A photograph of a teacher and two young students in a classroom. The teacher, a woman with long brown hair, is smiling and looking at a tablet. Two young girls are leaning in, also smiling and looking at the tablet. The background shows a colorful bulletin board with various drawings and papers. The overall mood is positive and collaborative.

What Illinois Stands to Lose:

The Impact of Federal Funding Cuts on Community Schools

ACTNOW

Afterschool for Children & Teens



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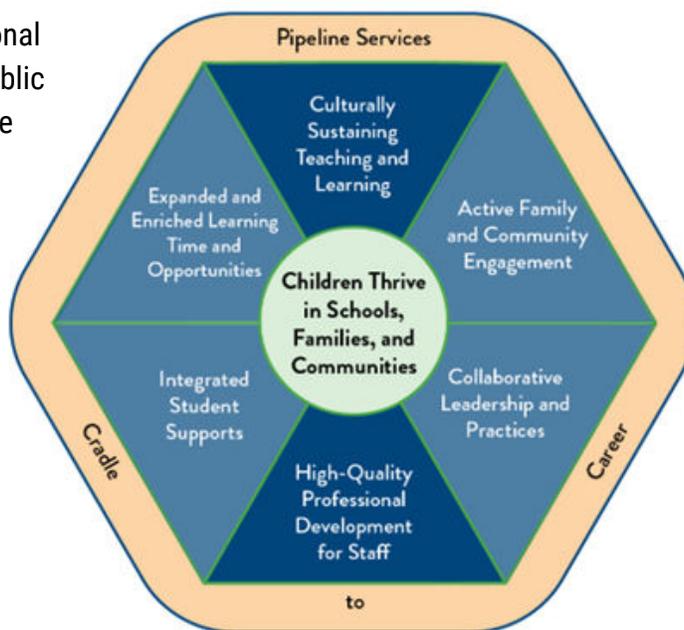
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction
3	Economic Impact
8	Community Health Impacts
12	Academic Impact
15	Conclusion
16	References

INTRODUCTION

Illinois cannot afford to treat Community Schools as optional enhancements; they are a foundational strategy for reversing post-pandemic academic decline, stabilizing families, and strengthening the state’s long-term educational and economic health. Decades of research, and now early data from Illinois’ own Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grants, demonstrate that when schools integrate academic supports with coordinated social, emotional, and family-focused services, student outcomes improve measurably, even in high-need contexts. At a moment when chronic absenteeism has reached crisis levels, achievement gaps are widening, and youth mental health needs continue to rise, dismantling this infrastructure is shortsighted and undermines an effective approach to ensuring students can learn, families can work, and communities can thrive.

The **Community School** model is a transformational school improvement strategy that reimagines public schools as the hub of their communities and core components of local infrastructure. Through the four foundational pillars of the community school strategy—integrated student supports, expanded learning opportunities, collaborative leadership, and family engagement—schools aim to eliminate barriers to learning by integrating school and community assets to promote whole-child, school, and community well-being.

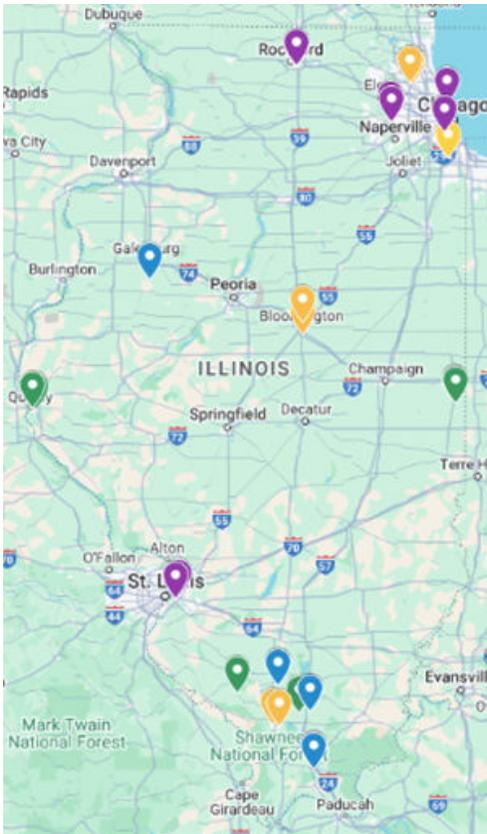


Illinois' model for Full-Service Community Schools

Community Schools provide services across a broad range of needs, including out-of-school time (OST), adult and family learning opportunities, physical and mental health supports, food access initiatives, social service coordination, and other resources designed to reflect the strengths and needs of each school's students, families, and neighborhoods.

