the two groups. Thus, it is unlikely that LAUSD-CSI produced the large positive test score impacts observed in some prior research on other community schools initiatives (Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026; Somers and Haider, 2017; Walsh et al., 2014). However, our analysis was not well powered to detect smaller impacts that are reasonably common in educational interventions (Kraft, 2020). Regarding our second primary outcome, chronic absenteeism rates fell slightly faster in the comparison group than in CSI schools, suggesting that CSI had a modest slowing effect on attendance improvement. As we explain below, we interpret this finding with some caution.

The Treatment and Matched Comparison Schools Were Very Similar, and Both Had Relatively Low Achievement Levels at Baseline

Table 7.1 summarizes the baseline characteristics of our sample of CSI (treatment) schools compared with matched (control) schools, focusing on the last two years with non-missing data before each cohort adopted CSI (i.e., the years we use for matching). To provide an additional point of reference, we also show the characteristics of the schools in our sample that were not selected as matches. The matched control and treatment schools are very similar. Both include a relatively high proportion of high schools (26 percent), both serve a large proportion of economically disadvantaged students (89 percent and 91 percent, respectively), and both serve students with similar baseline test scores in ELA and math. Graduation rates in both control and treatment schools (82 percent and 79 percent, respectively) are lower than in other high schools in LAUSD (87 percent). This means that our findings speak to the potential effects of LAUSD-CSI when it is implemented in schools with lower-than-average student outcomes at baseline.

Overall, very few differences existed at baseline between the 34 CSI-participating schools and our 132 matched control schools. Of the 23 school characteristics shown in Table 7.1, only two—the percentage of students who are Black and the percentage who are Hispanic—showed meaningful differences at baseline. However, in our supplemental annex (Table S.5), controlling for these and other school characteristics (in addition to our other model controls) does not substantively influence our results.

In contrast, both treatment and control schools differ markedly from the larger set of unmatched schools. Schools not selected as matches in our analysis tended to have substantially higher achievement scores, less chronic absenteeism, and fewer economically disadvantaged students at baseline. This reinforces our approach of evaluating the intervention using a more comparable group of matched schools and controlling for individual school fixed effects in our analyses.

TABLE 7.1

School-Level Summary Statistics in the Pretreatment Period

Characteristic	Unmatched Schools	Matched Control Schools	Community (CSI) Schools	*p*-Value of CSI Versus Matched Control
Elementary school	71%	59%	59%	N/A
Middle school	13%	9%	9%	N/A
High school	10%	26%	26%	N/A
Span school	5%	6%	6%	N/A
Student enrollment	692	671	748	0.414
Math test scores (SD)	–0.112	–0.394	–0.441	0.397
ELA test scores (SD)	–0.095	–0.348	–0.413	0.283
Chronic absenteeism	18%	23%	24%	0.587
Attendance rate	95%	94%	94%	0.549
Disciplinary referrals per student	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.884
Has a suspension	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.847
Hispanic	70%	85%	76%	0.052
Black	9%	8%	16%	0.077
White	13%	3%	4%	0.498
English learner	23%	28%	28%	0.979
Has an individualized education program	14%	15%	14%	0.411
Economically disadvantaged	78%	91%	89%	0.312
Foster child	0.7%	1.0%	1.0%	0.885
Homeless youth	2.6%	3.8%	3.8%	0.993
Average HS grade point average	2.53	2.33	2.37	0.539
Regular HS diploma graduation rate	87%	82%	79%	0.384
Met UC/CSU graduation requirements	64%	59%	61%	0.637
Took at least one AP course	25%	18%	17%	0.739
Number of unique schools	**512**	**132**	**34**	

NOTE: AP = Advanced Placement; HS = high school; N/A = not applicable; SD = standard deviations; UC/CSU = University of California/California State University. The statistics in this table are averages of school-level characteristics from 2018 and 2019 for CSI schools in cohorts 1 and 2 and their matched control schools, from 2019 and 2022 for CSI schools in cohort 3 and their matched control schools, and from 2018 and 2019 for unmatched schools. No *p*-values are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or lower. We do not present *p*-values for school level (e.g., elementary school) because matched control and CSI schools are the same level by construction. Matched control schools are weighted based on the number of matches the matched CSI school receives. Test scores come from grades 3–8 and 11; we first standardize the scaled scores using statewide year×grade×subject means and standard deviations, and then we compute school-level averages. A *span school* is a school with a nontraditional grade span, such as grades 3–8 or 6–12.

Both the Treatment and Comparison Groups Saw Gains in Achievement and Declines in Absences

Figure 7.1 shows descriptive trends for our primary outcomes—test scores and rates of chronic absenteeism—for treatment and control schools. In this figure, and throughout our analysis, we use scores from students in grades 3–8 and 11 who took California's end-of-year standardized test (the CAASPP).[1] We standardize their scaled scores using year-, grade-, and subject-specific means and standard deviations from all test-takers in the state. For chronic absenteeism, we follow the state's definition: missing 10 percent or more of instructional days in a school year.

