



MARCH 2026

# Partners for Rural Impact: Breathitt-Knott

Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) Annual Report (2025)

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education awarded Partners for Rural Impact (PRI) a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant to support all 11 schools in two Eastern Kentucky school districts: **Breathitt County Schools and Knott County Schools**. Like districts throughout Kentucky and across the nation, Breathitt and Knott districts have experienced growing rates of chronic absenteeism, lower rates of kindergarten readiness, and lower rates of academic achievement in reading and math, compared to years preceding school disruptions that began with the COVID-19 pandemic. The school disruptions continued when the area was hit with severe flooding in 2022. Flooding caused severe damage to school buildings, homes, and community spaces all while experiencing a downturn due to shifts in the local economy.

In its first two years of implementation, the Breathitt-Knott FSCS grant has made significant contributions to district priorities and extending learning opportunities for students. Strategic investments in tutoring, infrastructure, technology, enrichment, and work-based and experiential learning are accelerating student outcomes from kindergarten readiness to college and career readiness that are helping the districts recover from years of setbacks. Family outreach and engagement of community partners is also strengthening community capacity, collaboration, and engagement.

In a spring survey, seven of nine Breathitt-Knott principals reported that the FSCS grant has helped their school “to a great extent” with increasing resources available to the school. Six of nine principals reported that the grant helped their school improve the school’s partnerships, improve coordination of partners and supports, and contributed to student academic improvement to a great extent. In the same survey, principals identified book distribution (9 of 9), instructional supports for students (8 of 9), enrichment opportunities (7 of 8) and instructional resources (7 of 8) as resources with the highest benefit from the grant.

## **About this Report**

This report synthesizes data Policy Studies Associates (PSA) has collected this year in Breathitt and Knott counties. These data include needs assessments, surveys of principals and school coordinators, and site visit interviews and observations. The data point to several potential next steps and recommendations for PRI’s consideration. In particular, this brief reports on ways in which the grant is:

- Expanding Kinder Camp as a kindergarten readiness strategy
- Supporting high-impact tutoring aligned with district priorities
- Investing in technology and infrastructure to support learning
- Providing enrichments that contribute to improvement in student attendance, engagement, and life skills development
- Advancing postsecondary success through exposure to careers and work-based learning
- Increasing family and community engagement using social media
- Leveraging community partners to maximize collective impact
- Planning for sustainability

# Evaluation Findings

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## **Expanding Kinder Camp as a Kindergarten readiness strategy**

School leaders in Breathitt and Knott counties have identified kindergarten readiness as a high-leverage district priority. Both superintendents articulated in focus groups that to improve reading and math

achievement and sustain growth, they must improve kindergarten readiness. When children enter kindergarten ready to learn, they are more likely to meet grade-level expectations and less likely to need remediation in later school years.<sup>1</sup>

Kindergarten readiness, as measured by the Brigance Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen III (K Screen), declined sharply across Breathitt and Knott schools between fall 2020 and fall 2021. Average readiness increased between fall 2022 and fall 2023, but has otherwise remained steady at about 40% between fall 2021 and fall 2024. As shown in Exhibit 1, kindergarten readiness declined across all assessed K Screen domains between fall 2019 and fall 2024, meaning children entering school now are equipped with fewer language, social emotional, motor, self-help and academic cognitive skills compared to children entering kindergarten prior to the start of COVID 19 disruptions.