As Illinois’ statewide afterschool and Community Schools network, [Afterschool for Children and Teens Now \(ACT Now\)](#) is the recipient of two Full-Service Community Schools State-Scaling grants from the United States Department of Education (ED), making it the most endowed Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grantee in the nation. One grant serves nine rural districts, while the other serves eight urban and suburban districts, supporting a total of 32 Full-Service Community Schools.

Although Community Schools in Illinois long predate these grants—tracing their origins to Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago, established in 1889 and recognized widely as the first modern American community school (Benson et al., 2009)—the FSCS initiative created an unprecedented opportunity to scale the model statewide.



A map of Illinois’ FSCS partner schools across the Urban (purple), Suburban (gold), Rural Green (green), and Rural Blue (blue) cohorts

The grants provided seed funding to interested schools and robust technical assistance to build sustainable practices and systems of support that could be adapted for all Community Schools across Illinois. Grant implementation began in the 2024-25 school year and has demonstrated significant growth, even in its first year.

Despite these promising initial results, on December 12, 2025, ACT Now received two Notices of Non-Continuation from ED, terminating its existing FSCS State-Scaling grants effective December 31, 2025. Although ACT Now submitted formal requests for reconsideration within the required timeframe, both were denied, prompting the organization to file a lawsuit alleging procedural defects in the termination process.

As of February 2026, ED has granted ACT Now a temporary extension with limited carryover funding, calculated on a per-day basis, while negotiations and litigation remain ongoing. While this short-term extension has prevented the complete dissolution of the project, it has still produced significant and deeply felt disruptions across schools statewide.

The elimination of Community School initiatives produces immediate and measurable harm:

- Families lose essential childcare and OST supports
- Employers face sudden caregiver absenteeism
- Youth experience gaps in supervision, academic support, and enrichment during critical after-school hours
- Public systems absorb increased strain related to safety, health, and social services

These impacts quickly ripple throughout neighborhoods, destabilizing entire communities in real time. ACT Now’s network exemplifies the scale of what is at stake—serving 32 schools and approximately 19,000 students, any loss of funding would be felt immediately across entire communities as a system-level shock. Without sustained investment, the foundational infrastructure that the FSCS grants were awarded to build—and which schools are only beginning to develop—risks being dismantled at a pivotal moment in Illinois’ post-pandemic educational and community recovery.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Illinois families face twin challenges of unaffordability (Stephens & Perry, 2025) and higher unemployment rates than the national average (Bandoch & Josko, 2026). FSCS partner schools felt this economic reality—70 percent of students served by the FSCS grant qualify as low-income, compared to the 50 percent state average (Illinois State Board of Education, 2025). ACT Now’s partner schools seek to address these economic challenges with services that directly bolster the workforce of today and tomorrow through high-quality afterschool care and Career and Technical Education (CTE).

By providing consistent, high-quality care during out-of-school hours, Community Schools enable parents and caregivers to participate fully and reliably in the workforce, reduce absenteeism, and stabilize household income. Whereas CTE programs equip students with the credentials and connections needed to succeed in the workforce. Collectively, cuts to FSCS funding pose an immense threat to current and future economic well-being for ACT Now’s partner schools and their communities. The following sections describe these imminent economic harms through the lens of Illinois’ current and future workforce.



CAREGIVER WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

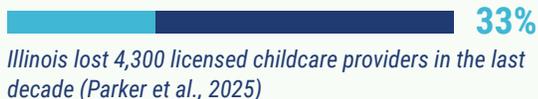
The impact of rescinded Community School funding in Illinois injures communities across the state as they begin to see disrupted participation in the workforce due to the loss of afterschool programs at nearly every partner site. Community Schools are characterized by expanded learning opportunities, meaning that afterschool programs are a core part of the services offered.

As of January 7th, 2026, approximately 150 afterschool programs were discontinued across school districts served by ACT Now. Consequently, parents and caregivers are left with no choice but to leave work early, reduce hours, and miss shifts to supervise children as they struggle with the sudden need for private childcare or informal care arrangements. Without the availability of consistent, safe spaces for children to reside until 5:00 PM, it is estimated that parents miss nearly ten days of work—this results in an annual economic loss of up to \$300 billion due to decreased worker productivity (Sekhar, 2024).

More than 50 percent of the country live in “childcare deserts,” or “areas with three or more children having to compete for every licensed childcare slot” (Reaves et al., 2025; Malik et al. 2018).

