Community Schools Incentive Initiative

External Evaluation Report

Completed by: MN Associates, Inc.
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Introduction and Background

The *Community Schools Incentive Initiative (CSII) Grant Program* was launched in 2013-14 school year (SY) with the passage of the Community Schools Incentive Act of 2012 by the District of Columbia Council as a proven, effective approach to address system-wide challenges facing at-risk students attending public schools in the district. The legislation empowered the Mayor to "establish and administer the multiyear" program by awarding multiyear grants to eligible applicants to partner and establish no fewer than five new community schools with 1) a focus on mental health prevention and treatment, 2) to schools with at least 60% of the student body labeled as at-risk, and with the focus on improving student academic outcomes (DC Code § 38-754). Six community school partnerships were awarded, and the program was piloted in SY2013-14 at:

- DC Scholars at Stanton Elementary
- Edgewood/Brookland Family Support Collaborative Community School Consortium at Jefferson Academy and Amidon-Bowen Elementary School
- Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) Community Consortium
- Mount Pleasant Community Schools Consortium
- Partnership Achieve, and
- Roosevelt Community School.

In SY 2014-15, two more partnerships were awarded—Communities in Schools of the Nation's Capital and LAYC/Cardozo Community School.

About the Evaluation

The *CSII* legislation originally stipulated that a Community Schools Advisory Committee would meet at least annually to review and evaluate the annual progress of the *CSII* grant program and the award grantees. In place of an evaluation tool and annual reviews, and in consultation with Community Schools Advisory Board, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) shifted toward hiring a third-party evaluator to conduct an evaluation study of the program. In July 2016, OSSE contracted MN Associates, Inc. (MNA) to conduct an evaluation study and report on their findings by September 30. The evaluation was to look at both the implementation and the impact of the program. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent was *CSII* implemented as planned?

2. What were the promising practices?

3. What challenges did the grantees face during the implementation of *CSII* at the school sites?

4. What, if any, was the impact of the grant on the following academic outcomes:

    a. Improved student attendance

    b. Improved behavior at school

    c. Improved academic performance in reading and math, and

    d. Reduced dropout rates and improved graduation rates?

MNA utilized a mixed methods approach in tackling the evaluation of *CSII*. MNA relied on multiple sources of data to identify themes and trends. These sources included including document reviews; site visits to all eight grantees with observations and conversations with key OSSE staff, grantee staff, school staff, parents, students, and service providers at the sites and follow-up calls as needed; attendance at a CS Advisory Board meeting with subsequent conversations with advisory members; surveys, and other extant data. Details about the research approach of the evaluation are available in the **Appendix.**

All data collected over the course of the evaluation were aggregated and no personal identifiers were used in the report. Due to the small and select sample of participating grantees, findings should be considered exploratory, descriptive, and non-conclusive. Findings can only be ascribed as those pertaining to the participating grantees and thus further extrapolation of any data results are limited to the grantees and the *CSII* program.

About this Report

The remainder of this report discusses findings from the data collected over the course of evaluation, taken from July to September 2016. While the evaluation covers all three years of the six pilot grantees and the first year of implementation for the second-round grantees, most of the focus has been on the latest data available, which, with a few exceptions, was SY 2015-16. The findings are organized and reported in response to the research questions as described above.

To What Extent Was *CSII* Implemented as Planned?

OSSE IMPLEMENTATION

The program was implemented at two levels: at the OSSE and at the grantee level. At the OSSE level, the program was implemented as planned. OSSE monitored the program, with OSSE staff members conducting site visits mid-year and at the end of the school for the grant in in SY 2015-16. OSSE collected mid-year and end-of-year reports for each grantee. Coinciding with the report submissions, OSSE staff conducted site visit at the mid-year and end-of-year mark. OSSE provided technical assistance the grantee, and facilitating best practices across each site. The Advisory Board convened four times in SY 2015-16 and as of September 30, 2016, has convened once for SY 2016-17. For the end-of-year site visits, a few members of the Advisory Board joined in visits.

GRANTEE IMPLEMENTATION

In general, the *CSII* Program was implemented as planned at each of the grantee sites though with some varying degrees of implementation. Some of the variance resulted from the two rounds of grant awards. Other sources of the variance in degrees of implementation were the local contexts in which the grant was developed and enacted. As of the start of the SY 2016-17, all grantees have a Community Schools Coordinator (CSC) in place. Needs assessment have occurred periodically, and new partnerships have formed and new programs and activities have taken place as a result of the needs assessment. Grantees were expending funds as needed and monitoring their expenditures through OSSE's online Enterprise Grant Management System.