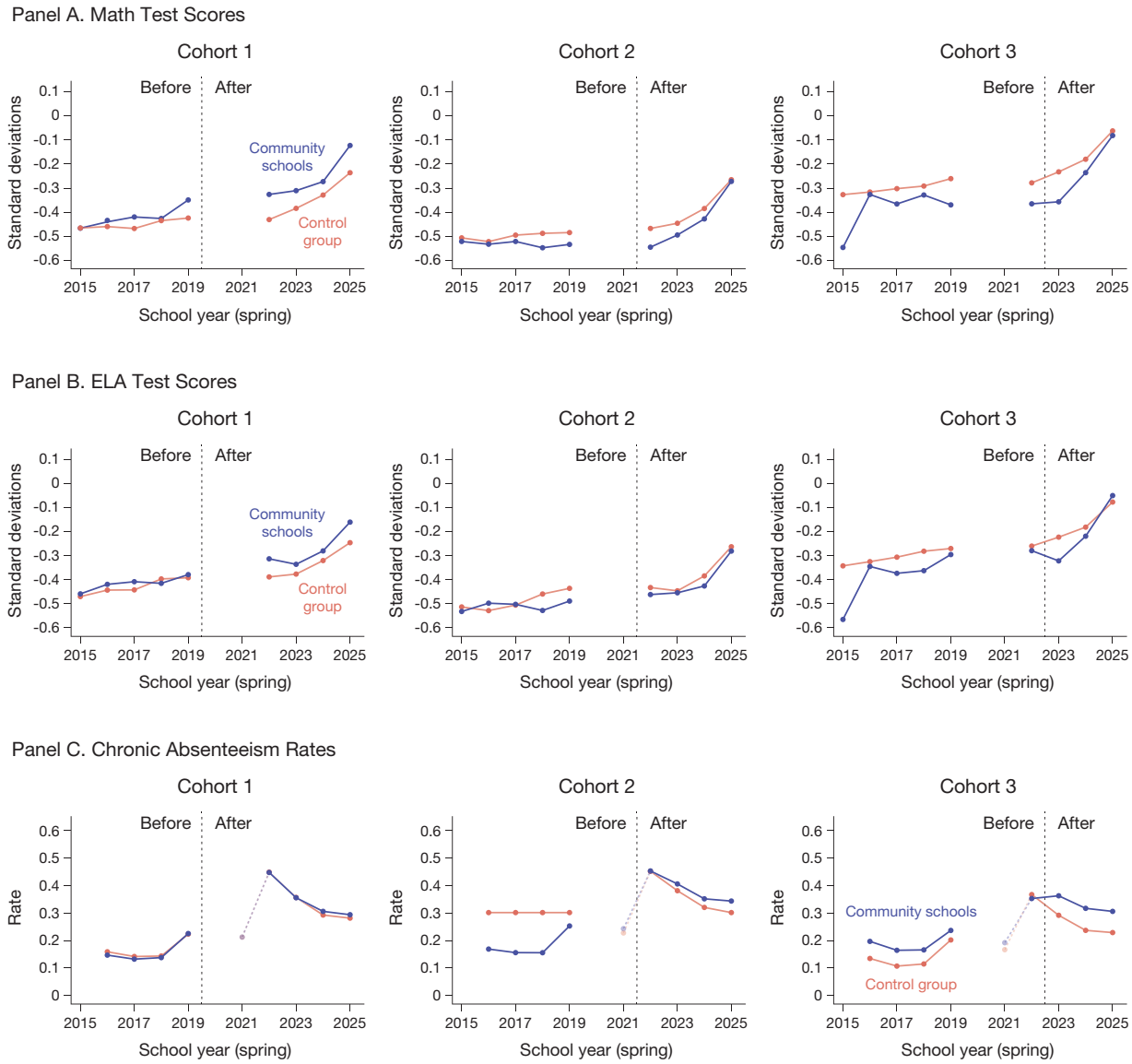
As Figure 7.1 shows, for all cohorts, math and ELA test scores trended up and chronic absenteeism rates trended down after the start of CSI implementation in LAUSD. However, these trends are mostly similar for both treatment (blue) and matched control (red) schools. (For exact values, see Table S.3 in the supplemental annex.)

In contrast, trends prior to the study period tended to be relatively flat across all three outcomes. However, the pre-study period for most cohorts coincides with the pre-pandemic period. Figure 7.1 highlights how missing outcome data from 2020 and 2021 complicate our interpretation of these trends, making it difficult to assess how similar treatment and comparison schools were at the start of the intervention for cohorts 2 and 3 in particular.

[1] We view the 11th-grade standardized test scores as a useful measure of achievement, but they are harder to interpret than earlier-grade scores. The content of the 11th-grade exam is less closely tied to coursework, and some students might not give a full effort because it is a low-stakes exam (i.e., there are no direct consequences for students).

FIGURE 7.1

Trends in Test Scores and Chronic Absenteeism in CSI and Matched Control Schools



NOTE: In each plot, the trend lines show average outcomes for students in community schools and control group schools that match with the CSI schools in a given cohort. Cohort 1 consists of 17 CSI schools, cohort 2 consists of 12 CSI schools, and cohort 3 consists of five CSI schools. Test scores come from grades 3–8 and 11 and are standardized using statewide year×grade×subject means and standard deviations. Test score data are missing in school years 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 because California canceled standardized tests because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chronic absenteeism rates are similarly unavailable in the 2019–2020 school year because of the pandemic. We show chronic absenteeism rates in the 2020–2021 school year in gray because, although these data exist, they must be interpreted with caution because of the irregular pandemic circumstances.

We Detected a Statistically Significant Impact on Absenteeism but Not Student Achievement

Using our sample of CSI and matched control schools, we estimate CSI's impacts on student outcomes using the difference-in-differences method. Although matching identifies non-CSI schools that are similar to CSI schools on a variety of observable characteristics, the two groups may still differ in ways we cannot observe or measure. The difference-in-differences approach helps address this limitation by incorporating information on the gap in student outcomes between treatment and control schools *before* CSI began. For each cohort, we calculate the average gap between CSI and control schools from 2015 through the year before CSI adoption. Then, when we compare student outcomes *after* CSI adoption, we do not count the preexisting gap as part of CSI's impact. We focused our analysis on impacts after schools had experienced at least two or three years of CSI participation, depending on the outcome (absenteeism or test scores, respectively).