Illinois has high concentrations of childcare deserts, as there was a 33 percent decline in childcare services over the past decade (Parker et al., 2025). This has had profound effects on the economy as families experience lapses in employment because of a lack of access to reliable childcare or transportation to it (Marrow et al., 2022).

Decline in Childcare Services in IL



An administrator from Lincoln and Lake Louise Elementary Schools (Palatine) stated:

“The loss of FSCS funding led to the elimination of 12 essential staff...directly impacting afterschool staff who provide care for more than 80 students. As a result, over 100 caregivers within Palatine are now without reliable childcare and are more likely to face employment obstacles due to childcare costs and constraints. The program previously enabled parents to maintain employment that could otherwise be unavailable and allowed children to flow in and out of care before and after school—a convenience that was especially critical for families without cars or reliable transportation.”

With recent announcements of federal withholdings of family and childcare assistance funds from Illinois (Schencker, 2026), it can be assumed that the strained relationship between afterschool programming and the workforce will be exacerbated as the financial burden continues to debilitate households—especially those who are already experiencing economic instability.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL WORKFORCE

In addition to affecting parents’ and caregivers’ ability to work, ongoing reductions in Community School programming have triggered widespread layoffs across program staff, educators, and contracted service providers. These effects disproportionately impact employees who are reliant on hourly or shift-based workers. At present, 227 positions funded through ACT Now have been laid off or are in the process of being reassigned.

Layoffs have had a particularly devastating impact on Herrin, Illinois, as all affected staff are residents with limited alternative employment options. With the area’s unemployment rate already exceeding the national average, displaced workers face significant barriers to securing comparable positions or salaries, compounding the economic strain on both families and the broader community.



“Without this funding, the same issue reemerges—students meeting with a new social worker—disrupting once again the continuity of care and diminishing trust between students and their families with the school district. To even pause funding means a loss of time to support our students. Rehiring laid-off staff would take at least two months, and this gap would further delay care and services, only causing an increased risk of unmet needs escalating into academic, behavioral, or attendance issues.”

-Leaders at Herrin Junior High
Herrin, IL

The loss of experienced afterschool educators, site coordinators, youth counselors, and specialists has and will continue to cause irrevocable harm to communities big and small, as these types of workers often tend to leave the field entirely for more stable sectors (Pazer, 2024; Bryant et al., 2023). Even so, the likelihood of securing new employment remains low, as current labor market conditions are increasingly constrained, with job openings declining nationally to historic lows (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025).

Furthermore, the reality is that the effectiveness of Community Schools relies heavily on trust and community relationships that take years to rebuild. Administrators across multiple sites reported deep concerns about declining trust and morale, not only within their schools but throughout their surrounding communities. A representative from Quincy Junior High (Quincy) captures the shared experience of schools currently facing staffing losses—and the challenges they anticipate as they navigate ongoing layoffs:



“This instability has also undermined efforts to build buy-in and trust around the Community Schools framework. The combination of increased pressure, accelerated timelines, and damaged trust has made it difficult to maintain morale and foster collaborative relationships essential to the success of this endeavor.”

For many schools, the combined loss of institutional knowledge, sustained staffing shortages, and erosion of trust has produced consequences that cannot be easily reversed. The destabilization of afterschool staffing directly disrupts workforce participation for both displaced employees and the families who rely on these programs to maintain consistent employment. As trusted educators and coordinators exit the field, communities lose not only essential care infrastructure but also the economic stability it enables. While these disruptions are immediately felt, their effects compound over time, undermining community economic resilience long after funding ends. These dynamics force local governments to absorb higher costs as revenues decline, locking communities across Illinois into an intergenerational cycle of economic strain that is increasingly difficult to break.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Outside of the immediate impact of childcare for working caregivers, the economic impact of the loss of FSCS will be felt for years to come as communities face a disruption of workforce development initiatives like Career and Technical Education (CTE). CTE programs are special pathways that serve a broad range of students, from middle schoolers to adults, to work toward credentials in fields experiencing job growth, including nursing, teaching, technology, business, and construction. These programs are an evidence-based strategy that bridges the connection between secondary and postsecondary education by promoting student outcomes and career success (Lindsay et al., 2024; Dougherty, 2016). These programs are particularly important for students who may not have access to viable career pathways that promote economic mobility and long-term stability.

