

MARCH 2026

Full Service Community Schools: Hazard-Perry

Partners for Rural Impact Annual Report (2025)

The U.S. Department of Education awarded Partners for Rural Impact (PRI) a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant to supports all 12 schools in two Eastern Kentucky school districts: **Hazard Independent Schools (HIS) and Perry County Schools (PCS)**. In these districts, FSCS launched in a context in which schools were, in many ways, already serving as resource hubs for the community. Immediately after the traumatic floods in late July 2022, schools and their communities came together to support families who had lost everything. During the ongoing recovery, schools across Perry County have supported each other, including by sharing space and resources ranging from busses to staff.

About this Report

This report synthesizes data Policy Studies Associates (PSA) has collected this year in Perry County. 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:

- Supporting early childhood education and kindergarten readiness
- Engaging youth and families to combat chronic absenteeism
- Advancing postsecondary success
- Working strategically to ensure long-term progress

Evaluation Findings

Supporting early childhood education and kindergarten readiness

Both districts in the FSCS grant have made kindergarten readiness gains in recent years, as measured by the Brigance assessment. Grant-wide, the districts’ combined Brigance scores show that 43% of entering kindergartners were kindergarten ready in the Fall 2024 assessment. “Social Emotional” and “Language” were assessment domains of strength, while “Academic Cognitive” was a domain of lower performance (see Exhibit 1).

In recent years, both districts have begun to recover from a dip in Brigance scores during the COVID years. From Fall 2022 to Fall 2024, HIS has

Exhibit 1: Kindergarten Readiness in Hazard Perry (Brigance)

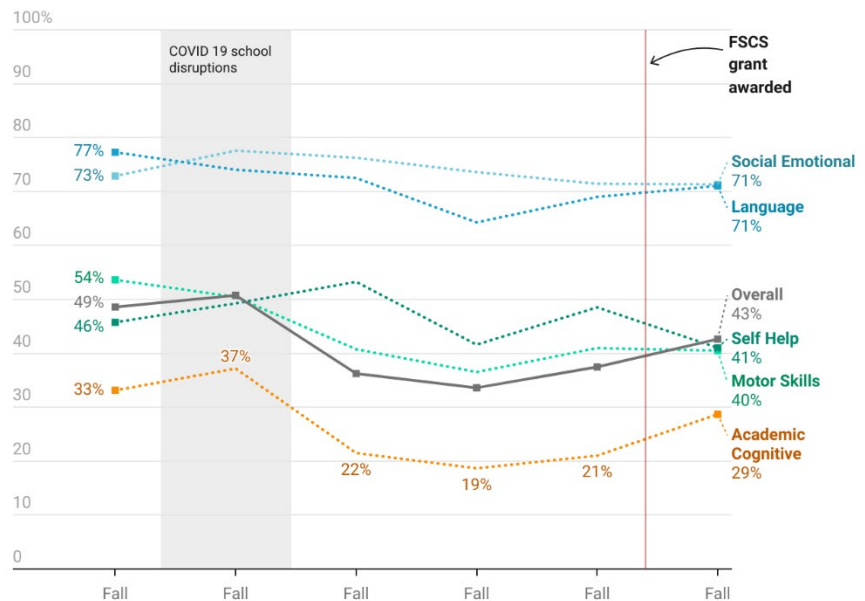


Exhibit reads: The Hazard Perry FSCS grant’s “Overall” score on the Fall 2024 Brigance Assessment was 43% of kindergartners ready, an increase from Fall 2023 but lower than prior to the COVID disruptions.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

increased 35 percentage points to 67% of students ready for kindergarten, and PCS increased 10 percentage points to 40% ready. The Kentucky state average for the Fall 2024 assessment was 46% kindergarten ready.

The grant was awarded between the Fall 2023 and Fall 2024 assessment periods, so much of grant's supports for kindergarten readiness came after the Fall 2024 assessment and will contribute to the Fall 2025 scores. FSCS staff and school representatives expressed hope and expectations that Brigance scores for assessments in fall 2025 will show growth when the state releases them.

In 2025, these FSCS supports included improved kindergarten readiness kits provided to families of preschoolers, enhanced summer KinderBoost camp for rising kindergartners, support in establishing and strengthening school-based preschool programs, and efforts to engage preschool families at school events.