Beginning with our estimated impacts on achievement, Table 7.2 shows that neither of these estimates is statistically significant. We obtain small directionally beneficial impact estimates for both math (0.031 SD) and ELA (0.033 SD).[2] The table also shows what effect sizes we would have been well powered to detect given our sample size (see the "Minimum Detectable Effect" column): effects close to three times as large as those we actually observe. Thus, while our findings allow us to likely rule out large impacts of CSI on achievement, we cannot determine with confidence whether CSI produced smaller (positive or negative) impacts (Kraft, 2020).

Our estimates of CSI implementation impacts differ from those of a recent Learning Policy Institute (LPI) study of CCSPP state implementation grants in LAUSD (Klevan et al., 2026). The LPI study found that grant receipt was associated with a statistically significant reduction in absenteeism (9 percent) and an increase in math proficiency (11 percent). Two methodology differences likely explain this divergence. First, the two studies define *treatment* differently. The LPI study measured impacts following the distribution of CCSPP grant funds to LAUSD in 2022–2023, abstracting away from when individual schools actually began CSI implementation. Our study anchors the analysis to each CSI cohort's implementation start date. Second, the two studies use different comparison groups. The LPI study compared CCSPP schools with all non-CCSPP LAUSD schools with at least 80-percent high-needs enrollment. Our study constructed a matched control group of schools that were similar to CSI schools across multiple key dimensions (including attendance, achievement, and demographics). Our approach thus offers a more direct investigation of the impact of CSI program activities, rather than CCSPP grant funds, and a comparison group with greater baseline similarity to treatment schools.

TABLE 7.2
Impact Estimates for Primary Outcomes

Outcome	Counterfactual Mean Outcomes	Impact Estimate	Standard Error	*p*-Value	Observations	Minimum Detectable Effect
Math test scores	–0.294	0.031	0.035	0.379	1,432	0.098
ELA test scores	–0.309	0.033	0.036	0.369	1,432	0.101
Chronically absent	0.322	0.020	0.010	0.047	1,344	0.028

NOTE: The estimate for the impact on chronic absenteeism is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Test scores come from grades 3–8 and 11; we first standardize the scaled scores using statewide year×grade×subject means and standard deviations, and then we compute school-level averages. Observations are at the school×year level. For more details on how we obtained these estimates, see the appendix.

[2] Math and ELA test scores come from the CAASPP Smarter Balanced summative assessment. For our analysis, we average test scores from grades 3–8 and 11 within school and within subject.

On absenteeism, we estimate that CSI adoption caused chronic absenteeism rates to be 2 percentage points higher than they otherwise would have been: around 34 percent instead of around 32 percent. This impact is modest but noteworthy, and the estimate is statistically significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.047$). Importantly, absenteeism *fell* in CSI schools following CSI adoption; however, our results suggest that it would have fallen faster absent CSI adoption.

It is difficult to reconcile the adverse absenteeism finding with the positive (though nonsignificant) achievement estimates and the generally positive implementation findings. One explanation could be that the teachers and coordinators we interviewed perceived positive impacts because they were not comparing the general improvement in student outcomes with an explicit control group. In interviews, some coordinators also reported to us that their dedicated pupil services and attendance (PSA) counselors were effective, but once their chronic absenteeism rates dropped below 30 percent, the school was no longer eligible for a PSA counselor. It is possible that this 30-percent threshold contributed to slowing attendance improvements. Another explanation could be methodological. Unfortunately, we lack data for 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduces the amount of information we have to accurately measure the baseline equivalence of cohort 2 and cohort 3 CSI and comparison schools. What data we do have suggest some pretreatment trends for cohort 3 in particular, which could lead to over- or underestimation of program effects.[3] For these reasons, and because of the unique dynamics of the pandemic's impact on chronic absenteeism, we interpret the estimated impact of CSI on absenteeism with caution.

Although a negative impact on absenteeism might be surprising, it does have precedent. In an evaluation of community schools in Tennessee, Truwit (2025) similarly found no detectable impact on math achievement and a small adverse impact on chronic absenteeism. It may be that initial implementation of the initiative has the potential to draw resources or attention away from business-as-usual efforts to address chronic absenteeism rates.

Exploratory Analyses Show No Impacts on Additional Student Outcomes and Little Evidence of Heterogeneity Across Subgroups

Table 7.3 summarizes additional findings from exploratory analyses of other student outcomes. We identify no statistically significant effects on the percentage of students meeting math and ELA standards, suspension rates, or the number of suspensions per student.

We similarly find no clear evidence of heterogeneity in effects across student subgroups. As shown in Table 7.4, estimated effects across groups defined by gender, ethnicity, and economic disadvantage are not significantly different for any of our three primary outcomes. We do not estimate impacts for different non-Hispanic racial groups because these groups together make up just 24 percent of the CSI sample and several CSI schools have very few or no students in some subgroups and years.

[3] Faster rising chronic absenteeism rates in the cohort 3 comparison group at baseline could imply either the expectation of continued faster increases for that group than for the treatment group or the expectation of greater regression to the mean for that group post-pandemic.