**Exhibit 1: Kindergarten Readiness in Breathitt Knott**

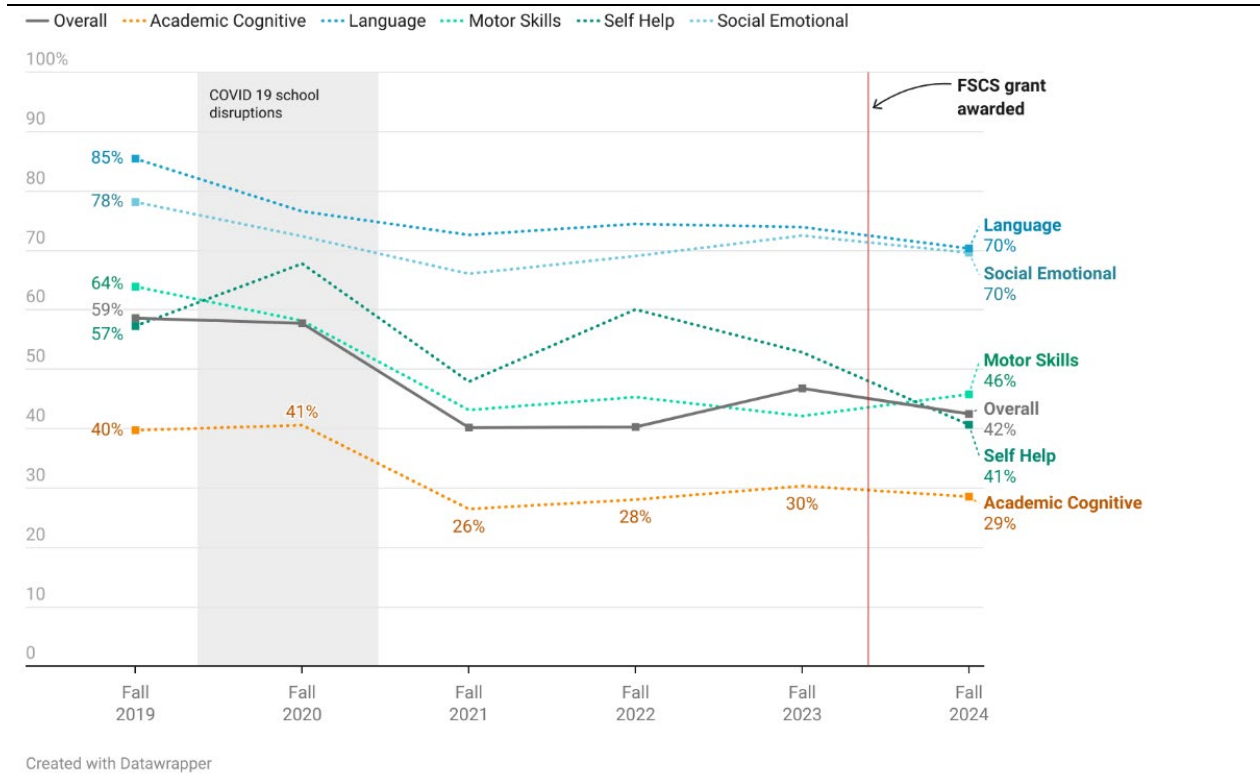


Exhibit reads: Eighty-five percent of kindergarten students in Breathitt-Knott met readiness criteria in the Language domain of the K Screen in fall 2019 and 70% met the criteria in fall 2024.  
 Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Early childhood education opportunities are limited in Breathitt and Knott counties. Head Start and state-funded preschool are available for four-year-old children meeting family income and special education services eligibility criteria. Beyond these programs, few center-based child care facilities are available and there are no licensed home-based care facilities.<sup>2</sup> While some informal early learning opportunities are

<sup>1</sup> Duncan, G. J., Dowsett, C. J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A. C., Klebanov, P., Pagani, L. S., Feinstein, L., Engel, M., Brooks-Gunn, J., Sexton, H., Duckworth, K., & Japel, C. (2007). School readiness and later achievement, *Developmental Psychology*, 43(6), 1428–1446.

<sup>2</sup> The Kentucky Center for Statistics Early Childhood Profile available at <https://kystats.ky.gov/Latest/ECP>.

provided by public libraries and community organizations, Breathitt and Knott counties lack a comprehensive system of care and early learning for young children prior to kindergarten.

To address the challenge, the Breathitt-Knott FSCS grant director worked with district and school administrators to design a week-long kindergarten transition program for all children eligible to be enrolled in kindergarten across districts. The Kinder Camp consisted of five days of instruction delivered four hours per day the week immediately preceding the start of the school year in each district. Every elementary school held their own camp staffed by kindergarten teachers at the school and paraprofessionals as needed.

Rising kindergarteners had the opportunity to acclimate themselves to the building, daily kindergarten routines, teachers and staff, and their peers. District leaders worked with teachers to develop the curriculum for the camp, which focused on addressing students' readiness gaps as measured by the K Screen. The districts paid for teacher staff time while FSCS provided teacher stipends for classroom supplies, and meals and transportation for students.

In focus groups, district leaders, school administrators, and FSCS school coordinators reported high levels of participation in the Kinder Camp, as measured by the number of Kinder Camp participants who enrolled in kindergarten at the school in which they attended camp. Some school administrators reported that they had a participation rate of over 100% of students who entered kindergarten at the start of the 2025-26 school year.

In focus groups, district and school leaders reported receiving overwhelmingly positive responses from teachers, students, and parents. They stated that students entered kindergarten with less anxiety and greater familiarity with school routines, allowing teachers to move forward with the curriculum more quickly in contrast to a typical school year start prior to the implementation of Kinder Camp.