Kindergarten Readiness Kits. A major grant strategy to support early childhood education and kindergarten readiness was the distribution of kindergarten readiness kits to families of pre-kindergarten students. These kits include instructional materials, easy-to-do activities, and parent guidance aligned to Brigance assessment domains, and the kits are intended to support families in preparing children for kindergarten entry. Kit activities address a range of skill areas (e.g., literacy and math, fine motor, colors, shapes) and had 2025 updates to improve upon the previous year.

Grant staff described parent requests for the kits and parent postings of kit use on the grant Facebook page, however they also acknowledged that it is a challenge to ensure all families are consistently and effectively using the kits. Strategies the grant used to promote family use of the kits include brief introductions to the kits when given to the families, hosting family engagement events throughout the year to discuss kits (e.g., "Family Fiesta"), promote parent use of the grant Facebook page to post images of kit use, and pre-school teacher reference to the kits in newsletters or in passing. The grant could bolster efforts to ensure the kits are used and incorporated into communication with families of pre-school children, as well develop mechanisms to monitor family engagement with the kits.

KinderBoost Summer Programs. The FSCS grant also operates summer KinderBoost programs to prepare rising kindergartners to enter kindergarten successfully. In one district, Save the Children previously launched a kindergarten preparation camp as a three-day experience in June, and in the other district, KinderBoost was previously a one-week camp. Using FSCS funds over the past two years, the grant and districts expanded the program to a two-week summer experience that tended to occur later in the summer. Another change in FSCS emphasis was that the KinderBoost programs would typically be taught by the kindergarten teacher each student will have in the fall. This approach provides families with early exposure to school routines, expectations, and staff, and represents a promising strategy for strengthening the transition into kindergarten. The approach also helps to create continuity across Pre-K instruction, summer programming, and kindergarten entry.

School coordinators and school staff see KinderBoost as a worthwhile investment. Many kindergarten teachers agree to lead KinderBoost in their schools during their summer vacation, and several respondents commented that KinderBoost attendees enter kindergarten with greater confidence and readiness to learn than those that do not attend. Attendance rates at KinderBoost suggest parents find value as well. For example, one elementary school reported that 26 of 36 (72%) incoming kindergarten students participated in KinderBoost and with nearly all attending every day. However, school coordinators did note that participation varied across schools and that some children that would benefit greatly from participation do not participate. Transportation and outreach were challenges to broader participation.

Support for Preschool Education. The FSCS grant has also supported preschool classroom education. In one isolated school that returned to its building after major flood damage renovation, the FSCS grant helped to establish a preschool program, paying for a teacher, classroom materials, and a playground. After the preschool program’s first year, the school board took over costs to run the program. In a school in the other district during 2024-25, a pre-K teacher worked with the school coordinator to develop classroom learning stations explicitly aligned to both the kindergarten readiness kits and the Brigance assessment domains. Students rotate through these stations during the half-day pre-K program, with teachers and aides facilitating targeted skill development.

Overall, principals and school coordinators find FSCS kindergarten readiness supports to be effective. In response to a spring 2025 survey, 89% of school coordinators and 86% of principals responded that kindergarten readiness services were a “high benefit,” with both groups finding this service area to be one of the most beneficial among 13 categories of service. Kindergarten teachers who were interviewed in December 2025 said that there have been improvements in student readiness compared to prior years, a perception that is supported by the increase in Brigance readiness scores in 2024–2025. School and grant staff look forward to the availability of Fall 2025 Brigance assessment data, expecting recent efforts will sustain or increase impact on test scores.

Engaging youth and families to combat chronic absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism (CA) trends over the past three years show noteworthy improvement at the grant level, as well as in both districts. As shown in Exhibit 2, both districts have successfully reduced their rates of CA, and both have seen greater reductions than the state as a whole. HIS, in particular, now has a lower rate of CA than the Kentucky average. While PCS’s CA rate has declined at a much greater rate than the state, it’s CA rate remains higher than the state average for 2024-25. On the state’s climate survey, both districts have seen an increase in students’ responses that “A teacher or some other adult from my school will care if I miss a day of school.” At the grant level, the average across districts and grade levels increased from 79% in 2022-23 to 84% in 2024-25 reporting this on the survey.