TABLE 7.3

Impact Estimates for Secondary Outcomes

Outcome	Counterfactual Mean Outcomes	Impact Estimate	Standard Error	*p*-Value	Observations	Minimum Detectable Effect
Met standards in math	0.243	0.008	0.015	0.589	1,432	0.042
Met standards in ELA	0.349	0.012	0.015	0.413	1,432	0.042
Has a suspension	0.004	0.000	0.001	0.741	1,523	0.003
Suspensions per student	0.004	0.001	0.002	0.767	1,523	0.006

NOTE: No *p*-values are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or lower. *Met standards* is defined as achieving a level 3 or 4 proficiency rating on California's end-of-year standardized test (the CAASPP); these outcomes come from students in grades 3–8 and 11. Observations are at the school×year level. For more details on how we obtained these estimates, see the appendix.

TABLE 7.4

Impact Estimates Across Student Subgroups

	Female	Male	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Economically Disadvantaged	Not Economically Disadvantaged
Math test scores						
Estimate	0.033	0.031	0.040	−0.026	0.031	0.015
Standard error	0.035	0.037	0.037	0.055	0.034	0.056
p-value	0.347	0.414	0.279	0.636	0.371	0.791
Counterfactual mean	−0.314	−0.277	−0.310	−0.181	−0.317	−0.104
Observations	1,424	1,424	1,422	1,359	1,432	1,384
p-value of difference	0.915		0.235		0.728	
ELA test scores						
Estimate	0.041	0.033	0.039	0.016	0.029	0.051
Standard error	0.035	0.040	0.037	0.064	0.036	0.062
p-value	0.239	0.411	0.293	0.805	0.411	0.415
Counterfactual mean	−0.213	−0.405	−0.328	−0.207	−0.332	−0.072
Observations	1,424	1,424	1,422	1,355	1,432	1,377
p-value of difference	0.727		0.707		0.674	
Chronic absenteeism						
Estimate	0.017	0.019	0.021	0.014	0.020	0.012
Standard error	0.011	0.010	0.010	0.020	0.011	0.012
p-value	0.103	0.074	0.033	0.504	0.067	0.305
Counterfactual mean	0.325	0.323	0.319	0.361	0.333	0.254
Observations	1,165	1,164	1,165	1,159	1,165	1,157
p-value of difference	0.845		0.703		0.493	

NOTE: No *p*-values for comparisons across demographic groups are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or lower. Test scores come from grades 3–8 and 11; we first standardize the scaled scores using statewide year×grade×subject means and standard deviations, and then we compute school-level averages. Observations are at the school×year level. For more details on how we obtained these estimates, see the appendix.

Our Analyses Have Limitations Common to Nonexperimental Research and Are Affected by Gaps in Pandemic-Era Data

Our methodology and data have some limitations that readers should keep in mind when interpreting our results. First, while we matched on observable characteristics of CSI and control schools, unobservable differences may have influenced which schools participated in CSI. As purely hypothetical examples, schools that applied to participate in the program may have had distinct instructional philosophies or more-motivated school leaders, or the district may have selected from among applicant schools those schools facing greater challenges in ways not fully reflected in the school characteristics we can observe. Our difference-in-differences strategy is designed to account for these unobservable differences between CSI and matched control schools, but it is possible that unobservable differences remain that could bias our results.

Second, gaps in pandemic-era student achievement and attendance data present unique challenges for our difference-in-differences methodology. For some cohorts, missing data in 2020 and 2021 limited our ability to assess baseline equivalence in the years immediately prior to the start of CSI or to monitor the equivalence of baseline trajectories between CSI and non-CSI schools. This uncertainty compounds any concerns about potential unobserved differences between non-CSI schools and schools that applied to and were selected for CSI.

Third, we cannot observe all concurrent school-level programs or interventions that may have occurred in CSI and non-CSI schools during the study period. If non-CSI schools received other supports or services that differed from those that CSI schools received—especially if the timing of those interventions coincided with CSI implementation—our results could be biased in either direction. Although we matched schools in part based on their participation in some high-profile concurrent programs in recent years (see the appendix), our data on program participation over time are incomplete, and other programs or school interventions we did not observe could not be accounted for.

Finally, we focused primarily on student academic outcomes. Because of resource limitations, our quantitative analyses did not assess potential impacts on school climate, teacher retention, or family engagement—all factors that our qualitative data suggest may have been affected as well.

CHAPTER 8

Summary and Recommendations

In this chapter, we provide a brief summary of our implementation study and impact evaluation findings. We then offer recommendations to leaders of community schools initiatives—based on our findings—for consideration when developing or scaling the community schools strategy in their own contexts.

Summary

We found strong evidence of implementation of the four key pillars across cohorts. CSI schools provided a broad array of mental and physical health services and other integrated supports identified as emergent needs of their school communities. Students experienced expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities through PBL and out-of-school-time enrichment activities, often facilitated by external service providers. Various stakeholders' voices were included in leadership and decisionmaking processes. Implementation was strongest when school leaders had a clear vision for the strategy and coordinators had preexisting deep ties to the school community. However, schools faced implementation challenges related to competing district directives, such as administrative hurdles for securing external service provider partnerships and accountability demands for low-performing schools.

In interviews, stakeholders, including teachers, coordinators, and service providers, perceived positive impacts of the initiative on student well-being, student and family engagement, and teacher well-being. However, the initiative sometimes created additional responsibilities for teachers (such as identifying and referring students for services), and, in some cases, the scope of student and family needs exceeded what coordinators could organize (such as immigration or housing support).