Families were invited into the classroom on the first day of Kinder Camp to meet the teachers, familiarize themselves with the school and classroom, and receive an introductory overview of what to expect in kindergarten. Focus group participants reported that inviting parents in on the first day helped encourage positive feelings about the start of the school year and reduce parent anxiety about the transition.

Some district leaders reported that, initially, when presented with the idea for the camp from the grant director, they were uncertain about how well the program would be received or attended; however, all were pleased with the outcome and are beginning to see measurable results in school-level data. For example, one school principal reported that all 2025-26 kindergarten students were meeting or exceeding the school's winter reading goals by the end of October, whereas in the year prior, none of the kindergarten students in school year 2004-25 were meeting the school's winter reading goals by the end of December.

Although fall 2025 Brigance K Screen scores have not yet been released to assess the outcomes of the Kinder Camp, district leaders reported that they intend to continue the program next summer.

## **Supporting high impact tutoring aligned with district priorities**

In focus groups, when asked about FSCS's most impactful work, district and school leaders ranked tutoring support among the top contributions from the grant. District and school administrators reported that tutoring enhanced and complimented district-led interventions. They shared that

although both school districts already had some tutoring and academic interventionists in place, additional tutors helped both districts intensify and target tutoring where it was needed most. The additional tutors provided by FSCS allowed schools to increase the dosage of small-group and one-on-one tutoring for students performing below grade level in reading or math and for those receiving Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) instruction. Moreover, the tutors hired were all experienced, retired teachers.

Through community outreach, the FSCS grant director helped recruit tutors to work with middle school students and remotely located schools. District leaders struggled to find retired teachers open to working with these grade levels and schools through traditional tutor recruitment strategies. The FSCS grant director was able to utilize his connections in the community to find retired teachers from other counties and districts to fill the gaps.

Beaver Creek Elementary, a remotely located school in Knott County, has benefited from additional tutoring. Beaver Creek Elementary had been identified as a low-performing school by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and received Comprehensive Support and Improvement “CSI” school status. CSI schools require additional state and federal oversight until they demonstrate enough improvement to exit CSI status. Beaver Creek Elementary administrators reported that having more tutors allowed the school to offer tutoring to a greater proportion of students and, specifically, more individualized tutoring for students needing the most support. Administrators noted that they targeted tutoring most intensively with the fifth grade. They noted that the 2024-25 fifth-grade students were experiencing the greatest academic struggles as a cohort compared to students in other grades. As a cohort, classroom learning was interrupted the most for these students during critical early elementary school years when children typically master reading and learn foundational math skills needed to meet grade-level standards in later school years.

Recently released state data shows that the strategy is working. Indeed, Breathitt and Knott schools collectively experienced an increase in reading and math achievement on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA), with significant increases in both subjects across multiple grade levels. As shown in Exhibits 2 and 3, the change in proficiency in reading and math from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25 exceeded the statewide average achievement growth in the same period. Notably, fifth-grade students experienced the greatest gains in reading (17.2% growth) and the state reported that Beaver Creek Elementary has exited CSI school status.

## **Investing in technology and infrastructure to support learning**

In addition to tutoring, the FSCS grant funded technology and infrastructure improvements to support district instructional priorities. For example, FSCS facilitated the purchase of online educational programs that complement the curriculum and engage students in learning and reading for pleasure. Examples of the online programs include Simple Solutions, which provides online workbooks for students across content areas; Beanstack, an online incentive program that rewards students for reading using gamification principles; and Generation Genius, which provides science videos designed for kids. The programs were requested by school leaders and teachers to help supplement the core curriculum and engage students. In a needs assessment survey, when asked what PRI FSCS supports they wish they had more access to as school staff, the top response among survey respondents was resources for classrooms (60%).

**Exhibit 2: KSA Reading Proficiency in Breathitt-Knott**

**KSA Reading Proficiency in Breathitt Knott**

Percent of students scoring proficient or distinguished

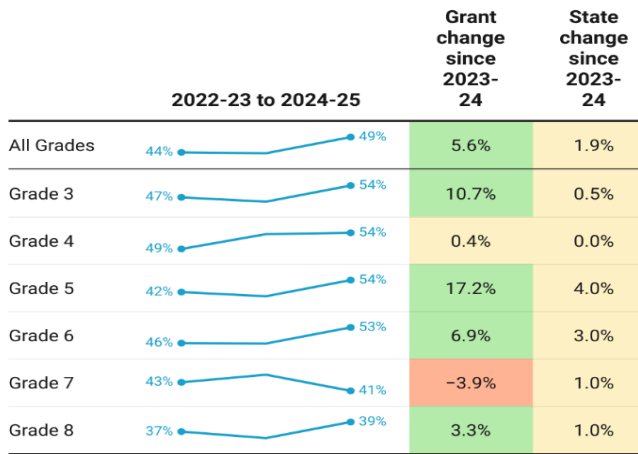


Exhibit reads: Across Breathitt and Knott districts, reading proficiency rates have increased an average of 5.6% since the start of the grant in 2023-24. Across other Kentucky districts, the increase was 1.9%.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