Exhibit 2: Chronic Absenteeism Rate Change from 2022-23 to 2024-25

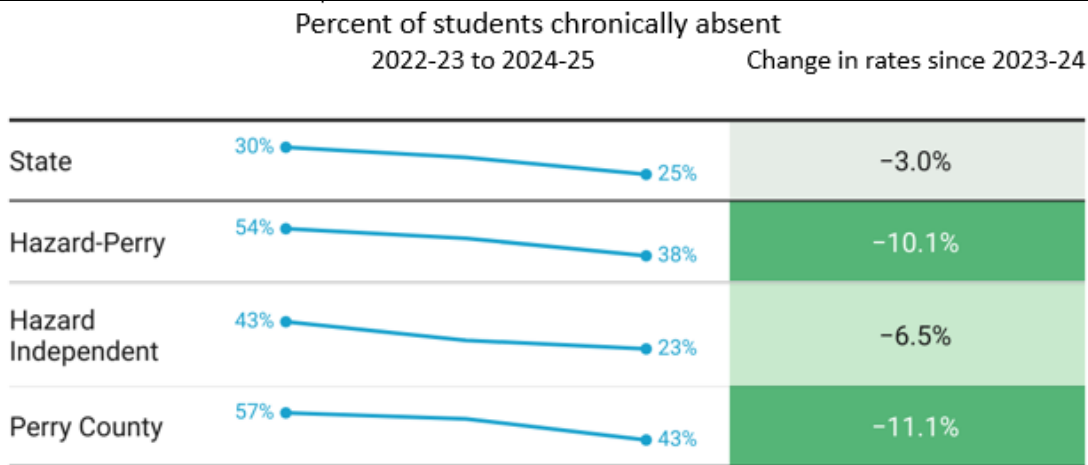


Exhibit reads: The state’s percentage of chronically absent students decreased 3% from 2023-24 to 2024-25, less than the decrease of chronically absent students in the Hazard Perry FSCS grant.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Both districts have implemented grant-supported strategies focused on early identification, relationship-based intervention, and student and family engagement.

Check & Connect. In both school districts, FSCS school coordinators have been trained in Check & Connect, an evidence-based mentoring and monitoring approach for students with attendance challenges. Coordinators and other designated staff typically support cohorts of approximately 15 students, providing individualized check-ins, monitoring attendance data, and problem-solving barriers to regular attendance. This targeted approach reflects a strategic effort to move beyond punitive responses toward relationship-driven supports.

Enrichment and Expanded Learning. In addition to attendance-specific strategies, the FSCS grant has provided enrichment to make school more intrinsically engaging and place where students want to be. While these investments are not attendance interventions per se, they address a critical root cause of chronic absenteeism: students' sense of relevance, belonging, and engagement in school. Educational enrichment—ranging from the arts to hands-on experiences to leadership groups to STEAM learning—is also a service area that school staffs and parents regard as a gap that FSCS can fill. When asked in a fall 2025 needs assessment survey, “enrichment” was the most frequently chosen area for offerings among 13 categories, by both parents (49%) and school staff (47%). This continues a trend from fall 2024 needs assessment which also indicated a parent and school staff desire for FSCS to support enrichment. One school coordinator described the importance of enrichment for attendance:

“What we were able to do with PRI's support is bring all these activities, whether it's during school, like creative writing and the arts and humanities residencies, or after. Those [enrichment activities] make school more engaging... You don't want to miss all these fun things that we are trying to provide at the school. And we are letting parents know that coming to school is important and not just because of the fun things, but your kid can get behind.”

— Elementary School Coordinator

Schools across both districts in this FSCS grant provided a variety of enrichment that otherwise would likely not be provided. For example, at a K-12 school that had no art teacher, the FSCS grant supported the inclusion of art into academic program for all its elementary students, as well as the establishment of a weekly after-school art program for secondary students that has garnered participation of 28% of its high schoolers. A couple of high schools in the grant have established leadership groups, in which high school students engage in leadership learning and tutor students in Prek-5. A middle school started after school chess and art clubs. Other schools added science, “book,” and music enrichment groups that meet regularly. Most schools brought artist residents into the school day for project-based hands-on learning over the course of a week to a month, typically integrated with academic instruction.

