

Communities In Schools of Greenville

Integrated Student Support Services

What is the community challenge?

OnTrack Greenville middle schools located in the White Horse Community of Greenville County, South Carolina serve a higher proportion of low-income and minority students than other middle schools in the district. Overall, students attending these four schools have placed behind their peers in key academic measures of attendance, behavior, and course performance. These early warning indicators of disengagement in middle school are connected to increased risks of high school dropout (Balfanz & Fox, 2011).

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund
Intervention: Integrated Student Support Services
Subgrantee: Communities In Schools of Greenville
Intermediary: United Way of Greenville County
Focus Area: Youth Development
Focus Population: Middle school youth
Community Served: White Horse Community of Greenville County, SC

What is the promising solution?

To help improve student academic outcomes, Communities In Schools of Greenville (CIS) provided tiered, individualized support services to students. At each treatment school site, the grade-level CIS Student Support Specialists worked with assistant principals and the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) team to identify, case-manage, and monitor students needing services. Each Student Support Specialist case-managed a targeted group of 10–30 students who were identified as at-risk and needing support outside of the classroom. These students received intensive one-on-one support, home visits, after-school opportunities, and other services and interventions necessary to help them meet their personal and academic goals.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of CIS's Integrated Student Support Services by the Riley Institute at Furman University began in 2016 and finished reporting in 2019. An implementation evaluation examined model fidelity and provided feedback for quality improvement. To assess if students who participated in CIS demonstrated improved attendance, behavior, and course performance, the impact study utilized a single-site, non-randomized group design with groups formed by propensity score matching. Treatment students were matched to: (1) other students in the treatment schools who did not participate in the intervention; (2) other students in the same school district; and (3) to other students attending Title I schools across the state of South Carolina.

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund, United Way of Greenville County engaged an independent evaluator to conduct an evaluation of CIS's Integrated Student Support Services. Key findings include:

- CIS implemented the program with fidelity. At the end of each year, Student Support Specialists across the four sites were positive about their implementation of the five elements of case management.
- The report includes promising findings suggesting the program may produce positive results for student relationships with teachers and caring adults, an exploratory secondary outcome.
- However, for key outcomes, including attendance, behavior, and course performance, results varied greatly by academic year, comparison group, and type of behavioral incident. Overall, there were more statistically significant negative results than positive results.

Notes on the evaluation

The report includes several possible explanations for the negative behavioral findings when examining matched students at treatment schools. First, OnTrack Greenville treatment schools were simultaneously implementing other school-wide policies aimed at improving student behavior. Further, the significant negative behavioral findings for in-school matches may be related to missing data on student participation in other OnTrack Greenville interventions. The small sample size also resulted in researchers setting a very broad definition of treatment. Students were included in the treatment group if they were enrolled in Tier II or Tier III support services during academic year 2016-17 or 2017-18. The report also posits that the primary barrier to achieving a moderate level of evidence was the shortened timeframe of the impact study. Originally, the impact study of CIS was designed to cover four academic years. With the loss of Social Innovation Fund continuation funding, researchers executed a contingency plan to conclude the impact study after only two years. These important student impacts in attendance, behavior, and course performance are long-term in nature and it is possible the shorter study timeline did not allow researchers enough of an opportunity to examine the long-term effects of participation in the program.

How is Communities In Schools of Greenville using the evaluation findings to improve?

Local leaders have committed to funding the initiative and evaluation for the final two years of the project in the absence of Social Innovation Fund continuation funding. If these barriers are mitigated in the next two years, it is possible that this study ultimately will achieve a moderate level of evidence. Researchers intend to conduct additional analyses to assess if long-term participation in CIS leads to improved student outcomes in attendance, behavior, and course performance over time. In addition, CIS of Greenville recently scaled to serve students attending a high school in the White Horse Community feeder pattern. It is possible that researchers will be able to study a small number of students transitioning to high school to assess additional long-term exposure to the program model.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Single-site non-randomized group design with groups formed by propensity score matching

Study Population: Middle school youth

Independent Evaluator: The Riley Institute at Furman University and the SERVE Center at UNC Greensboro

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.



The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.