What Were the Promising *CSII* Practices?

Looking across all eight grantees, common promising practices—as well as localized promising practices—were observed. Both common and localized practices covered three domains: program activities, program processes and procedures, and overarching governance or organizing structure.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Home visits: Several of the grantee sites have either worked previously or are currently working with Flamboyan Foundation to help improve their school-parent/family ties. At least two grantees have conducted extensive home visits in which, teachers and school staff were trained to

engage students, parents, and family members of their students in open-ended dialogue in order for the teachers and school staff to get to know the students and their families better. Typically, the home visits are conducted in the students' residences, but parents and students may choose a neutral setting such as a local restaurant or café to have the visit. The purpose of the home visits is to build relationships outside the school setting. The home visits were typically held over the summer or during the early part of the year. For CS program staff and school faculty and staff, home visits have been successful ice-breakers. For one Latino parent, it demonstrated to her that the school cares about her child and her family and encouraged her to be involved, despite her limited English proficiency. Teachers have remarked that home visits have given them insights into their students' lives that they would otherwise not see. The home visits also have prompted early referrals to other services that the parents and their students can avail. Two *CSII* grantees in particular— ███████████ ███████████████—have been working to reach the goal of 100% home visits each school year. Last year they were within the 70 to 80% range.

Mental and physical health screening, referrals and services[1]: One of the key wrap-around services that the community schools provide is on-site mental, physical, and/or well-being care. Service referrals and services rendered all increased, particularly for mental health, in part because of the ease of having it on-site. One ███████████████ parent remarked how she really liked that her child can see the school mental health provider so easily, which helped cut down on her students absences. A school psychologist, who is in partnership with the school and provides services on-site at ████████, shared that because he sees the students on a regular basis, he is able to also share (within HIPAA and FERPA limits) and counsel teachers of the student when a positive or negative behavior may be expected.

Regular schoolwide activities that promote seat-time attendance: ███████████████ holds weekly, monthly and seasonal activities and celebrations at both ███████████████ ██████ campuses that engage students, parents, and teachers and incentivize students to show up to school on time. Coupled with a *Check and Connect* program that most of the grantees also subscribe, █████████████ some of the highest attendance rates in the district: 90.8% for the high school, 93.4% for the middle school, and 94.8% for the elementary school.

Neighborly engagements: For ████████, providing weekly backpacks of food for their lowest income students to take for the weekend in partnership with the *Blessings in a Backpack* program and Transitions Healthcare has bloomed into a true neighborhood engagement. The partnership facilitated relationships to build among residents and staff at the healthcare facility and

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[1] Physical screening for this report includes vision and dental care.

with the faculty, staff and students. Furthermore, a few parents of ███████████ students later secured employment at the facility. Another example is ████████████████████████████ The grantee uncovered as part of their needs assessment that there were no commercial laundromats in their schools' ward. Lack of clean school uniforms is a barrier to school attendance. Collaborative launched a laundry program (with a washer and dryer at each school campus)—at ███████████████ ████████████████████—that will allow students' families and neighborhood families to utilize the dedicated laundry room to meet their clothes washing needs.

Home-grown youth enrichment and development initiatives: Both ████████████ ██████████ have also supported homegrown activities and partners that aim to support youth development and address truancy and other attendance issues. ███████████ have partnered with Gearin' Up Bicycles, which cultivates experiential learning and self-confidence among at-risk students through the process of learning the skills of repairing bicycles. Similarly ███████ partnered with Oye Palaver Hut, Inc. to cultivate performing arts and culinary talents, and impart health and well-being through nutrition and exercise. Through the *CSII* grant ███████████ helped support one teacher's initiative to establish a positive character development program for boys, a Kings club. At ████████████████████████ high school site, a peer mentoring program has developed and grown in which upperclassmen mentor underclassmen. The peer mentors helped guide their "younger charges" away from negative behaviors, promoted positive behaviors, provided peer support and contributed to the school's community building. Peer mentors gained stature and self-confidence and self-efficacy through their mentorship. One peer mentee has been motivated to become a peer mentor once he becomes a junior.

PROGRAM PROCESSES

Data sharing MOUs: One of the challenges that will be covered later in this report involves accessing data. One promising practice emerging as a result of the grant program has been the formulation of memoranda of understanding (MOU) over data sharing. ███████ has instituted an MOU beginning with at the ████████████████████████████████████ — ████████████ ████████████████████████████—in order to receive timely, accurate and comprehensive information of students touched by the grant.