**Exhibit 3: KSA Math Proficiency in Breathitt-Knott**

**KSA Math Proficiency in Breathitt Knott**

Percent of students scoring proficient or distinguished

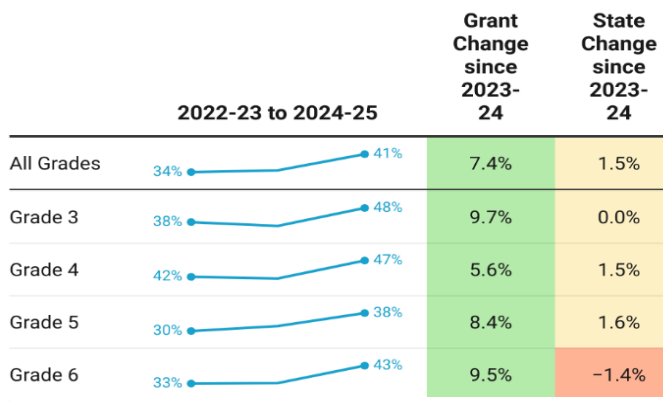


Exhibit reads: Across Breathitt and Knott districts, math proficiency rates have increased an average of 7.4% since the start of the grant in 2023-24. Across other Kentucky districts, the increase was 1.5%.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Additionally, FSCS is investing in library renovations to transform outdated school libraries into welcoming, updated, and engaging spaces. In the 2024-25 school year, the FSCS grant supported library renovations at Beaver Creek Elementary and Jones Fork Elementary schools with plans to renovate at least two more school libraries at Cordia School and Carr Creek Elementary in 2025-26, pending approval.

The FSCS grant paid for new furniture and materials specifically designed with three designated sections; one section for early learners in grades k-2, a section for older elementary grades 3-5, and a section for middle school students in grades 6-8. The sections are filled with books, resources, and comfortable seating that are developmentally appropriate for each grade span such as puppets of popular children’s book characters for k-2, dry erase whiteboard tabletops for collaborative learning for grades 3-5, and multiple electrical ports in the seating area for older students to work individually on their laptops. The library renovations were implemented with braided funds from the schools and a PRI Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant in Knott County, which paid for new books.

School administrators and FSCS school coordinators reported that students love the renovations and are spending more time in the library voluntarily. One administrator said, “kids are excited about reading again.” The Knott County IAL Year 2 evaluation found that book circulation is increasing in the district and access to books is increasing. The IAL program team also reported that across all schools in the district, the book-to-student ratio has increased from 33:1 to 38:1.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Woods, Y., & Meredith. J. (2025). *Launching the Knott County Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) place-based initiative: Enhancing reading in rural east Kentucky*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

# Providing enrichments that contribute to improvement in student engagement, attendance, and life skills development

In focus groups, district and school leaders agreed that enrichment opportunities, particularly field trips and art and music instruction, have also been impactful for students. In a spring principal survey, seven of nine principal respondents agreed that enrichment activities have been a high benefit to the school.

In coordination with school principals, Breathitt Knott FSCS school coordinators supported trips for students to the aquarium, reptile zoo, local theater performances, and college tours, among others. Focus group participants agreed that field trips aligned with learning standards and classroom content. The FSCS grant also supported resident artists and music teachers to provide instruction across schools and helped Knott County Central High School recover their band program—the only band program in the district—after the band room and much of its content endured extensive damage from recent flooding.

District and school leaders conveyed that, as with supplemental instructional materials, the districts have limited discretionary funds to take students on field trips and support music and the arts without external grants. As one principal noted, “I just think that the PRI grant can give these kids opportunity, whether it be college visits, whether it be trips, whether it be guest speakers, things that we've just got such a small budget [for].”