Communication with Parents and Families. The FSCS team has further amplified attendance messaging through public awareness efforts, including radio public service announcements, messaging at athletic events, and sustained engagement on social media platforms such as Facebook. Notably, school coordinators themselves manage much of this social media outreach, highlighting not only school and community events but also individual student successes, which helps build positive school identity and strengthen connections with families.

Strengthening teaching and learning through tutors

The FSCS grant invested strategically in tutoring—both through adult and student tutors—and collectively FSCS staff and school partners said that the investment in tutors was filling an instructional need. While there has not been systematic analysis of the impact of tutoring at the individual student level, both districts have made substantial gains in Kentucky state report card ratings from 2023-24 to 2024-25. Across the grant’s 15 schools, 10 schools have advanced one or two rating levels, while two have dropped a level.

Math and ELA state assessment scores are key factors in school ratings, both of which are the focus of FSCS tutoring efforts. Across grades 3-8, the grant districts outperformed the state average on the KSA math and ELA assessments from 2023-24 to 2024-25 (see Exhibits 3 and 4). PCS and HIS are making academic progress in these grades, with FSCS tutoring efforts contributing to the work.

Skilled Adult Tutors. The FSCS has been successful in recruiting highly skilled adult tutors to serve in the districts’ schools. In many cases, the tutors are retired teachers from those same schools, often having been leaders as department heads or grade level chairs. Tutors are hired to teach specific content areas based on their area of pedagogical expertise, most in either math or reading. In schools we visited, the tutors typically deliver instruction three full days a week. They support instruction in the classroom by circulating to provide individualized support, working with small groups on the side, or pulling students during or outside of class time for individualized instruction. Tutors who were interviewed described strategies for identifying students to work with and their specific learning needs, including close consultation with the classroom teachers and analysis of formative and benchmark assessment data (e.g., Measures of Academic Progress, I-XCEL). In some cases, tutors provided ongoing support to students, but they also had flexible “case loads” that allowed them to provide supports ad hoc based on real-time need.

Because this FSCS grant has recruited highly skilled educators as tutors, some tutors have also had a role in providing mentoring and support to classroom

Exhibit 3: KSA Reading Proficiency in Hazard Perry

Percent of students scoring proficient or distinguished

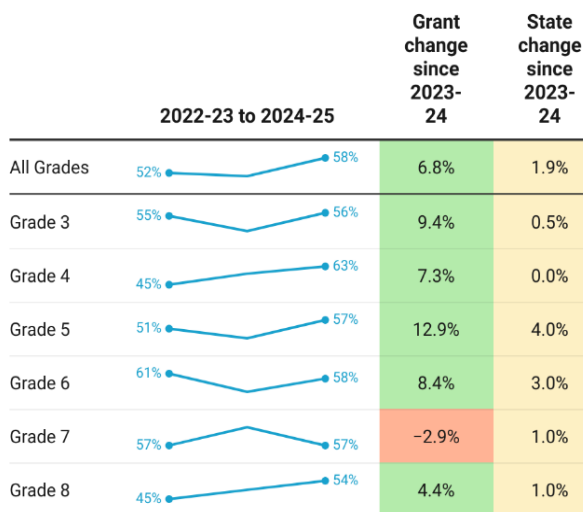


Exhibit reads: Across all grades, Hazard Perry FSCS student reading proficiency increased 6.8% from 2023-24 to 2024-25 on the KSA.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Exhibit 4: KSA Math Proficiency in Hazard Perry

Percent of students scoring proficient or distinguished

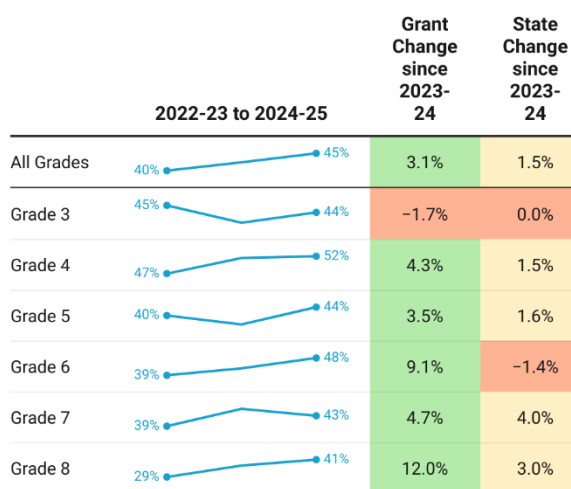


Exhibit reads: Exhibit reads: Across all grades, Hazard Perry FSCS student math proficiency increased 3.1% from 2023-24 to 2024-25 on the KSA.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

