

# West Kern Consortium Full-Service Community Schools Grant

Annual Evaluation Report

Year Three

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September 2021

Full-Service Community Schools  
Grant #U215J180104, funded by the  
U.S. Department of Education

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Suggested citation: Cartznes, S., & Tejawani, J. (2021). West Kern Consortium Full-Service Community Schools Grant Annual Evaluation Report, Year Three. WestEd.

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# Executive Summary

In 2018, the West Kern Consortium (WKC), a partnership between three rural districts located in California's Central Valley, garnered a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education to improve mathematics proficiency, school readiness, behavioral outcomes, and attendance in their schools. The FSCS grant program aims to improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty, rural schools. Lost Hills Union Elementary School District (Lost Hills), Maple Elementary School District (Maple), and Semitropic Elementary School District (Semitropic) aim to achieve their goals by implementing a community school model and establishing and improving the following five pipelines: (1) preschool; (2) expanded learning; (3) student transitions with focus on mathematics instruction; (4) family and community engagement; and (5) social and health services.

In collaboration with the WKC leadership, WestEd is conducting a comprehensive, mixed-methods evaluation aligned to the five pipelines of the WKC that combines formative and summative components. In year three, the focus was to further understand grant implementation and partner relations through interviews with WKC leadership, community school coordinators, teachers, and parents, as well as an analysis of extant program data.

## Findings

**Pipeline 1: Early Childhood Programs.** During the third year of the grant, Lost Hills enrolled 50 students in the preschool program and offered two in-person classes and one virtual class. Enrollment in the program increased to the point that staff discontinued marketing efforts. A preschool trainer provided several half-day professional development trainings to staff focused on using language, social emotional development, and visual representations in mathematics. Preschool students exceeded the targets for the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessments in social and emotional development and math cognition, a noteworthy achievement given the high-level of training provided to preschool teachers through the grant.

**Pipeline 2: Expanded Learning.** In year three, only 23 students enrolled in the virtual afterschool program (compared to 74 students in the previous year). Parents were concerned about excessive screen time for their children and preferred to not add more. Leadership added

that the afterschool program was not implemented for the entire school year because staff and students were experiencing burnout and Zoom fatigue.

**Pipeline 3: Supporting School Transitions through Mathematics Instruction.** Like previous years of the grant, the WKC was unable to find a qualified candidate to fill the position of a mathematics coach in year three. To address this challenge, Lost Hills contracted with a university mathematics professor to provide services, including read, draw, write strategy training to all teachers and instructional assistants. At Maple, teachers worked with Next Gen math trainers to support their efforts to teach math. Semitropic relied on the Kern County Office of Education to provide math coaching.

Leadership teams at each school site adopted the Data Wise framework, which helped the teams interpret their data. Monthly meetings included structured agendas, data analysis, and learning walks, which leadership noted has successfully become part of their standard practices. In year three, the Lost Hills team focused on developing a consistent system where all students in need of further mathematics support receive additional instruction two days per week. Semitropic and Maple are establishing structures to move toward this model in future years.

**Pipeline 4: Family and Community Engagement.** The grant-funded community school coordinators at each district played an important role in engaging the community by organizing community events, facilitating the Family Literacy Program, and assisting the school social workers to refer services. One of the main roles of the coordinators during year three of the grant was to address student attendance, often calling homes and parents to get students logged in during distance learning or picking up students during in-person learning. Leadership and community school coordinators from each district meet biweekly to discuss the grant activities and challenges. Each community school coordinator interviewed made it clear that they understand how important their role is and take pride in their contributions. Teachers and leadership were pleased with the work of the community school coordinators, praising their work as liaisons between the school and community.

In year three, the Family Literacy Program served eighteen 18 preschool parents and 14 parents of K-5 students. The WKC provided parents with the opportunity to participate in the courses online through Zoom. Parents were also provided with devices to facilitate their participation and incentives to increase participation. Through surveys administered during the first and last sessions, 100 percent of parents reported changes in at-home literacy behaviors as a result of their participation in the program.

The WKC held 13 school events across the three districts in year three. All family and community events during year three of the grant were moved online or were held as drive-thru events to adhere to COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. These events included virtual bingo, a Halloween Parade and Drive-Thru, a Christmas Lights Drive-Thru, a Daddy/Daughter Date Night Box, a Mother/Son Virtual Adventure, an event with United Farm Workers and other

organizations, and a Drive-in Movie Night. Staff noted that text messages, social media, and paper flyers informed the community about the events.