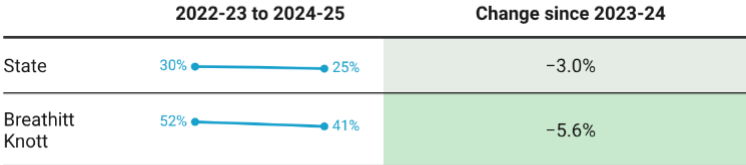
However, they expressed that the experiences are vital because the enrichment opportunities help build excitement about school and enjoyment. As one principal noted, “All those enrichment activities going on at school, like the math scientist Fridays, are helping attendance. Kids don't want to miss it. They're so excited to go to school.”

Indeed, chronic absenteeism data show that more students are attending school regularly. As shown in Exhibit 4, chronic absenteeism declined 5.6 percentage points across Breathitt and Knott schools from school year 2023-24 to 2024-25, greater than the state average decrease of three percentage points. District and school leaders also reported the average daily attendance (ADA) rate, the measure used to determine state funding, improved in both districts. In focus groups, district and school leaders and FSCS school coordinators attributed the rise in attendance to a variety of factors, but enrichment stood out as a contributing factor across districts and schools.

### Exhibit 4: Chronic Absentee Rates in Breathitt-Knott

#### Chronic Absentee Rates in Breathitt-Knott

Percent of students chronically absent in Breathitt-Knott and across Kentucky



Created with Datawrapper

Exhibit reads: Chronic absenteeism rates have decreased an average of 5.6% across Breathitt-Knott since 2023-24. Across other Kentucky districts the average decline was 3%.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Additionally, several district and school administrators noted in focus groups that students in the region lack critical life skills from lack of exposure to experiences outside of home and school. They explained that every opportunity to expose students to new experiences helps them build background knowledge that enhances learning, prepares them for life after high school, and gives students hope for the future that can break down barriers to advancement.

Administrators, such as the district administrator below, stressed that it is hard to imagine the extent to which experiences that are more commonplace in highly populated regions are novel to students living in high-poverty, rural, isolated environments.

*It's just hard to fathom after three floods and trying to go back through the rebuilding process... Some of the activities we did through outside organizations—we would take our kids to Walmart and give them an allotment of money and they didn't know how to spend it. I'm talking high school, middle school kids. They had never been in Walmart. They didn't know their shoe size. They didn't know how to purchase anything because they were never allowed to go. And it is very, very, very humbling to see [these older] kids and they don't know how to spend their money.*

Breathitt and Knott needs assessment survey data showed that teachers, students, and parents also valued enrichment opportunities and reported wanting more of these types of opportunities for students. When asked, “What programs or resources do you wish children had more access to at school”, enrichment rated highest among school staff (60%) and parents (50%) compared to all other options. Students’ top responses to a question asking what they want more of in school were sports (41%), enrichment (32%), and career exploration (28%).

When asked what types of activities they would want to do most if they could, field trips rated highest (59%) among students, followed by sports (45%), outdoor activities (40%), arts and crafts (36%), and music (36%). When asked what PRI FSCS supports they wish they had more access to as school staff, after the top response of wanting more resources for classrooms, the second and third top responses among survey respondents were support arranging field trips (47%) and support offering enrichment (44%).

## **Advancing postsecondary success through exposure to careers and work-based learning**

To advance college and career readiness at the secondary level, FSCS staff and district leaders in Breathitt County focused on redesigning a required introductory Career Technical Education (CTE) course using hands-on career learning modules developed by Paxton/Patterson Labs. FSCS staff and district leaders in Knott County focused their attention on developing an internship program at Knott County Central High School and Cordia School, the only two schools in the district with grades 9-12. Across both districts, school and district leaders spoke positively about the initiatives and the impact they have had on school culture and postsecondary readiness.

In Breathitt County, the superintendent, having recently been introduced to the Paxton/Patterson Labs, believed they would be a good fit for the district. He worked with the FSCS grant director to find a way to integrate the labs into the CTE curriculum at Breathitt High School. Breathitt High School has a CTE pathways program in which all seventh-grade students take an introductory career exploration course to learn about pathway options. In eighth grade and beyond, students may choose to continue to participate in a pathway program if they are interested. The principal explained that prior to introducing the labs, the course was basic with little hands-on experimentation opportunities and exposure to a narrower set of career pathways.