teachers regarding instruction and professional practice. Discussions about student learning and instructional strategy have provided an opportunity for tutors to be a sounding board and provide soft guidance when teachers ask for it. For example, in one school, a former math teacher and district new teacher mentor served as a tutor primarily supporting instruction of four math teachers, three of whom are novice teachers. The tutor attends weekly math department meetings and described nurturing a relationship with the teachers in which he provides “food for thought.” For one of the teachers, the tutor has modelled instruction, and with another, the tutor is collaboratively working to compile resources and design a process for working with subgroups identified through analysis of assessment data.

Student Tutors. The FSCS grant also has invested in student tutors. Student tutors are typically high school students that have met school-level criteria for being tutor (e.g., credit attainment, academic performance, leadership and communication skills) and work with students in lower grades, often travelling to elementary or middle schools. In some but not all cases, student tutors have an interest in the teaching profession. The number of student tutors varies from school to school, with one school the evaluation team visited having nine tutors. Tutors also vary in the amount days and hours they tutor depending on their course and credit load, from a few hours a week to several full days a week. To illustrate, one senior that has completed nearly all their required course work is in their second year of tutoring, traveling to a feeder elementary school for 3-6 hours every day to work specifically with third-graders. This student has plans to enter the teaching profession and has been earning college credit through the schools dual-credit program. In addition to supporting third-grader learning, the tutor described her own learnings ranging from behavior management and pedagogy to personal time management and professional practice.

Postsecondary success

Dual Enrollment. FSCS is strategically engaging students in high school through providing them with dual enrollment opportunities, career and technical education (CTE) expansion to programs already at the high school or bringing in new programs, summer internships, apprenticeships and school year internships, and providing after school activities that build leadership skills, service experiences, or competition.

FSCS has supported students taking dual enrollment credit by purchasing books and materials, while the district picks up the tuition costs. GEAR UP funds supported the costs in the past, but the GEAR UP grant was completed last year. FSCS has picked up those costs by allowing more students to take dual enrollment classes. Students can earn multiple credits before graduating from high school at no cost.

Pathways. Perry High School is creating a new engineering pathway at the high school funded by FSCS. The teacher is receiving professional learning, the classroom is being equipped with state-of-the-art computers and equipment that will engage students interested in a career in engineering. Other programs in Perry High School like the media pathway, the afterschool pod cast program, and health care have been supported by FSCS in order to ensure students are working with current industry standard material.

Work Experience. Summer internships, tutoring opportunities, apprenticeships and during the school year internships that are paid. FSCS provided funding for the student tutoring program and partnered with businesses and organizations to provide students paid internships during the school year. Three of the internship students expressed the value of these opportunities for them. They all relayed that they

would not of been able to do this without the help of FSCS backing. Two other students in the tutoring program expressed how much they liked the program, and one student is questioning her career decision because she likes working with students. These changes are impacting students and the careers they want to engage in.

“A lot of the times our tutors, by the time they get to be a senior, we do the tutoring program for juniors and seniors. By the time they get to be a senior, they're taking pretty much nothing but their dual credit classes every day. So that way they have three, four or five hours they can go to the elementary schools and do the hands-on tutoring for the students and then come back here.”

—High School Coordinator

Postsecondary Readiness. Providing students with engaging curriculum, qualified teachers, current equipment and opportunities to explore jobs in the community is integral to their increase in data in Exhibit 5 below where there is an increase of over 25% in the number of students taking dual enrollment classes, more students are earning industry certification by 7%, and more students are graduating completing one or more postsecondary indicators by 5%.