74% of partners
reported being
unable to
start or
continue
CTE services

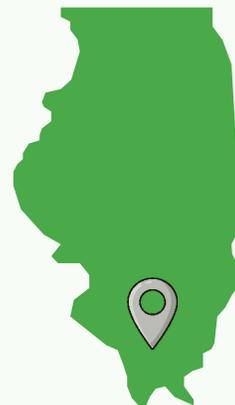


in communities throughout Illinois

As of January 21st, 2026, 74 percent of partner schools were unable to start or continue initiatives that help students and caregivers prepare for the workforce or post-secondary education. This number includes every high school that receives funds from this grant, where students are at the most critical stage for strengthening college and career connections. The suspension of FSCS funding has affected the ability of partner schools to operate or grow their CTE programs, depriving their students of key opportunities and local businesses of workforce development opportunities.

HERRIN HIGH SCHOOL

Leaders at Herrin High School (Herrin) shared that they will lose not only their newly hired Career Coaches, but also the staff who maintained College and Career Pathway Endorsements with the state's board of education, a significant administrative burden. The school's progress toward endorsements for two new pathways in automotive technology and business will be halted. A staff member discussed the implications of these personnel changes, noting that their **"CTE programs would be demolished."**

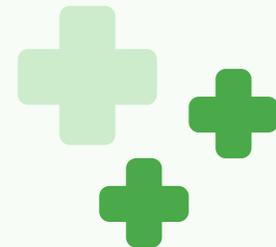




TRICO HIGH SCHOOL

Trico High School (Campbell Hill) faces particularly severe consequences from the funding cuts, with the community bracing for significant collective loss following CTE programming reductions. With additional FSCS funding, they just developed a new pathway for future Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) in partnership with Sparta Community Hospital. When surveyed, 20 percent of its student body indicated an interest in careers in healthcare. CNAs and other non-degree healthcare workers are in high demand due to the US's aging population, and are some of the more secure, well-paid entry-level

jobs (Illinois Workforce Demand, 2025; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). **"A lot of our kids are interested in healthcare because healthcare opens a door in Southern Illinois,"** says Trico staff, **"to be a CNA gets those kids the first step in the door of working in the hospital."** Unfortunately, this program has ended in large part because of prolonged uncertainty about the future of FSCS funding.



The Trico community witnessed firsthand the tangible impact of strong CTE programs on individual student success and the strength of the local economy. Students are simultaneously learning real-life skills to apply in school and for future careers, and to give back to the community. One Trico staff member notes that **"for every one dollar that's spent on a Full-Service Community School student, three dollars [are] reinvested into our community. When you're a small rural community, that's big...we're showcasing [for] our students that it's possible for you to stay here...and make the impact on your community."**

Trico staff highlighted that students have the opportunity to graduate with guaranteed employment in stable, high-demand industries. This is particularly significant given that the school serves a predominantly low-income population, with 100 percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Staff underscored the transformative impact of expanding access to these career pathways, emphasizing the potential for upward mobility. As one staff member noted, when students from the Trico area are assured employment, they are better positioned to break cycles of generational limitation and create new opportunities for themselves and their families.

Overall, CTE programs across Illinois will be affected significantly by the loss of FSCS funding. The enduring impact is twofold as students risk losing critical skills and pathways to stable employment, while local economies lose a pipeline of skilled workers, limiting small business growth. These disruptions weaken workforce development and have long-term generational effects on community economic stability.

COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPACTS

Across the country, public health challenges are undermining the success and futures of schools and communities. In 2025, Illinois ranked 28th in the country for overall health indicators, with an especially high rate of preventable hospitalizations (America's Health Rankings, 2025). Full-Service Community Schools play a critical role in stabilizing the health of communities by addressing barriers through social interventions and wraparound services. In the current economic climate, these services are vital community infrastructure that helps families remain resilient.



FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity is a pressing public health issue linked with higher rates of physical and mental health concerns (Thomas, Lammert & Beverly, 2021). Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of food insecurity experienced by Illinois residents soared to roughly 12 percent within the past two years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). Communities in rural Illinois are uniquely impacted by this phenomenon as scheduled public transportation is almost nonexistent, making reliable access to food a near impossibility (Gray & Bhairy, 2024).

ACT Now serves 16 rural schools, all of which provide their communities with programs and services meant to provide nutritious meals to food-insecure families. A recent internal survey found that 78 percent of school partners, including those in rural communities, anticipate an imminent elimination in food and nutrition resources as a result of FSCS funding cuts. These programs include everything from the provision of meals during afterschool programs, to summer meal pick up or delivery, mobile food pantries open to the community, and “snack packs” sent home on the weekends.