**Pipeline 5: Social and Health Services.** Through the grant, two social workers were placed at each of the four school sites to provide interventions to students and families, offer general services within the school such as assessment and consultation with school teams, and work directly with students. Social workers moved many of their student check-in meetings to Zoom or FaceTime during year three of the grant. They also used phone calls and conducted 44 home visits to check-in with students in their caseload. During year three, 97 students were referred for services and 84 students were placed in case management. Community school coordinators and teachers explained that the school social workers are helpful to both students and staff.

During year three, the WKC expanded the Family Referral Program, and found that the resources needed are available through the existing partnerships and staff hired under the grant, such as College Community Services (CCS), Omni Family Health, Kern County Behavioral Health, Kern Social Services, Shafter Healthy Start, Kaiser Behavioral Health Department, Lost Hills Family Resource Center, Migrant Education and Community School Coordinators. Combined, the organizations made 57 family referrals, with 41 families successfully connected to services.

During year three of the grant, 27 students enrolled in AmeriCorps mentoring at A.M. Thomas Middle School and Semitropic. Unfortunately, Maple was unable to fill their vacant position. Overall, students believed that the AmeriCorps mentors were beneficial, and that the mentors were someone that students could talk to when they needed emotional or academic support. Teachers also saw the benefit of the AmeriCorps mentors and believed that they were an asset to school community.

Overall, chronic absenteeism increased in year three of the grant, which staff directly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. To address chronic absenteeism, community school coordinators made phone calls and conducted home visits. Additionally, EveryDay Labs Letters were sent home to students who are at risk of becoming or were already chronically absent.

**Successes and Challenges to Grant Implementation.** A number of successes and challenges emerged regarding implementation of the FSCS grant during the third year. Like last year, facilitators of grant efforts included the work of the community school coordinators in supporting students and staff and engaging the community, and the work of the Children's

Cabinet of West Kern to connect students and their families to services. Barriers included staffing challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from the interviews and extant data analysis conducted in year three of the grant, WestEd provides the following recommendations to WKC leadership as they embark on the fourth year of FSCS grant implementation.

- Sustain high enrollment in the preschool program by surveying current parents about the learning options, in-person and virtual, to understand their preferences, trying with additional effort to gather feedback from parents of migrant and special education students.
- Utilize community school coordinators and current parents to tell others in the community about the afterschool program, especially highlighting the tutoring aspect, to increase enrollment in year four.
- Continue to celebrate the work of the community school coordinators in engaging the community in school events, facilitating the Family Literacy Program, and providing numerous supports to students and staff at the schools, and ensure they have the necessary supports to fulfill their many obligations.
- Disseminate the results from the Family Literacy Program in terms of the change in at-home literacy behaviors – follow up with parents on their use of learnings and share success stories with the broader school community to increase participation.
- Continue to offer virtual options for community events to appeal to parents who are concerned about the possible health consequences of attending in-person and those who appreciate the ease of access to attend a school event virtually.
- Address staffing challenges through the consideration of a grow-your-own program to prepare members of the local community to be teachers and instructional aides, through partnering with a local university and structuring a program tailored to the unique needs of rural districts. This would be a significant effort for the districts but could lead to a long-term solution for the ongoing staffing challenges.



# Introduction

In 2018, the West Kern Consortium (WKC), a partnership between three rural districts located in California's Central Valley, garnered a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education to improve mathematics proficiency, school readiness, behavioral outcomes, and attendance in their schools. The FSCS grant program aims to improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty, rural schools.

The community school model has shown itself to be a solution for some of the educational challenges that teachers, administrators, and districts have found within their schools today, particularly in rural areas. The model is based on a relationship between the school and the community, where the school partners with community members and organizations to utilize existing resources.<sup>1</sup> The school becomes a neighborhood hub throughout the year, and students and parents benefit from the range of engagement opportunities provided, such as tutoring, family and parenting classes, mental and physical health care, and community building activities. The four pillars of the community school model are integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices.<sup>2,3</sup>

## West Kern Consortium

The WKC represents a partnership between Lost Hills Union Elementary School District (Lost Hills), Maple Elementary School District (Maple), and Semitropic Elementary School District (Semitropic)—three rural districts located in Kern County in California's Central Valley. During the grant period (2018/23), the WKC aims to implement the community school model and

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<sup>1</sup> Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2018). Community schools: A promising foundation for progress. *American Educator*, 42(2), 17–22.

<sup>2</sup> Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2017). Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/equitable-community-schools>.