Participation in regular school team meetings: Grantee staff members from ████ ████████████ convened regularly with school teams responsible for attendance, behavior, etc., and coordinate activities and services accordingly to ensure that the students remain on track academically and in their overall well-being.

OVERARCHING GOVERNANCE OR ORGANIZING STRUCTURE

Tiered system of support: All the *CSII* grantees generally follow—whether explicitly like ██████████████ or implicitly like ████████—Response to Intervention's (RtI) tiered system of support for truancy prevention and intervention. Tier 1 is considered schoolwide, Tier 2 is reserved for group interventions, and Tier 3 is for the most acute and difficult cases that require one-on-one counseling.

Results-driven mission and vision: A clear vision and mission articulated through a logic model, linked to performance outputs and outcomes, focused the attention of the work at ██ ███████████████████████████████ and helped drive them forward. This is especially telling for ███████████████████████████ of implementation.

Strong institutional connectedness: Several grantees were in school sites located in large Latino and immigrant population. ██████████████████████ took advantage of the circumstances to strengthen wraparound services through the grant tailored to the Latino and immigrant population. The result was that the partnership garnered such a loyal following that parents and students endured the temporary moved to the ████████ while the ████████ school building underwent renovations. The ████████ principal reported a 99% re-enrollment rate for SY 2016-17 and 94% teaching staff retention rate.

Strong leadership and partnership: Having a strong supportive leader at the helm of the school and of the *CSII* implementation at the site helped insure not only fidelity to the initial plan but also drew support across the school and community. As ████████ has shown the principal championed the CS concept, at first tentatively, but after being partnered with an enthusiastic CSC became an ardent supporter. Their strong leadership and partnership grew to change the school climate and dynamics of the school and community.

What Were the Challenges?

As in all programs, there is never a perfect implementation story. However, some *CSII* grantees faced significant obstacles.

Leadership and staff turnover: Turnovers at any institution slow the momentum toward change and progress. In the cases of █████████████████████, turnover of principals slowed down *CSII* implementation as grantees were required to cultivate buy-in and support from newly installed principals who were not aware of the partnership or the grant before their assignments. For ████████ it was felt more acutely, since █████████████████ had

five principals in four years. The program had great difficulty gaining traction, which was further exacerbated by a move to temporary facilities while the ▮▮▮▮▮ school building underwent renovations. The lack of strong principal leadership made data-sharing across partners difficult and getting parents support even more challenging. Moreover, OSSE experienced staff turnover too, which interrupted monitoring practices with the grantees and engagement with the Advisory Board members.

Lack of parent engagement: The majority of the grantees had non-existing or tepid parental engagement at their school sites. This made it challenging to meet the requirement of having a local community school advisory board to work in tandem with grantee partners. Lack of parental engagement often meant tepid community engagement as well, which made it harder for school and grantee partners to help students at academic and/or behavioral risks.

Lack of coordination with existing multiple partners at the school site: The grantees began implementing *CSII* at school sites with existing, multiple partners in the building. Without further support and authority from a principal, the grant itself was seen as another funding stream with commensurate staffing and activities in a school. As a result services provided at the school appeared as muddled layers of overlapping services by service providers that may have competing agendas. Some *CSII* staff experienced mission creep as a result.

Inadequate data systems and data sharing practices: A majority of the grantees were ill-prepared to collect, analyze and report data that would determine how well their program is progressing. Their data systems were not built to collect certain data, and the personnel were not trained to diligently collect data beyond the Tier I and sometimes Tier II support. Further exacerbating the situation is the grantees inability to acquire timely, accurate, and complete data from the school due to perceived privacy issues.

Out-of-boundary catchment of students and public transportation limits: In a number of schools, a significant percentage of students do not live in the neighborhood. In the case of ▮▮ 80% to 85% of ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ students reside outside the neighborhood. This means logistically that it takes longer for students to arrive at school and be at their seats by the time the first period bell rings. The problem becomes even more complex when students and their families rely on public transportation, and are beholden to the vicissitudes of traffic in the District during morning rush hour and unreliable service of Metro trains. Finally inclement weather further exacerbates the situation such that schools like ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ experienced high percentage of unexcused absences from students after rain and snow storms have ended.

What, If Any, Was the Impact of the *CSII* Grant?