78% of partners
reported an
imminent loss
of food and
nutrition
resources



Notably, Vienna Grade School (Vienna), Pine Crest Elementary (Georgetown), and Trico Junior High School (Campbell Hills) allocated funding towards initiatives that directly give community members access to food, clothing, and hygiene resources. The communities surrounding these schools all face increasing rates of unemployment (Illinois Workforce Demand, 2025), only further emphasizing the necessity of FSCS funding to mitigate the harmful effects of economic instability throughout Illinois.

Since the notice of discontinuation, approximately 193 programs and services that provide children and their communities with food have been abruptly cut. These cuts immediately inflict lasting damage by destabilizing family routines, increasing health and developmental risks for children, and overwhelming already-strained local food systems. The trust, infrastructure, and partnerships required to deliver consistent nutrition are difficult to sustain by schools, leaving communities with enduring susceptibility to food insecurity.

PHYSICAL HEALTHCARE

In addition to preventative initiatives like the food and nutrition programs mentioned in the previous section, FSCS partner schools provided a wide array of physical healthcare services in the school building, as well as coordination of specialist care. These services are vital given that families face significant barriers in accessing healthcare services. According to a 2025 Gallup poll, Illinois ranked 34th in the country for access to healthcare. FSCS partner schools have mobilized to meet their communities' needs for healthcare access.

If funding is lost, 67 percent of partner schools will be without programming aimed at improving community health and wellness. These services are critical for preventative care, chronic condition management, and overall student well-being. Without coordinated physical health support, students face increased health risks, which can ultimately affect attendance, academic performance, and long-term health outcomes.

For Community Schools, healthcare services vary to address local realities and needs. These services include on-site vision and hearing screenings, vaccination clinics, mobile primary care services, and more.

ABINGDON-AVON HIGH SCHOOL

A key service in the planning phase is now threatened at Abingdon-Avon High School (Abingdon): **“Eagle View mobile dental clinic... would have provided cleanings, exams, fillings, and extractions during the school day. This service could have eliminated major barriers such as transportation, time off work, and long wait times for families.”** Oral healthcare is often overlooked and difficult to access, but it is a pivotal part of an individual's overall well-being. It's very difficult to focus with a toothache—dental care offered by these partners at no cost or low cost is critical to ensuring that students stay healthy, present, and engaged in their learning. These services also benefit families who work.

68%
OF PARTNERS
REPORTED
**LOSS OF
PHYSICAL
HEALTHCARE
SERVICES**

67% of partner schools will be without programming aimed at improving community health and wellness



Many ACT Now partner schools, especially rural schools, are in healthcare deserts where families must travel long distances and endure long waits for primary and specialist care. In addition to broad challenges to health, this lack of care also means students miss out on school and sports when they don't have the required physicals and immunizations. The Trico School District (Campbell Hills) recognized this problem and partnered with Sparta Community Health to provide primary care onsite to students and community members for free, three days per week. However, hours for this clinic have already been reduced due to threats to funding.

“We have previously used funds to pay for specialized assessments, vision needs, dental needs, replacement glasses, and other medical needs not covered by insurance.”

-Staff at Fairview Elementary School
Normal, IL

Finally, Community Schools support access to healthcare even when they don't offer services on-site. Staff funded through the FSCS grant provide one-on-one care coordination for students and their families by finding practitioners, scheduling appointments, and even driving students and caregivers to medical visits. The FSCS grant also allows for funds to be used to pay directly for medical expenses. In so many ways, FSCS funds help to remove critical barriers to care—ensuring that students' health needs are met so they can fully engage in learning and thrive both in and out of the classroom. Now, all of this infrastructure is at risk of disappearing.



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Community Schools serve as trusted community hubs that aid in providing and coordinating socio-emotional health services for students and their families. Youth across the country are facing a growing mental health crisis, with rising rates of anxiety, depression, and behavioral challenges (Centers for Disease Control, 2024). Many students lack access to consistent, supportive environments where they can address these

needs safely—this has potential long-term effects on their socio-emotional and academic development (Woolfe, 2025).

Community Schools in our project have expanded on-site mental healthcare services for students, as well as, invested in community partnerships to strengthen referral networks. These services improve mental health outcomes (Sanchez et al., 2018) and may help promote academic performance (Agnafors, Barmark, & Sydsjo, 2021; Halpern-Manners et al., 2016) and prevent “juvenile delinquency” (Frederick-Ellis, 2022; Seiter, 2017).