The Paxton/Patterson labs introduced the opportunity for students to engage in hands-on, self-guided exploration of up to 19 career pathways in one school year. For the introductory CTE course, FSCS supported the purchase of 19 College and Career Ready Labs, specifically designed for seventh and

eighth grade, equipped with high-quality, hand-on learning materials and accompanying online learning modules. During the year-long course, students rotate through 16 of the 19 lab stations<sup>4</sup> in groups of two, spending approximately 10 days at each station. A project or set of tasks must be completed at each station. Students go through the online learning module to complete the task or project. Students can go at their own pace with their partner and must pass an exam to complete each module.

This course design works well for Breathitt County since all seventh-grade students in the district attend the same school and take the same required CTE course. Therefore, one lab located in one school building can serve every student in the district. All middle school students in successive school years will get to experience the lab and benefit from the opportunity. A district with multiple secondary schools would need to purchase labs for each school, rotate labs from school to school, or transport students to other schools with different career labs.

District administrators, the principal, and course instructors shared that students are highly engaged and enjoy the program. They are gaining exposure to careers they may not have known existed and are concurrently gaining essential life skills such as home maintenance at the Electrical Lab and Home Maintenance Labs, child care at the Intro to Child Development Lab, and cooking at the Hospitality & Tourism Management Lab. As a course instructor stated,

*There's at least one station, arguably every one of them, where they will probably use what they learn in everyday life. Ten out of the 16—they're going to have to do something that they did at that station in the real world, regardless of what career they do.*

District and school leaders noted that the labs are especially beneficial for Breathitt students because the community lacks employment opportunities in many of these critical areas that are needed in the community or could be done outside of the community or remotely. Students would not otherwise have opportunities to learn about these career opportunities locally before graduating from high school.

In Knott County, FSCS worked with school leaders to launch an internship program at the two district high schools. The school coordinators initiated outreach to local businesses, government agencies, and public programs to secure internship opportunities for students throughout the county. In its first year of implementation, FSCS supported 17 internships at various locations including the County Courthouse, the Knott County Board of Education, doctor's offices, community organizations, and in schools.

Each school designed its own program. For example, at Knott County Central High School (KCCHS), participants were selected based on attendance. Cordia School, with a much smaller student population, was able to offer an internship to all students who expressed interest. Cordia School is also more remote than KCCHS. As such, students faced more barriers participating in internships in other parts of the county outside of their community. Rather, many Cordia School student interns worked for the school or the Community Services Center that supports children and families in the area.

The high school principals were enthusiastic about the internship initiative and noted some of the benefits for students, including encouraging attendance, motivation to pursue a career, increasing employment skills, and increasing civic and community engagement. For example, one principal sharing enthusiasm about the benefits of the initiative said,

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<sup>4</sup> Not all lab modules can be out simultaneously due to space limitations.

*We've got Thanksgiving coming up and some of these kids are helping [the community center] fill these Thanksgiving bags and pack the food pantry items in cars. I think it's not only rewarding earning money, but more so because there's a purpose, they're giving back.*

Across districts, KDE CTE outcomes data showed that the districts were offering more career pathways or programs in 2024-25 (33 total) compared to the prior school year (14 total). The data also showed that the districts increased the average number of minutes of CTE instruction from 771 minutes in 2023-24 to 2,305 minutes in 2024-25.

## **Increasing family and community engagement using social media**

In partnership with school staff, FSCS coordinators across both districts are having success increasing family and community engagement using highly visible outreach methods such as leveraging social media. In interviews and focus groups, principals, FSCS school coordinators, and school-based Family Resource and Youth Services Coordinators (FRYSCs) reported seeing an increase in family participation at school events. In October, schools had recently held fall events in which interview and focus group participants reported high numbers of participants compared to the previous year in both districts. As reported by interview and focus group participants at two schools, one in each district, participation at fall events jumped from fewer than five families in fall 2023 to over 100 families in fall 2024.

FSCS school coordinators, FRYSCs, and other school staff are working together in schools to boost the school's social media presence by posting about school events and activities regularly on Facebook. Multiple FSCS school coordinators who participated in this effort credit the work with raising awareness about the events and excitement for the events among students and families. For example, one FSCS school coordinator shared,

*Last year we had four families show up to a family engagement event. This year, for our fall festival, we had over a hundred families come in. We only have 168 kids, so for a hundred people to show up was huge. It was the biggest one that we've ever had, and I really think that a lot of that is because we posted something [on Facebook] every single day, something new that was going to be happening at the fall festival.*

Some school leaders reported that FSCS is having an impact on student and family attitudes towards school in the community. Principal survey data showed that 56% of principals believed that the FSCS grant helped their school enhance student attitudes towards school "to a great extent," and 44% reported that FSCS increased community connections to the school "to a great extent." District leaders are also noticing the impact. One district administrator shared,

*Just doing all these parent engagement activities that PRI has [done] and offering these courses that they teach at the high school I think is already starting to shift some of that mindset. Parents are coming in and getting to know the staff more.*

## **Leveraging community partners to maximize collective impact**

Districts and schools in the region have long-standing relationships with a variety of community partners. In the Breathitt and Knott communities, the schools are a central hub that connect children and families with a variety of services such as vision and dental services and mental health. All nine spring principal survey respondents in the Breathitt and Knott grant region reported that they partner

with health and wellness providers. Most principals also reported that they partner with faith-based organizations (8 of 9), local businesses (7 of 9), and nonprofits (7 of 9).