<sup>3</sup> Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report>

establish the following five pipelines to improve mathematics proficiency, school readiness, behavioral outcomes, and attendance in their schools:

1. High-quality early childhood education programs
2. High-quality school and out-of-school time programs and strategies
3. Support for a child's transition to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school into and through postsecondary education and into the workforce through mathematics instruction
4. Family and community engagement and support
5. Social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and support

The implementation of a community schools model requires a high level of coordination to involve all influential parties in the design and implementation of innovations in the community. The WKC convenes community stakeholders through the Children's Cabinet of West Kern (Cabinet), a strategic network charged with efficiently implementing the community-school program. The Cabinet includes the three partner districts' superintendents, the superintendent of the local high school, the Kern County Supervisor, Kern Behavioral Health Services, Kern Public Health Services, the Boys and Girls Club, and state and local political representatives. The Cabinet utilizes the overarching framework of Harvard's By All Means<sup>4</sup> initiative that forms and supports cross-sector consortia to organize the pipeline services. Due to the high rates of chronic absenteeism and suspensions/punitive discipline in the WKC, the primary focus of the Cabinet is to improve school attendance by spreading awareness and resources to parents about the importance of good attendance on their students' academic success.

## Evaluation

In collaboration with the WKC leadership, WestEd began an evaluation of the FSCS grant in 2018 that will extend through the life of the grant. The comprehensive, mixed-methods evaluation is aligned to the five pipelines of the WKC and utilizes qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources to strengthen the validity of the results. In addition to reporting on relevant performance measures, the evaluation includes a study of program implementation

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<sup>4</sup> The By All Means initiative, led by Harvard's Education Redesign Lab, seeks to address the correlation between a child's socio-economic status and educational achievement (<https://edredesign.org/by-all-means-initiative>).

to help ensure that implementation efforts are informed by data. Table 1 details the evaluation questions by WKC Pipeline.

**Table 1. WKC Pipelines and Corresponding Evaluation Questions**

| WKC Pipeline                           | Evaluation Questions   |
|--|--|
| <b>Early childhood programs</b>        | <p>How and to what extent is the WKC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) effectively preparing children to enter school through early childhood education and services?</li> <li>2) providing high-quality mathematics instruction to early childhood students?</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Expanded learning</b>               | <p>How and to what extent is the WKC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) effectively providing a safe and supportive environment for students afterschool and in summer?</li> <li>2) prioritizing English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students for enrollment?</li> <li>3) impacting growth in mathematics and English Language Proficiency for expanded learning students?</li> </ol> |
| <b>Student transitions</b>             | <p>How and to what extent is the WKC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) effectively providing high-quality mathematics instruction and intervention to PreK-8 students?</li> <li>2) engaging in reviews of student mathematics data to understand how instruction is impacting student data?</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Family and community engagement</b> | <p>How and to what extent is the WKC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) effectively providing parents with education services to increase family reading literacy?</li> <li>2) connecting families with the school community and helping them understand resources available?</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Social and health services</b>      | <p>How and to what extent is the WKC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) effectively providing support to students who are chronically absent or present discipline issues in grades 5-8 through a caring adult, intensive counseling and case management services?</li> <li>2) effectively providing students and families with referrals to agencies based on their needs?</li> </ol>                 |

The year three evaluation focused on three aspects of the WKC's progress in the FSCS grant: to further understand grant implementation and activities; assess student academic and behavioral outcomes; and understand how the partner districts continue to adapt grant activities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. WestEd reviewed relevant documents, analyzed extant program data, and gathered formative data through interviews with stakeholders. Relevant documents included meeting agendas and notes, the Annual Performance Report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education, and program materials. Extant data included enrollment, attendance, student academic proficiency, and mental health related data, which informed a quantitative assessment of whether the WKC met the annual targets set in their grant application. One-to-one interviews with WKC leadership (4), community school coordinators (4), teachers (1), parents (3), and partners (1) were conducted virtually in May 2021.<sup>5</sup> The eleven interviewees were asked about the development and implementation of the various grant activities, the collaboration among the three local districts, and successes and challenges of the grant work. Narrative data from interviews were analyzed qualitatively, with researchers engaging in a process of data coding and identification of overall emergent themes across respondents. Analysis of these various data points inform the findings in this year three report.

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<sup>5</sup> One Community School Coordinator and one teacher who participated in the interviews are also parents of WKC students. These interviewees were asked questions regarding their role within the district (community school coordinator or teacher) and as a parent of a student.

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# Findings

During the third year of the evaluation, data collection efforts focused on a study of grant activities and implementation, and how districts collaborated to achieve their FSCS grant goals. Findings from interviews uncovered a number of themes related to the overall progress of the initiative. Student academic and behavioral outcome data provide further understanding of grant implementation and how the students are being served. These findings are summarized in this section, organized by WKC Pipeline, and followed by additional findings related to successes and challenges of the work in year three.