CURIE HIGH SCHOOL

At Curie High School (Chicago), the school has become **“a rare safe haven where families feel secure enough to seek help.”** Staff emphasize that losing funding for student and parent programs would mean more than eliminating a budget line—it would mean losing **“the trust and the safety net that keeps this community whole.”** Without these supports, families risk losing their most reliable pathway to critical resources in an already complex system, at a time when students’ sense of safety is **“already under siege.”**

Many students who live in communities that habitually grapple with the realities of instability experience chronic stress, exposure to violence, and unaddressed trauma that, if left untreated, can manifest as behavioral challenges (Miller, 2023). Several FSCS schools used their funds to embed counseling, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed support within afterschool enrichment programs as preventative measures. Several school partners identified strategies to de-escalate risk and connect youth and families to appropriate care.

78% of partner schools will lose on-site mental health care services without FSCS funding



At Lincoln Elementary School (Palatine), staff reported that students “felt the effect immediately when the Bridge [program] was cut due to funding,” leaving 70 students without the individualized and group therapy they had relied on. One member of the community noted:

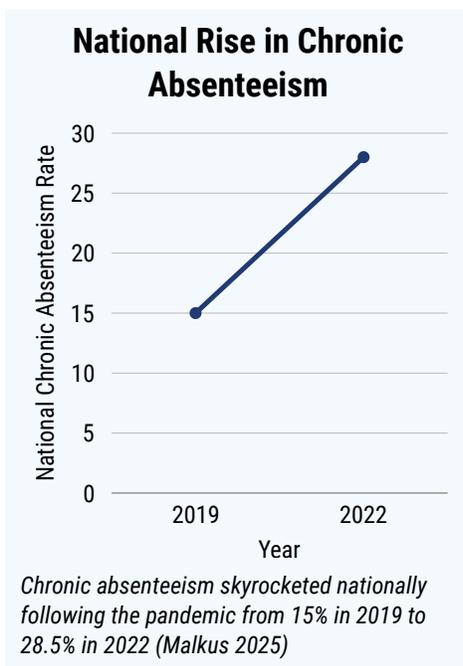
“As a parent [at Lincoln Elementary School], I have seen firsthand how this program has helped my child—who is not a straight-A student, star athlete, or among the most popular—feel that he has an important role and a meaningful place within his school. That, to me, is a significant and worthwhile achievement.”

Similarly, an administrator at James Avant Elementary School (East St. Louis) emphasized that their “students and families live in a high-poverty, high-need community where school-based wraparound services are not supplemental. They are essential.” Further, outside of structured behavioral health supports, enrichment programming helps to support students’ socio-emotional development. These examples highlight how the loss of funding for school-based supports directly removes critical mental health and wraparound services, undermining students’ and families’ well-being.

FSCS funding has enabled schools to serve as vital community hubs, offering resources, connection, learning, and stability while fostering family partnerships and whole-child development. Community Schools are critical entry points for preventative health services, combatting the growing youth mental health crisis. For many students and families facing complex safety challenges, these programs offer a vital safe haven—providing spaces to learn and grow—underscoring the essential role Community Schools play in protecting both the well-being and future of communities.

ACADEMIC IMPACT

At their core, Community Schools are schools with the purpose of supporting the whole child, integrating academic instruction with the social, emotional, and environmental conditions that enable students to learn. When there are sustained efforts to maintain a rich academic focus within Community Schools, students' learning outcomes are likely to improve. Research across the country demonstrates this positive academic improvement¹. Although outcomes vary across studies, reflecting differences in research design, local context, and implementation supports, the notable academic gains seen throughout these studies underscore the need to understand how and under what conditions Community Schools most effectively drive academic success.



Students' academic success in Illinois rests fundamentally on whether they feel safe, supported, and engaged at school – conditions that research consistently shows are among the strongest drivers of attendance, and ultimately, achievement. Accordingly, Illinois' academic outcomes must be understood within the broader ecosystem of school, neighborhood, and individual factors.

The UChicago Consortium on School Research highlights the link between the climate of schools and student attendance across Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and leverages the 5Essentials survey. Data suggest that students' sense of safety, strong student-teacher relationships, students' academic engagement, and robust teacher-parent relationships were even stronger predictors of student attendance than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, despite a national rise in chronic absenteeism from 15 percent of students in 2019 to more than 28 percent in 2022 (Malkus 2025), attendance remains just as strongly associated with GPA and standardized test performance, indicating that improving attendance will continue to yield academic growth (Allensworth et al., 2026). Taken together, this confirms that improving school climate is central to advancing academic recovery and long-term student success.