In focus groups, administrators and community partners reported having good community relationships, but noted that they believed that any organization or business that could be tapped as a partner is already tapped out. One community partner stated, “I feel like we’re such a small area that we tap all of the nearby resources.” Community partners noted that the solution was not engaging more partners, but getting creative about how partners can work together. The FSCS grant is helping to thread the needle and incubate creative solutions leveraging local partners and existing resources for greater impact.

For example, LKLP Community Action, an organization that provides services, including employment services, for low-income families in Knott County and surrounding areas, had been a partner with Knott County Schools prior to the FSCS grant. However, the FSCS director is now working with the organization to engage them in the internship initiative, connecting the high schools, student interns, and local employers in new ways. The FSCS grant director is working with LKLP to determine what role the organization could play to grow and sustain the internship initiative beyond the duration of the grant. One Knott County Schools administrator noted that the discussion is opening doors for the expansion of that partnership. The administrator said, “We had never had that type of relationship with them before [LKLP] and so it does, I think, open more doors that we just didn’t even know were possible.”

In Breathitt County, the FSCS grant director has helped facilitate a relationship between Breathitt County Schools and Hindman Settlement School. Hindman Settlement School is based in Knott County and provides education and service programs in Knott County and surrounding communities, including one-on-one tutoring in literacy for struggling readers. The partnership is helping Hindman Settlement School expand its reach in the region and connecting Breathitt County Schools with additional tutoring resources. Speaking about the newly formed relationship with Breathitt County, the Hindman Settlement School director stated,

*Right now we have three positions filled at Breathitt [Elementary] and Sebastian Elementary. Their students are going to get daily one-on-one intervention. We would not be in Breathitt County, it just wouldn’t have been on our radar, but because there was a full service grant in Knott County and Jonathan manages the grant in Knott County and Breathitt County, it was a natural way [for us] to move in there.*

Community partners in Breathitt and Knott counties emphasized that although they believed every organization and agency capable of supporting children and families in the area is actively engaged in the effort, overall funding and resources are limited and declining. For example, Save the Children, which has led its own education and literacy efforts in East Kentucky, has lost funding for some local initiatives. A GEAR UP grant that has been supporting college and career readiness initiatives in Breathitt and Knott counties has ended. The Cooperative Extension Office within the Department of Health lost funding to support nutrition education in schools.

Most principals agreed that funding is an integral component needed to strengthen partnerships. In the spring principal survey, when asked what would help strengthen the school’s partnerships, the highest proportion of survey respondents (6 of 9) indicated that more funding or resources would help strengthen their school’s community partnerships. Community partners, including the Breathitt-Knott FSCS and Knott County IAL teams, are doing what they can to continue initiatives that have been impactful in the community, but with fewer resources and limitations on what their grants can support.

## Planning for sustainability

For the Breathitt-Knott FSCS director, sustainability planning has been at the forefront of the collaborative planning process with the districts and with community partners from the beginning. The Breathitt-Knott FSCS grant director has been working with the districts and their partners to come up with ways to sustain costly initiatives such as tutoring and internships. For instance, the FSCS grant director has been working with Alice Lloyd College to facilitate a tutoring initiative staffed by students majoring in education as a means for them to earn their required work-study hours.

Additionally, the grant director has prioritized Investing in one-time costs for infrastructure and initiatives the districts and schools can maintain with their own funds. For example, Breathitt County Schools could not have purchased the equipment and materials needed to set up the Paxton/Patterson Labs and renovate a classroom for the redesigned CTE course, but they can find the funds to maintain the labs and replenish materials as needed. School districts can also maintain the renovated libraries, books, and supplemental instructional programs (e.g., Simple Solutions) purchased with FSCS funds.

Some initiatives can be continued at little to no cost. For instance, the FRYSCs and other school personnel can continue to plan school events that have become popular with families and maintain the social media hubs that have helped improve attendance at events. Also, FSCS has paid for professional learning for teachers that can be shared internally without external support.