Using administrative data, we estimated that LAUSD-CSI slowed the pace of chronic absenteeism reduction in CSI schools. Our estimates for student achievement are not statistically significant but would suggest small positive impacts on math and ELA test scores. We can likely rule out large test score impacts of the kind observed in some prior studies of community schools initiatives (Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026; Somers and Haider, 2017; Walsh et al., 2014). However, many interventions have effects on student outcomes that are smaller than those we were powered to reliably detect, and we therefore cannot conclude with confidence whether LAUSD-CSI had small effects on achievement.

Regardless, both treatment and matched control schools in our sample showed improved outcomes over the period of our study, perhaps influenced by other activities, interventions, or secular trends occurring in the district during the same period as CSI. Our qualitative findings suggest that LAUSD-CSI may have had impacts on other outcomes, such as school climate, teacher retention, or family engagement, that we lacked the resources to examine but that may be worth evaluating in the future. Our key takeaway, based on the combination of our implementation and impact findings, is that the perceived positive impacts reported to us by stakeholders in our implementation study are meaningful, even if they did not translate into detectable effects on student achievement during the years of our study.

Recommendations

Prioritize Internal Promotion of School Staff to the Coordinator Role

We recommend that leaders of community schools initiatives, when possible, strongly consider promoting internal school staff to the community school coordinator role. Community school coordinators who were previously embedded in their schools brought invaluable institutional and contextual knowledge; preexisting relationships with staff, students, families, and community partners; and a clear understanding of the school's day-to-day operations—all of which enabled a smoother and more effective transition into the CSI strategy. Similarly, coordinators reported that having broader ties to the surrounding communities, such as living in the same neighborhoods as their schools or having personal connections to their schools as parents or alumni, contributed to their efficacy as coordinators. In contrast, newly hired coordinators who lacked prior work experience in their schools reported feeling underprepared for and unfamiliar with the demands of the coordinator role.

Selecting a coordinator internally also creates the opportunity for the prospective coordinator to participate in drafting their school's community school application. According to our interviews, this kind of early and active involvement fostered a sense of ownership and investment in the CSI strategy and the coordinator role.

Streamline District Administrative Processes for Community Schools

Our interviews highlighted the influential role that district-level administrative practices can play in enabling or impeding successful implementation of the CSI strategy. When CSI schools had meaningful autonomy over their budgets, coordinators reported greater flexibility to respond to the needs of students, families, and staff and to fund collaborative structures (e.g., paying teachers for additional hours of collaborative planning time) that strengthened implementation across multiple pillars. This suggests that districts should work to protect and expand school-level budget autonomy.

Competing district directives—including mandated professional development, restrictive programming requirements (e.g., limiting after-school programming to tutoring), and burdensome external service provider partnership processes—can undermine CSI school autonomy. We recommend that districts critically examine and simplify the administrative requirements for onboarding external service providers (e.g., insurance and contracting policies) to ensure that bureaucratic barriers do not prevent schools from building the community partnerships that are central to the CSI strategy's commitment to integrated student supports and expanded learning opportunities.

Community Schools Initiatives Should Prioritize Implementation of the Key Pillars in Ways That Support Teacher Well-Being

Our findings suggest that the community schools strategy can support teachers' well-being through a combination of better student services and the inclusion of teachers in decisionmaking. Teachers in community schools sometimes shouldered additional responsibilities, including coordinating services between staff and families, leading extra programming, and facilitating outreach. Teacher accounts indicated that these added demands were more manageable because integrated student supports, expanded learning opportunities, and family engagement often improved classroom climate and eased some aspects of teachers' workloads. When students' needs are met, they are better prepared to learn, improving teachers' working conditions. Likewise, when school leaders included teachers in decisionmaking, teachers unsurprisingly felt a stronger sense of community and support from leadership. These factors, in combination with a positive school climate, buffered teachers against demanding workloads and high levels of need among students.

Community Schools Initiatives Should Pay Extra Attention to Student Attendance

Our quantitative analysis found that CSI adoption slowed the improvement in chronic absenteeism that CSI schools experienced following adoption. Although we interpret this finding with caution, it would be prudent for community schools to pay extra attention to supporting student attendance, which is a prerequisite for students to benefit fully from academic instruction, as well as the social, emotional, and health-related supports offered through community schools. In interviews, coordinators reported to us that their PSA counselors were effective at improving student attendance but that PSA counselors were conditional on having a chronic absenteeism rate of at least 30 percent. Therefore, further investment in dedicated staff members beyond this threshold would help ensure that students are positioned to realize the full variety of benefits offered by the community schools strategy.

APPENDIX

Technical Details on the Student Impact Analysis

This appendix provides additional details about the analytical methods we describe in Chapter 7. First, we describe the procedure we use to construct a matched control group, and then we describe the statistical approach we use to estimate CSI's impacts.

Constructing a Matched Control Group

To strengthen the internal validity of our difference-in-differences approach, we construct a matched control group for each of the three CSI cohorts in our analysis sample (i.e., those beginning implementation in 2020, 2022, and 2023). The donor pool for potential matched control schools includes all non-CSI schools in LAUSD (other than independent charters) that enroll at least 40 students and have traditional grade spans (e.g., we drop schools that enroll only grade 12 or grades 11–12).

Our matching algorithm is designed to ensure comparability between treatment and control schools on primary outcomes and a broad set of school-level characteristics prior to CSI implementation. In broad strokes, the algorithm proceeds in three steps. First, we predict each school's outcomes in the posttreatment period based on their pretreatment outcomes and characteristics. Second, we compute a distance metric between each treatment and control school based on the predicted outcomes from step one. Third, we match each treatment school with up to five control schools based on the distance metric, giving priority to geographic proximity.