A handful of six pilot grantees were able to report on the impact of the grant. They are presented below:

⬛⬛⬛⬛: Over 99 PreK elementary children were enrolled in ⬛⬛ early childhood program with their parents. Most recent data showed that 100% of those children who were enrolled for the full academic year at ⬛⬛ met or exceeded expectations as measured by GOLD Literacy and 97% met or exceeded expectations as measured by GOLD math. The students were also at the 97% and above as measured by GOLD Social Emotional Learning. Their parents are doing just as well. The adult ⬛⬛ students experienced growth in reading, writing, and oral skills as measured on the CASAS assessments. **Table 1** shows the percentage of ⬛⬛ students making progress at each ESL (English as A Second Language) level.

Table 1: ⬛⬛⬛⬛ **CASAS assessments on English language proficiency**

Level	Percent Making Level Progress
ES	84
ES	87
ES	83
ES	75
ES	51
ES	40

Furthermore, ⬛⬛ adults were moving toward post-secondary education training and employment. According to their end-of-year report, "76% of students in the labor force entered employment or post-secondary education/career training. 89% of students in the labor force retained employment or entered post-secondary education/career training" (⬛⬛⬛ End-of-Year Report, 2016).

⬛⬛⬛⬛: Students enrolled in the programs initiated through the *CSII* grant showed marked improvement. For example, students in grades K through 2 who were enrolled in the People Animal Love afterschool program (N=103) had a 93% attendance rate exhibited greater average growth than their non-participant peers in the MAP assessments for English language arts (36% vs. 31%) and in math (55% vs. 44%). They also showed more dramatic growth from beginning of the year to the end of year than their non-participant peers (27 percentage-point gain vs. 15 percentage-point gain) in reading proficiency. For older students involved with City Year afterschool, they also witnessed dramatic growth. City year participants in ELA interventions (N=95), they saw a 35 percentage-point jump from beginning of the year to the end of the year. Their counterparts' growth

was less dramatic: 17 percentage points. In math 63% of City Year participants (N=81) met their growth targets while only 52% of non-City Year participants met theirs.

In terms of behavior, students whose parents and teachers met at least three to four times in academic parent teacher teams (APTT) averaged 5.3 suspension referrals compared to 7.3 suspension referral of those whose parents did not take part in APTTs.

████████████████: SY 2016-17 began with 96% of ██████████ students re-enrolling, an eight percentage point increase from SY 2015-16. All 55 seniors (Class of 2016) graduated and 96% were accepted to a 2- or 4-higher education institution. Furthermore, all eight of the seniors who participated in the wellness Transitional Workshop (addressing anxiety and other wellness concerns as they move away and go to college), were accepted into college. High school students receiving Tier III attendance interventions (N=10) experienced some notable positive changes from first to third quarter as measured by the number of unexcused absences, grade point average (GPA), and number of suspensions. All ten saw increases in their GPA ranging from a modest .1 to 2.3. Seven out of ten saw decreases in the number of absences, one from a high of 12 down to three unexcused absences. Three saw also drops in the number of suspensions, while the rest stayed the same, though most have had no suspensions in the first quarter.

Key Takeaways

To summarize the findings from the evaluation, the following points drive the change process that *CSII* has made throughout its implementation:

- A **shared vision and stable distributive leadership** with both principal and CSC is important for leading the change effort. The principal and the CSC are critical change agents for the school and surrounding community.
- While **leadership stays intact**, other partnerships change over time as needs change.
- Common partners like **Flamboyan, Mary's Center, Kids Hour**, etc. provide opportunities for shared practices and common language and coordination.
- There is some convergence in the types of **partnerships (limited, coordinated, collaborative) to the degree of implementation**. High implementers end up moving beyond a coordinated partnership to a collaborative partnership. The partners co-own the problems and the successes of the collaboration, which is characterized by interdependence and collective governance (Hora & Millar, 2011).

- **Home visits** are a critical leverage point to draw out teachers to where their students and their families are and to build relational trust and common understanding. Home visits are critical bridge-building strategies, especially for at-risk students and families.

- **Local contexts, existing capacity and interpersonal relationships** shape the nature of *CSII* as played out in each site.

- Discussions on **sustainability** are underway but involved no more than looking for funding streams to replace *CSII*.

Recommendations

As OSSE and the DC Council consider the next steps for *CSII*, the findings above reveal ways that the organization can continue to improve, evolve, and expand the program:

- **Revise future grant competition to be five-year grants, with a Year 0 for planning.** The planning year should last at least the first six months of the grant with a percentage of the award set aside for planning. Planning should include devising MOUs (particularly data sharing), establishing data systems, processes and procedures, staff training, etc. in place. Ensure that the plan to be implemented is align with district and school plan goals, with commensurate performance measures and indicators.

- **Have clear start and end dates of the grant with guaranteed minimum levels as a percentage of current budgeted year to aid grantees in planning for each year**.