Some initiatives such as the Kinder Camp do not have an obvious revenue source to maintain them. However, the grant director and central administrators are hopeful that the districts can generate revenue from additional per-pupil funding from the state based on their attendance gains, and lower costs for intervention supports as student achievement improves and fewer students require intervention and remediation. Thus, if the Kinder Camp or other new initiatives are proving to be successful, the district can reallocate funds to support them.

However, the recent decline in external grants weighs heavily on the community. In the spring principal survey, when asked what are the most needed resources to sustain the current service provided by FSCS beyond the life of the grant, eight of nine principals selected funding stability. In focus groups, when asked about the sustainability of FSCS and IAL grant initiatives in the community, community partners stressed that much of what has been brought to the community could be continued, but without funding stability, it would be a challenge. As one partner stated, "I think some of the things are [sustainable] in terms of conversations, ideas, partnerships, but without that money, it's hard."

One school coordinator stated that he believes external grants have enabled the schools to thrive amid economic challenges. He shared an anecdote about the success of the local high school and how vital external grants have been for the school. He said,

*This was in the local paper this week. Knott County Central High School, for the fifth year in a row, is one of the top 10 high schools in the country, and the common denominator in that five-year period is more than one PRI grant, starting with GEAR UP. And now with Full Service, VSTOP, and IAL, it's vital. You cannot overstate the importance of the funds that are provided to these rural districts. We don't have the tax base to adequately staff and support our public schools.*

# Recommendations and Next Steps

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Preliminary data are showing that the FSCS grant is having a positive impact in the Breathitt and Knott communities. FSCS is bringing partners together in new ways to help communities and schools build capacity to address local challenges. The investments in tutoring, infrastructure and technology, enrichment, and college and career readiness are creating excitement in schools and fostering engagement in learning that is contributing to improved outcomes.

While the FSCS grant is beginning to show strong results in several areas, PSA identified areas where there could be room for growth to inform continuous improvement. The following recommendations and suggested next steps build on the findings in this report. We offer them to identify high leverage ways to build and sustain progress to date.

- **Explore opportunities to support early learning in new ways.** Following the well-received roll-out of the Kinder Camp, consider asking parents about other early learning opportunities they would like to see added to their community. For example, school coordinators could administer a brief survey card, focus group, sticker vote, or other creative data collection strategy during the next Kinder Camp to inform ways that the FSCS grant can continue to extend learning to children from birth to five to address kindergarten readiness.
- **Continue to target tutoring and instructional resources where they are needed most.** While achievement gains between 2023-24 and 2024-25 were strong across reading and math in most grade levels, the 2024-25 seventh-grade cohort lagged other grade-level cohorts in both reading and math. Explore root causes specific to this cohort to identify and support their unique challenges.
- **Shore up capacity and resources to maintain the enrichments.** School districts will likely not have the capacity to support music and art programs and field trips to the extent that the FSCS grant has been able to do. Yet the desire for more of these enrichments was shared by district and school administrators, school staff, parents, and students. Consider ways the Breathitt and Knott communities can learn from other districts and community partners around the state that have demonstrated success accessing grants and other external resources to support and sustain enrichments independently.
- **Continue to find ways to expand experiential and work-based learning.** The college and career readiness initiatives in both Breathitt and Knott are exposing students to more career pathways and employment opportunities that are engaging students and opening doors for them. Continue working with higher education partners, local businesses, and community partners to strategize ways to create opportunities for more students to benefit from experiential and work-based learning opportunities and connect students to higher education institutions and employers.
- **Document and share successful family and community engagement strategies.** Several school coordinators have worked with school staff to raise awareness and interest in family and community events, dramatically improving participation. Ensure that school coordinators are documenting the events and tracking participation so that these stories can be shared and celebrated. Reflect with school coordinators as a group about strategies that are working well or not working well and why so that coordinators can learn from each other and spread promising practices.

- **Consider identifying a leader to sustain the partnership networks.** The FSCS grant director has had success finding ways to bring community partners together in new ways to expand their reach and impact. To maintain that momentum beyond the life of the grant, both the Breathitt and Knott communities would benefit from establishing a leading person or organization that can take on the role and responsibilities the grant director has played. Sustainability could be strengthened by ensuring that there are people or processes in place to steer the partnership networks in each community and help to connect the dots between entities to fill gaps in services and limit redundancies, thereby maximizing impact regardless of funding stability.