Exhibit 5: Postsecondary Readiness Indicators from 2021-22 to 2024-25

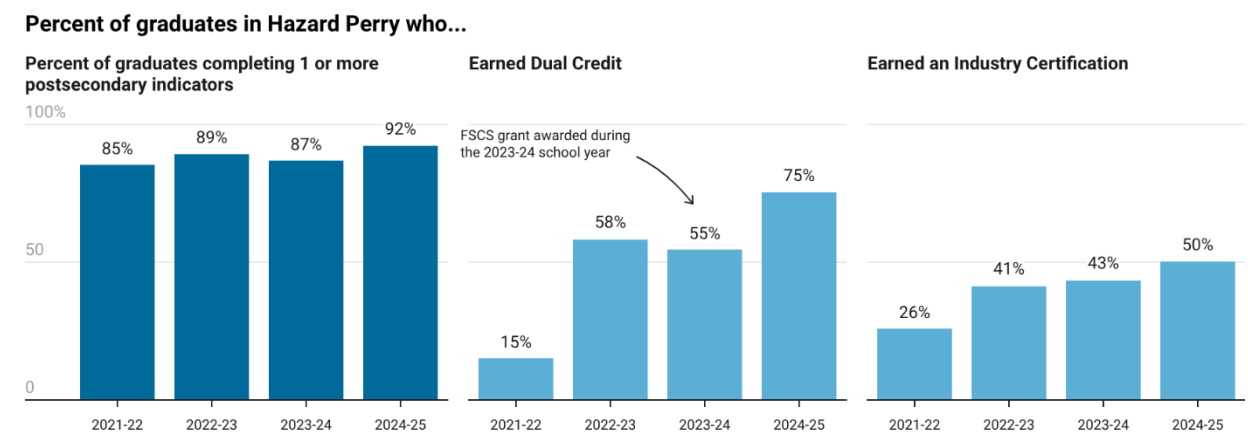


Exhibit reads: Across the Hazard Perry FSCS districts, 92% of graduates completed one or more of the state’s postsecondary indicators in 2024-25, an increase from 2023-24.

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Graduation Rates. Despite expanded career pathway options and increased participation in CTE, graduation rates in Perry County have remained largely unchanged over the past four years. Exhibits 6 and 7 show that both four-year and five-year graduation rates have plateaued. FSCS has continued some of the strategies that GEAR UP started while enhancing other programs to create an engaging high school experience.

GEAR UP ended in the 2023-2024 school year and FSCS picked up some of those activities for college and career awareness. In the grant districts, a few of the school coordinators worked for the GEAR UP grant providing knowledge of the parts of the program to continue that will provide students with the highest level of support. In many cases like dual enrollment FSCS has expanded the programs. Internships, college and career fairs, college visits, and in school pathways options like healthcare, media, and the new engineering program at Perry High School are opportunities afforded students in hopes that they will find career paths and graduate.

The four-year graduation rate found in Exhibit 6 has remained nearly the same for the last four school years. The five-year graduation found in Exhibit 7 is at the lowest point over four years in the 2024-2025 school year at 93.3%. These activities contribute to awareness and motivation, the stagnant graduation data indicate that career readiness efforts alone are not sufficient to move graduation rates without deeper integration into academic advising, credit recovery, and student support systems.

Exhibit 6: Four-Year Graduation Rate

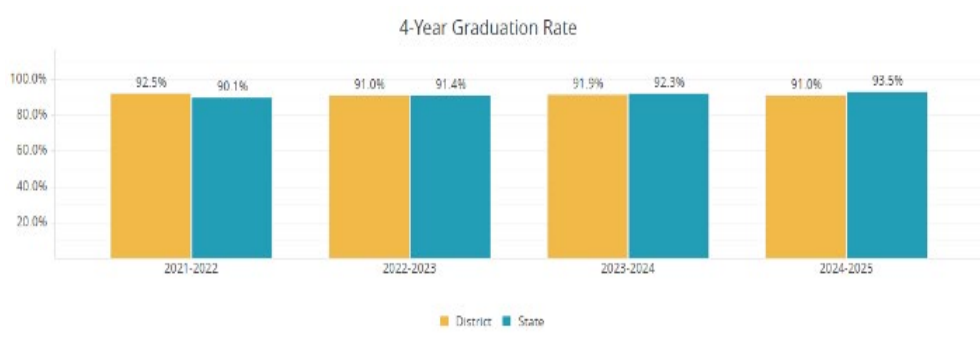


Exhibit reads: Across the Hazard Perry FSCS districts, 91% of students graduated in four years, a slight decrease from 2023-24 and slightly less than the state average.
 Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Exhibit 7: Five-year Graduation Rate