Constructing a Distance Metric

Beginning with the first step, using only the schools in the donor pool, we estimate a model for each of the three primary outcomes (math test scores, ELA test scores, and chronic absenteeism). We estimate models for elementary and middle schools together but models for high schools separately because some predictor variables are available only for high schools.

Specifically, for each school *i*, we estimate the following model via ordinary least squares:

$$Y_i = \gamma X_i^{base} + \varepsilon_i,$$

where the outcome Y_i is either S_i^{math} (standardized math test score), S_i^{ELA} (standardized ELA test score), or CA_i (chronic absenteeism rate).[1] The predictor variables, contained in the X_i^{base} vector, include baseline values of math test scores, ELA test scores, chronic absenteeism rate, attendance rate, student suspension rate, average number of disciplinary referrals per student, number of students enrolled, share of students in vari-

[1] We standardize scaled test scores ourselves using publicly available year×grade×subject means and standard deviations obtained from the annual CAASPP Smarter Balanced Technical Report (available at California Department of Education, 2026). After standardizing, we average across grades to obtain an average score for each school×year×subject.

ous demographic categories (Hispanic, Black, White, English learners, economically disadvantaged, special education, foster youth, and homeless youth), and indicators for a variety of school-level programs (Black Student Achievement Plan, Humanizing Education for Equitable Transformation Community Schools Plan, dual language, Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, magnet programs, and science, technology, engineering, arts, and math [STEAM]). When estimating models for high schools, X_i^{base} also includes the share of students taking AP courses, mean grade point average, graduation rate, and the share of students meeting UC/CSU graduation requirements.

For cohorts 1 and 2, we use baseline data X_i^{base} from the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 school years (averaged). For cohort 3, we use baseline data from the 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 school years (averaged).[2] For each cohort, these are the last two years prior to CSI adoption with data that are not missing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For outcomes (S_i^{math}, S_i^{ELA}, and CA_i), we use the first year of non-missing data for each cohort after CSI adoption, which is 2021–2022 for cohorts 1 and 2 and 2022–2023 for cohort 3.

After fitting these models, we use the estimated coefficients to compute predicted values for every school (control and treatment): $\hat{S}_i^{math}$, $\hat{S}_i^{ELA}$, and $\widehat{CA}_i$. Then, we make two adjustments before computing the distance metric: (1) We take the average of the predicted math and ELA scores, and (2) we standardize the predicted chronic absenteeism rates using the mean and standard deviation of the predicted values so that the test scores and absenteeism measures are all in standard deviation units:

$$\hat{S}_i \equiv \frac{1}{2}\left(\hat{S}_i^{math} + \hat{S}_i^{ELA}\right)$$
$$\widehat{CA}_i^{std} \equiv \left(\widehat{CA}_i - \mu_{\widehat{CA}}\right)/\sigma_{\widehat{CA}}.$$

Finally, we calculate the Euclidean distance between each treatment school i and control school j as

$$D_{ij} = \sqrt{\left[\hat{S}_i - \hat{S}_j\right]^2 + \left[\widehat{CA}_i^{std} - \widehat{CA}_j^{std}\right]^2}.$$

Matching Algorithm

We match control schools to treatment schools based on the computed distance D_{ij} between each school, giving priority to schools that are geographically close. We match with replacement, keeping up to five matches per treatment school.

To implement the prioritization of geographic proximity, we create three groups:

- Group 1:
  - Schools i and j are in the same "Community of Schools."
  - $\hat{S}_i - \hat{S}_j \leq 0.05$ SD.
  - $\widehat{CA}_i - \widehat{CA}_j \leq 1$ percentage point.

- Group 2:
  - Schools i and j are in the same "Board of Education District."
  - $\hat{S}_i - \hat{S}_j \leq 0.10$ SD.
  - $\widehat{CA}_i - \widehat{CA}_j \leq 2$ percentage points.

[2] When a predictor variable has missing data in one of the two baseline years, we use the value from the year with non-missing data. This is most relevant for the indicators of other school-level programs (e.g., Black Student Achievement Plan) because they are frequently missing from our data in school year 2021–2022.

- Group 3:
  - $\hat{S}_i - \hat{S}_j \leq 0.25$ SD.
  - $\widehat{CA}_i - \widehat{CA}_j \leq 5$ percentage points.

For treatment school *i*, Group 1 contains all control schools *j* that are in the same "Community of Schools." (Communities represent very small geographic areas, with a median of 17 kindergarten through grade 12 [K–12] buildings in a given community.) In case there are no similar schools within such a small geography, we also impose closeness thresholds based on predicted test scores and predicted chronic absenteeism ($\hat{S}_i$ and $\widehat{CA}_i$). For each treatment school *i*, we sort the control schools in Group 1 based on the distance metric D_{ij} and select the five lowest-ranked schools. For treatment schools with fewer than five matches, we proceed to Group 2.

Group 2 contains all control schools *j* that are in the same "Board of Education District." (Board districts are larger than communities of schools. There are seven districts in the state, with a median of 127 K–12 buildings across districts.) As in Group 1, we impose closeness thresholds based on $\hat{S}_i$ and $\widehat{CA}_i$ in case there are no similar schools within a board district. For any treatment school *i* with fewer than five matches, we sort control schools in Group 2 based on the distance metric D_{ij} and select the lowest-ranked schools from Group 2. For any treatment schools that still have fewer than five matches, we proceed to Group 3.

Group 3 is a catch-all group that does not factor in geography but ensures that all matches satisfy a minimum level of closeness. For any school that does not already have five matches, we select the schools with the lowest value of D_{ij}, as long as predicted test scores are within 0.25 SD and predicted rates of chronic absenteeism are within 5 percentage points.