¹National evidence on Community School effectiveness:

- New York City: Chronic absenteeism decreased by 5.6 percentage points, and math and ELA scores improved over three years (Covelli et al., 2025).
- California (CCSPP): Math and ELA scores increased by 6% and 5% of a standard deviation, respectively, since 2021-22 (Swain et al., 2025).
- Maryland: Chronic absenteeism declined from 28.6% to 21.8% between 2020-21 and 2023-24 (Durham et al., 2024).

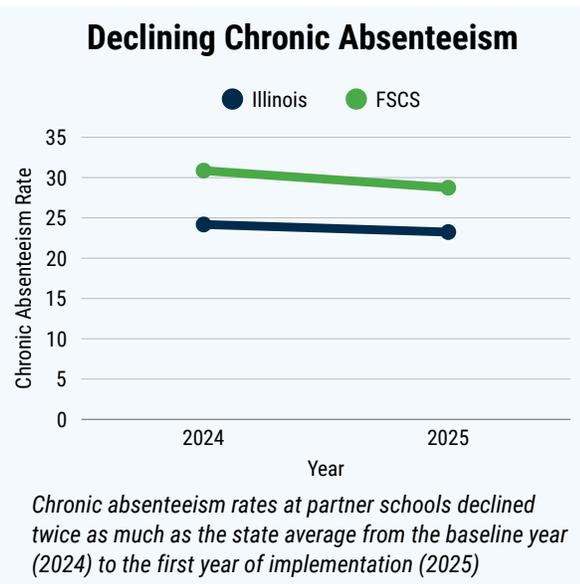
Students' sense of safety is now associated with a

4%

drop in adjusted absenteeism, as opposed to a 1% drop prior to the pandemic (Allensworth et al., 2026)

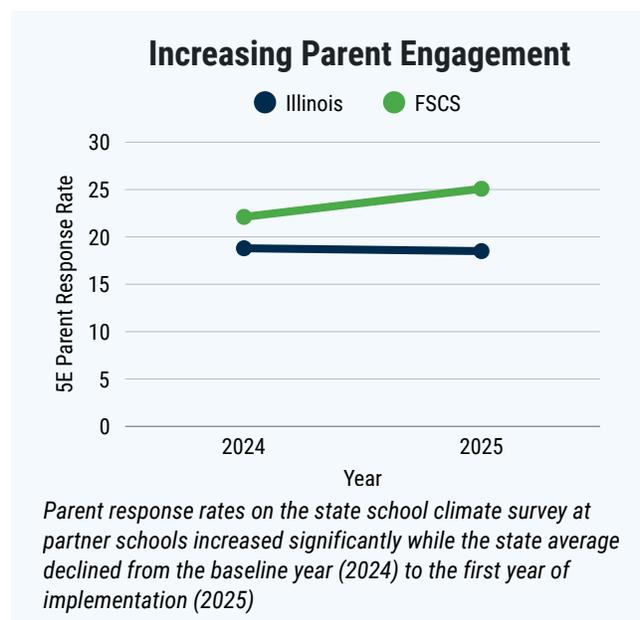
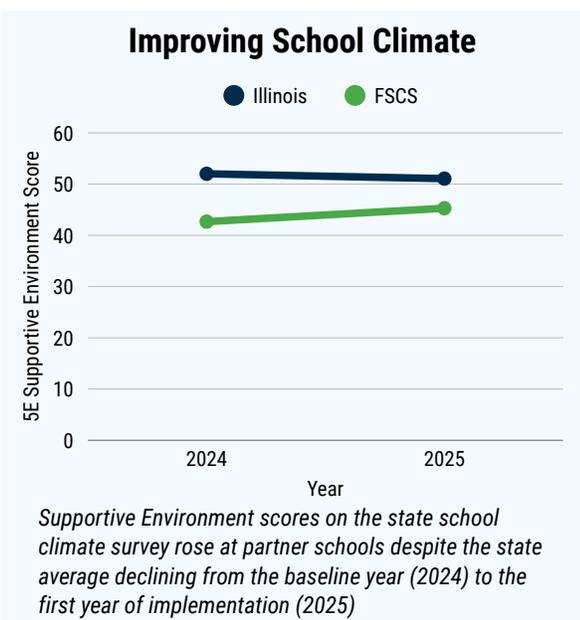
Within this framework, current Illinois Community Schools’ absenteeism and school climate data can be understood as early signals of future academic gains, even in schools facing the deepest challenges. ACT Now’s partner schools for the Full-Service Community Schools State-Scaling Grants were intentionally selected because they demonstrated both a strong readiness for transformational change and a significant level of need.