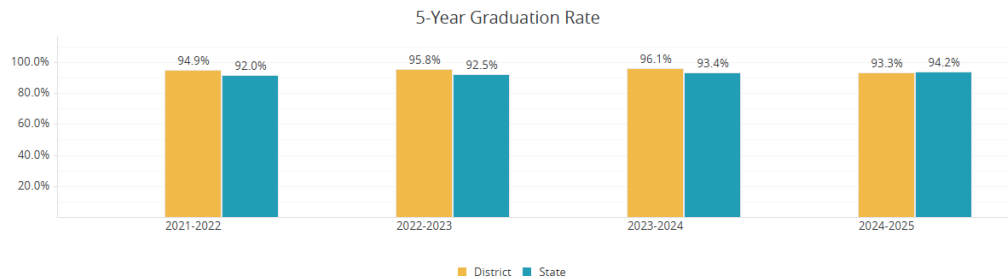


Exhibit reads: Across the Hazard Perry FSCS districts, 93.3% of students graduated in five years, a decrease from 2023-24 and slightly less than the state average.
 Source: Kentucky Department of Education

Strengthening lasting community partnerships

The FSCS grant in PCS and HIS has strengthened and established partnerships with community organizations and members, helping to connect the districts with partners in ways that can be sustained after the FSCS grant ends. Some FSCS grant partnerships were at the grant level supporting one or both of the districts, whereas others were at the school level supporting an individual school’s students and community. Some partnerships predated the FSCS grant, and the grant worked with the partners to address newly identified needs or to sustain efforts with new vigor. Other partnerships were new in the districts and introduced an untapped resource to ecosystem of supports. Much of the FSCS grant work

with partners involved coordinating with other providers, ensuring that services were strengthened, aligned, and non-duplicative.

The FSCS partnerships helped to provide a variety of needed services, including educational opportunities, enrichment, career preparation, health care, and other services. Below are select examples to illustrate the ways FSCS worked with partners to deliver services in PCS and HIS.

Kindergarten Readiness. The FSCS grant worked with Eastern Streams, an organization with expertise in early education, in multiple ways. Shortly after the FSCS grant award in 2024, the grant team partnered with Eastern Streams to design kindergarten readiness kits that would be shared with the families of rising kindergartners and preschool-age children across the two districts. Eastern Streams lent expertise in identifying learning goals for the kits, choosing materials and activities, and ensuring caregivers could effectively use the kits with their children. The kits were comprehensive, accessible, and aligned with the Brigance assessment’s expectations for kindergarten readiness. Distribution of the kits began in summer 2024 and was refined in 2025 to improve the breadth of distribution.

At one school that was shuttered for renovation after historic 2022 floods, FSCS worked with Eastern Streams and other partners to establish the school’s first Pre-K program upon reopening. This was a major community need in this isolated town, as there was no formal preschool or day care program available within roughly a half hour drive following the flood. Eastern Streams provided guidance on the classroom space and programming, as well as the new age-appropriate outdoor play space, while FSCS supported funding for initial materials and the first year of staffing. In its second year of 2025-26, the Pre-K program has been incorporated into the district’s budget with expectations it will be sustained indefinitely.

Health Supports. The FSCS grant has worked with the University of Pikeville to provide vision and the University of Kentucky to provide dental services to families that do not have access to health providers. The universities provide interns to conduct health screenings in the schools, identifying students with needs that if left unaddressed would inhibit their academic, social, emotional, and physical development.

Career Preparation and Experience. The FSCS grant partnered with a variety of organizations, businesses, and the district to provide internships and job shadowing for high school students, during both the summer and the school year. During the summer, students explored careers as interns for partners that included the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Perry County Clerk Office, Goodwill, and a local company installing new sports fields following devastating floods. With the two districts, the grant provided long-term internships that partnered students with teachers to provide tutoring and gain experience in the education profession, and during the summer, interns assisted in the delivery of summer camps. With the Hazard Community and Technical College, the grant provided job shadow opportunities in a variety of fields, including 3D design, HVAC, engineering, and manufacturing.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following recommendations and suggested next steps build on the findings above. We offer them to identify high leverage ways to build and sustain progress to date.