Ultimately, 28 treatment schools have five matches, one has four matches, three have three matches, one has two matches, and one has one match. No treatment school has zero matches.

Constructing Weights

We assign each control school a weight such that for any given treatment school, the sum of weights across matched control schools equals 1. Specifically, for each treatment school *i* and control school *j* in cohort *c*, we define the following intermediate weight:

$$w_{ij}^{c} = \begin{cases} 1/N_i \text{ if } j \text{ matches to } i \\ 0 \quad \text{otherwise} \end{cases},$$

where N_i is the number of matches for treatment school *i*. By construction, $\sum_j w_{ij}^{c} = 1$ for all *i*.

A control school may match to multiple treatment schools in the same cohort. Thus, the final weight for each control school *j* for cohort *c* is $W_j^c = \sum_i w_{ij}^c$. By construction, the sum of W_j^c across all control schools and cohorts equals 34 (i.e., the number of treatment schools in the analysis sample).

Assessing Matching Results

We assess the performance of our matching procedure in Table 7.1 and in Figures S.1 and S.2 and Tables S.1 and S.2 in the supplemental annex. As the figures show, the matched control schools are highly similar to the treatment schools in terms of predicted outcomes. They are also very similar in terms of *observed* outcomes in the pretreatment period, even though the matching procedure does not directly target these values.

Table 7.1 shows that treatment schools and matched control schools are very similar on a variety of school characteristics in the pretreatment period. Out of 19 characteristics we examine (not including the grade level of a school), there are no statistically significant differences between treatment and matched control schools at the 5-percent level. The only differences that are statistically significant at the 10-percent level are the share

of students who are Hispanic and the share of students who are Black; students in treatment schools are less likely to be Hispanic and more likely to be Black. Table 7.1 also confirms that the treatment schools are much more similar to the 132 matched control schools than the 512 unmatched control schools. Table S.1 in the supplemental annex shows that treatment and matched control schools are also similar within cohorts.

Supplemental annex Table S.2 shows comparisons of pretreatment characteristics between treatment and matched control schools in standard deviation units. Of the 19 differences we check, only the differences between the shares of Hispanic and Black students exceed 0.25 SD (the threshold recommended by the What Works Clearinghouse [What Works Clearinghouse, undated]). All other differences, other than one, are less than 0.10 SD.

Estimating the Impacts of CSI

Estimating Cohort-Specific Impacts

To estimate impacts, we restrict the analytic sample to treatment schools in the first three CSI cohorts and their matched control schools. We exclude all data from the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 school years because of the disruptions and irregularities that the COVID-19 pandemic caused. In our prespecified, primary specification, we further exclude data from the earliest posttreatment years to allow sufficient time for program effects to materialize. For attendance- and discipline-related outcomes, we exclude the first year of posttreatment data. For test score outcomes, we exclude the first two years.

To isolate the causal effects of CSI adoption, we use a difference-in-differences design. First, we estimate impacts separately by cohort. Then, we combine the cohort-specific estimates into a single overall estimate. In practice, we estimate a single stacked model with all three cohorts. However, we could have estimated a standard two-way fixed effects model separately for each cohort and then aggregated the cohort-specific estimates. It is instructive to first describe our methods in the context of the more traditional single-cohort model:

$$Y_{it} = \beta\left[Treat_i \times Post_t\right] + \alpha_i + \theta_t + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{A.1}$$

where Y_{it} is an outcome for school i in year t, $Treat_i$ is an indicator for being a treatment school, $Post_t$ is an indicator for the posttreatment period (which would be redefined for each cohort), α_i is a vector of school fixed effects, and θ_t is a vector of school year fixed effects.

We weight school-level observations by the number of students with non-missing data for each outcome. (For control schools, we multiply this number by the school's cohort-specific matching weight, W_j^c.) Standard errors are clustered at the school level. For each outcome, we calculate a counterfactual mean for treatment schools by subtracting the impact estimate by the average outcome across all treatment schools in the relevant posttreatment years. We also estimate minimum detectable effects for 80-percent statistical power at a 95-percent confidence level by multiplying the standard errors by 2.8.

After obtaining cohort-specific impact estimates, we take a weighted average of the estimates and conduct inference on this average. Accurate inference requires that we account for control schools that match in more than one cohort. Practically, the simplest way to do this is by estimating cohort-specific impacts in a single model. We therefore construct a "stacked" dataset in which each stack contains treatment schools from a particular cohort and the control schools that match to those treatment schools. If a control school matches in more than one cohort, it appears in multiple stacks. Using this dataset, the model we estimate in practice is

$$
\begin{aligned}
Y_{itc} = {} & 1_{\{c=1\}} \cdot \left\{\beta_1 \left[Treat_i \times Post_t^1\right] + \alpha_i^1 + \theta_t^1\right\} \\
& + 1_{\{c=2\}} \cdot \left\{\beta_2 \left[Treat_i \times Post_t^2\right] + \alpha_i^2 + \theta_t^2\right\} \\
& + 1_{\{c=3\}} \cdot \left\{\beta_3 \left[Treat_i \times Post_t^3\right] + \alpha_i^3 + \theta_t^3\right\} + \varepsilon_{itc},
\end{aligned}
\tag{A.2}
$$

where $1_{\{c=x\}}$ equals 1 for treatment schools in cohort x and for control schools matched to cohort x treatment schools. Otherwise, it equals 0. This stacked model obtains the same estimates for β_1, β_2, and β_3 as would be obtained by estimating Equation A.1 separately for each cohort, but it also obtains the covariance structure necessary for aggregating the three estimates.