This need was clearly reflected in their 2024 baseline data—partner schools exhibited chronic absenteeism rates 6.68 percentage points higher than the state average and 5Essentials Supportive Environment scores 9.34 points lower than the state average. Despite this, partner schools have already shown meaningful early growth. In just their first year, partner schools exhibited a:



- **2.12 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism** from the baseline year, which is more than double the statewide reduction of 0.94 percentage points
- **2.61 point increase in the 5Essentials Supportive Environment score** compared with a 0.94-point statewide decline
- **2.97 percentage point increase in 5Essentials Parent Response rate** compared with a 0.30-percentage point statewide decrease

These marked improvements reflect gains in the precise conditions that have been established as foundational to later academic success.



However, the recent disruption in FSCS funding now jeopardizes both this progress and the immediate academic supports that underpin it. Schools have reported that funding challenges have impacted more than 80 in-house academic services that span literacy initiatives, mentorship programs, academic tutoring, and beyond. The impact of these academic supports are not just theoretical—they have been transformational for students’ academic progress on the site level.

JAMES AVANT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Students who participate in afterschool tutoring and enrichment at James Avant Elementary School (East St. Louis) have demonstrated improved outcomes. As one school leader noted, **“Without it, students and families would lose critical supports that address basic needs, academic growth, and social-emotional well-being—placing them at greater risk and undermining the significant progress our school has achieved.”**

The continuation of these programs is essential to sustaining student success and protecting the gains made in both learning and overall well-being.



ABINGDON-AVON MIDDLE SCHOOL

For many schools—particularly in rural communities—FSCS funding represents the only source of academic and enrichment support beyond the school day. As one staff member from Abingdon Avon Middle School (Abingdon) explained, **“Because our school does not have a 21st Century [Community Learning Centers] program, students no longer have any after-school options, leaving families without safe, structured care and students without academic or enrichment support.”** Without this funding, students lose critical opportunities to extend their learning, and families lose access to consistent, high-quality programming that reinforces learning and supports positive youth development.



DU QUOIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The impact of losing afterschool supports will not be felt equally, disproportionately affecting students whose parents work outside of school hours or lack the educational background to assist with homework. As a staff member at Du Quoin Elementary School (Du Quoin) explained, **“[Many families] work until at least five o’clock... The children wouldn’t have adults at home to help with homework... so academics will hurt in the long run for our school.”** In the absence of structured academic support beyond the school day, these students face compounded barriers to success, widening achievement gaps, and undermining long-term academic progress.

Altogether, it's clear that the loss of FSCS funding interrupts evidence-based approaches to academic achievement that have paved the way for student success, in both the short and long term. Partner schools' progress in just one year at both the site level and project level has been astounding and shows what Community Schools can do, especially in high-need communities. But it's these same communities that are most vulnerable when critical supports are removed, widening educational disparities and interrupting post-pandemic academic recovery. Sustained investment is therefore essential to not only preserve the progress already made but to ensure that all Illinois students, regardless of zip code, have the conditions they need to thrive in school and in life.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the loss of Full-Service Community School (FSCS) funding brings widespread harm to Illinois communities. The Community School Framework is uniquely designed to implement programs that address critical neighborhood barriers, ranging from basic needs services to essential family supports, and its abrupt disruption removes the infrastructure that students, families, and educators rely on every day. While schools have already felt the immediate impact of program closures, staff layoffs, and diminished supports, the longer-term effects will be even more consequential—students will face increased academic and socio-emotional risks, families will face increased economic precarity, and communities will lose vital mechanisms that sustain workforce development and small business growth. Any reductions in community school funding, therefore, threaten not only enrichment opportunities but also the conditions that enable educational attainment, family stability, and the socioeconomic resilience of entire communities. Preserving FSCS investments is a necessary commitment to the social and economic well-being of Illinois as a whole, as well as to the education of the students this funding serves.

THANK YOU

We extend our sincere gratitude to the many FSCS partners whose leadership, collaboration, and on-the-ground insights made this report possible. In the face of significant funding challenges, you continue to serve as trailblazers—advancing innovative solutions, sustaining critical supports, and steadfastly championing the needs of students, families, and communities. We also appreciate the ongoing support from our fiscal sponsor Metropolitan Family Services who made our application for this grant and ongoing legal battle possible.

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