Cross District Collaboration. School Coordinators collaborate as a unified team across the two districts in Perry County, and they have implemented strategies and activities that are beginning to show

measurable impact in district data. Coordinators have established strong, positive relationships with school administrators, and the project director has built trusting relationships with staff in both district offices. Building on this foundation, the FSCS grant could facilitate cross-district learning to strengthen existing efforts and support the development of new strategies focused on high-need areas (e.g., kindergarten readiness, chronic absenteeism, postsecondary readiness). For instance, grant staff could be more systematic in sharing what is happening between the two districts, as well as provide district leaders and administrators with dedicated time and space to talk about promising strategies.

Kindergarten Readiness. KinderBoost and kindergarten readiness kits had a promising impact on Brigance data and teacher reports in the first year of grant implementation. While it will be important to monitor Fall 2025 Brigance assessment results when the state releases them, these two existing grant strategies appear to be bearing fruit.

- Regarding the kindergarten readiness kits, the FSCS grant should consider if there are ways to strengthen its approach to ensuring parents use and know how to use the materials with their children. There are likely learnings or strategies among schools that can be shared grantwide (e.g., distributing at an event where there can be guidance, regular communication with parents about kit progress via email or Facebook, integration with messaging from PreK or kindergarten teachers).
- Continue to consider how to strengthen alignment between PreK curriculum, kindergarten readiness, and Brigance domains, including communication with non-district-managed PreK providers.
- Continue to broaden outreach and recruitment of preschool-aged families that are harder to reach, both for KinderBoost and kindergarten readiness kits.

Chronic Absenteeism. Improvements in absenteeism data suggest that district, school, and FSCS grant strategies are working. FSCS work to support relationship-based interventions, consistent messaging, and engaging school environments may be a lever in reducing chronic absenteeism. However, the two districts may be able to learn from each other, and FSCS services may be modified to ensure they are reaching enough students for grant-wide improvement and institutionalized at the school level.

- Where needed, consider expanding evidence-based attendance interventions like Check & Connect to reach a larger proportion of chronically absent students, including by working with school leadership and staff to scale staff use of the intervention.
- Routinize use of data to target efforts, such as weekly attendance data and the absenteeism map provided by PSA.
- Sustain and scale successful family and community engagement strategies, including family events, timely and meaningful communication from school staff, home visits.
- Ensure district transportation options are regularly communicated.
- Continue to provide engaging and enriching learning opportunities to ensure school is a positive place for all students.

College and Career Readiness. Our findings suggest that the districts, along with FSCS support, are making important structural investments in career readiness, including pathway expansion, financial supports, and professional learning. However, there is room to grow, particularly in regard to dual credit completion, industry credential attainment, and graduation rates.

- Consider strengthening advising, scheduling, and monitoring to support CTE pathway completion, not just enrollment.
- Advocate for and support the expansion of work-based learning, dual credit, and credentialing opportunities that culminate in recognized, high-value outcomes.
- Use participation and completion data to identify drop-off points and targeted intervention opportunities.
- Identify students who are at risk of not graduating, and provide targeted support.

Community Partnerships. The FSCS grant has supported both PCS and HIS by nurturing and establishing partnerships, yet this can be an area where FSCS can increase its support. While recognizing that the number of partners may be more limited in Perry County than other locales, there may be opportunities to identify new partners or ways to maximize the contributions of existing ones.

- Create a grant-wide partnership advisory board that meets regularly and includes members of the community and districts. This will help to identify and coordinate partners, provide an opportunity for members to learn more about each other's efforts, add focus on prominent needs in the districts, and increase a collaborative effort across both districts (reducing competition for partners).
- Develop a partnership strategy, which might specify outreach strategy, guidance about clear communication when asking for help, a list of priorities/needs for partners, a list of potential and existing partners, and clarity around roles and goals for partnership (including expectations for FSCS staff).
- Share stories of FSCS successes that celebrate partner contributions, and create a campaign to publicize these to create excitement in the community to increase partnerships.