- **Set clear expectations in the application, with a theory of change, inputs, outputs, short-term and long term outcomes, with indicators and expectations and measurable performance measures and/or targets.**

- **Hold both school sites and *CSII* partner grantees mutually accountable for results from *CSII* grant funded outputs and outcomes.**

- **Begin sustainable conversation in Year 1 and continue throughout the remaining years.** Toolkits are available from Ohio Afterschool Network and other public sites.[2]

- **Institutionalize the Community Schools Coordinator position through reallocation of the school budget,** but ensure that no teaching or other administrative responsibilities added to the current job description. This will help avoid mission creep.

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[2] https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Models-for-Family-and-Community-Engagement/Planning-for-Sustainability.pdf.aspx

- **Ensure that data systems are in place by the end of Year 1**, if not already established.
- **Change parental and engagement strategies to direct the school personnel out to the parents and the community** instead of the reverse.
- **Reframe the Community Schools Advisory Board for OSSE as a "critical friend"** such that they are more active partners to the initiative.
- **Expand academic enrichment and youth development to open students to wider possibilities in their future through career academies, career and technical education (CTE), and dual enrollment and certification** with community colleges through stacked and latticed credentialing so that students will have a roadmap from high school to post-secondary education and careers in technology-heavy growth sectors.

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Appendix

Community Schools Incentive Initiative Program Evaluation Research Design

MN Associates, Inc. (MNA) completed the evaluation of the program using a theory-based approach to study program design. This orientation applied a systematic process for defining what an educational innovation or intervention (e.g., Community Schools Incentive Initiative Program) is expected to do, in order to achieve desired teaching and learning outcomes and the process by which those impacts are realized (Chen, 1990, 2005; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). Program design and implementation was based on assumptions—explicit or otherwise—held by program designers and stakeholders about how specific actions were expected to mitigate an identified problem. Chen (2005) defines program theory as being simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, with a resulting focus on identifying action-oriented explanations of program assumptions, inputs/processes, and activities. See **Figure 1**. The theory of action aligns with the Coalition of Community Schools logic model and framework for student success.

Figure 1: Standard Theory of Action
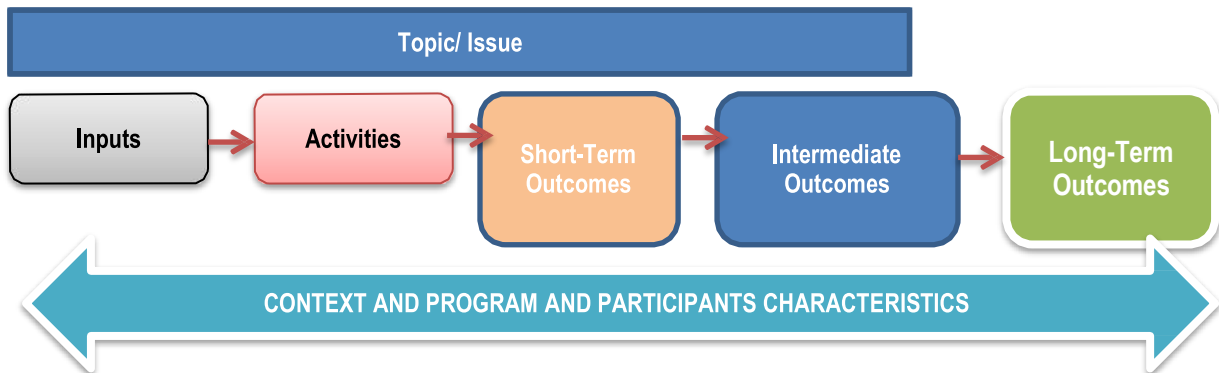
In MNA's experience, theory-based evaluation is better able to: (a) assess impact both holistically and as influenced by separate program elements; (b) provide feedback for ongoing program improvement; and (c) inform program replication and scale-up. MNA believes this conceptual position complements both OSSE and its approach to providing thorough program evaluation services.

All of MNA's evaluations apply a collaborative evaluation approach (O'Sullivan & D'Agostino, 2002) that treats project staff and participants as partners in data collection activities, rather than as subjects of research. MNA also adhere to tenets of Patton's (1997) utilization-focused evaluation to address how people in real-world programs experience the evaluation process and are able to put

findings into practice in ways that meet their knowledge and use needs. These theories were put into practice, as MNA completed the C*SII* program's evaluation activities.

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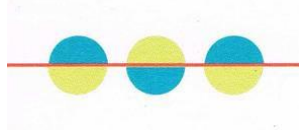
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