Combining Cohort-Specific Estimates

We combine the cohort-specific impact estimates ($\hat{\beta}_1$, $\hat{\beta}_2$, and $\hat{\beta}_3$) into a single overall impact estimate using weights proportional to student enrollment in treatment schools. Let $\mathcal{T}_c$ denote the set of all treatment schools in cohort c. Define E_i as the mean enrollment for treatment school i across all posttreatment years. The cohort-level weight is then

$$
\omega_c = \frac{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{T}_c} E_i}{\sum_{i \in \mathcal{T}_1} E_i + \sum_{i \in \mathcal{T}_2} E_i + \sum_{i \in \mathcal{T}_3} E_i}.
$$

By construction, we have $\sum_c \omega_c = 1$. Note, also, that cohorts are weighted only by their sizes, not by the number of years of posttreatment data available.

We define the overall impact of CSI adoption as

$$
\beta_{overall} = \sum_c \omega_c \beta_c.
$$

The estimates in Tables 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 are estimates of $\beta_{overall}$. Given our weighting scheme, $\beta_{overall}$ should be interpreted as the average impact on students in the first three CSI cohorts. To estimate standard errors, we use the variance of each cohort-specific point estimate and the covariances between cohort-specific estimates from the stacked difference-in-differences model.

Conducting Internal Validity Checks

Our difference-in-differences design relies on a *parallel trends* assumption, which is that average outcomes for treatment and control schools would have evolved in parallel absent CSI adoption. We find supporting evidence for this assumption using plots of raw outcome trends and event study plots. Note that these plots examine trends separately by cohort because the cohorts are missing data (as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic) in different years relative to CSI adoption.

Panels A and B of Figure 7.1 show that treatment and matched control schools were trending very similarly in terms of test scores prior to CSI adoption. Furthermore, they were also highly similar in levels, lending additional credibility to the parallel trends assumption. In Panel C, chronic absenteeism is nearly identical in trends and levels between cohorts 1 and 2. On the other hand, there is reason for some concern about parallel trends for absenteeism in cohort 3 because absenteeism rates rose faster in non-CSI schools than in CSI schools prior to CSI adoption.

Figure S.3 in the supplemental annex formally assesses parallel trends with event study plots. To create this figure, we estimate a fully dynamic version of Equation A.1 for each cohort. The pretreatment coefficients are virtually all statistically indistinguishable from 0, and visual inspection shows little evidence of nonparallel trends prior to treatment. The main exception is absenteeism trends in cohort 3, as just mentioned. However, it is not clear how any difference in the preexisting trend of increasing chronic absenteeism during the pandemic would be expected to play out in the period following the pandemic.

Separate from parallel trends, our analysis might not capture the intended estimand if CSI adoption changes the composition of students in treatment schools. If CSI adoption causes some students to leave CSI schools or some to enroll in them, then our estimates might conflate changes in student demographics with impacts on student learning and behavior. To test this possibility, we estimate Equation A.2 with a variety of student demographics as outcome variables, obtaining small and statistically insignificant estimates that suggest no impact on school composition (see supplemental annex Table S.4).

Conducting Robustness Checks

Finding supporting evidence for our identification assumptions, we next assess whether our main results are sensitive to different methodological choices we could have made. We find generally similar results across the three supplemental analyses we consider.

First, we reestimate impacts after adding time-varying school covariates (e.g., the share of students who are Black) to our base model (see supplemental annex Table S.5). This specification produces results almost identical to those from our primary specification, suggesting that baseline imbalances between CSI and matched control schools are unlikely to influence our findings. (We did not prespecify this model as our primary one because time-varying school demographics could theoretically have been affected by CSI adoption.)

Second, we reestimate impacts using outcomes from all posttreatment years instead of omitting the earliest posttreatment years (see supplemental annex Table S.6). All things equal, we would expect this shift to attenuate our impact estimates because we hypothesize—and prior research (Covelli, Engberg, and Opper, 2026) suggests—that CSI's impacts on students emerge gradually over time. Consistent with this hypothesis, though possibly occurring by random chance, our impact estimates for test scores and chronic absenteeism are directionally smaller in this specification.

Lastly, we reestimate impacts using an alternative weighting scheme that does not weight schools by student enrollment (see supplemental annex Table S.7). We do, however, continue to use W_j^c weights that account for treatment schools potentially matching with multiple control schools. This approach effectively asks an alternative research question: Instead of examining the average effect of CSI on *students*, it examines the average effect of CSI on *schools*. When we use this specification, estimates of test score impacts remain statistically insignificant and are directionally smaller. The adverse impact estimate for chronic absenteeism is slightly larger (2.6 percentage points) and remains statistically significant ($p = 0.010$). These results are exploratory, as they do not come from prespecified, confirmatory hypotheses. However, they indicate that our confirmatory findings are robust to at least one alternative model specification.

Abbreviations

ANA	assets and needs assessment
AP	Advanced Placement
CAASPP	California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress
CCSPP	California Community Schools Partnership Program
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSI	Community Schools Initiative
CSIT	community school implementation team
ELA	English language arts
ELT	expanded learning time
ESL	English as a second language
HS	high school
K–12	kindergarten through grade 12
LAUSD	Los Angeles Unified School District
N/A	not applicable
PBL	project-based learning
PSA	pupil services and attendance
SD	standard deviations
UC/CSU	University of California/California State University
UTLA	United Teachers Los Angeles

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