## Pipeline 1: Early Childhood Programs

To improve the offerings for their youngest students, the WKC expanded their full-day preschool program with additional classrooms for students between ages three and five. The WKC proposed that program staff would utilize the California Preschool Framework<sup>6</sup> and California Learning Foundations to organize the preschool program, focusing specifically on intentional teaching<sup>7</sup> and family and community partnerships.

In year three of the grant, the program included two in-person classes and one virtual class. The school year began with distance learning only for preschool students. By October 2020, the program offered in-person instruction through small-group cohorts with an additional distance learning option. Leadership are proud of the successful enrollment for this program, and believe that providing these two modes of instruction helped to increase enrollment. During

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<sup>6</sup> The framework is grounded in eight guiding principles: (1) relationships are central; (2) play is a primary context for learning; (3) learning is integrated; (4) intentional teaching enhances children's learning experiences; (5) family and community partnerships create meaningful connections; (6) individualization of learning includes all children; (7) responsiveness to culture and language supports children's learning; and (8) time for reflection and planning enhances teaching (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschoolframeworkvol3.pdf>).

<sup>7</sup> Intentional teaching refers to teachers being mindful of children's learning, with an understanding of early learning and development. The intentional teacher is flexible in order to accommodate differences in children's learning strengths and needs. Intentional teaching strategies span from planning learning environments, experiences, and routines to spontaneous responses suggested by the moment-to-moment focus of the children (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschoolframeworkvol3.pdf>).

the third year of the grant, Lost Hills enrolled 50 students in the preschool program, more than the target goal of 40 students (see Figure 1).

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**Figure 1. Preschool Program Student Enrollment, Target vs. Actual**



To track student attendance, the team developed a system during the 2020 summer school session and continued to use this system during the 2020/21 school year. As of May 2021, the WKC met the attendance goal in preschool (see Figure 2).

While overall attendance for the preschool program is strong, leadership identified that migrant and special education students struggle with coming to school on a daily basis. Additionally, communicating with migrant parents during the school day is a challenge since they spend the day working mostly in the fields where they have minimal to no cell phone reception.

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**Figure 2. Attendance Rate in the Preschool Program, Target vs. Actual**



The classes were taught by three preschool teachers and three associate teachers, and specifically targeted English Language Learners. Teachers in the preschool program utilize the California Preschool Framework and California Learning Foundations to organize the class and appropriate preschool curriculum to teach required components. Teachers focus on using visual

representations to teach mathematics and are supported with weekly meetings and classroom support from the preschool director.

In year three, a preschool trainer/consultant worked closely with the preschool teachers and coordinator to provide several half-day professional development trainings focused on using language, social emotional development, and visual representations in mathematics. The trainer also conducted observations and provided direct feedback to the teachers. Building off of the work established in year two, preschool teachers and associate teachers work closely with K-8 grade staff and administrators to ensure students enter kindergarten prepared. With the establishment of the FSCS grant, as an ongoing practice, the preschool staff utilize visual representations for math instruction, and leverage both the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) and assessments done in the first-quarter of the kindergarten year to measure student learning progress.

Lost Hills leadership reported being especially proud of the DRDP assessment results, as there has been a large effort to provide training for teachers in this area. For the Social and Emotional

Development domain of the DRDP, 35 out of 40 students (87.5%) scored at building or above, which exceeded their target (see Figure 3).<sup>8</sup>

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**Figure 3. DRDP Assessment Proficiency: Social and Emotional Development, Target vs. Actual**



For the Cognition – including Math and Science domain of the DRDP, 32 of 39 students (82%) assessed scored building or above, which exceeded their target by two percent (see Figure 4).

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**Figure 4. DRDP Assessment Proficiency: Cognition – Math Domain, Target vs. Actual**



Leadership noted that the preschool program was one of the largest successes in the third year of the grant. In addition to meeting or surpassing each project measure, leadership are also proud of the availability of services for special education students. In addition, enrollment in the program increased to the point that staff discontinued marketing efforts, as parents were

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<sup>8</sup> The DRDP developmental levels are on a 4-point scale: Responding (Earlier, Later); Exploring (Earlier, Middle, Later); Building (Earlier, Middle, Later); and Integrating (Earlier) ([https://www.desiredresults.us/sites/default/files/docs/forms/DRDP2015\\_PSC\\_Comprehensive\\_View\\_Combined-20200219\\_ADA.pdf](https://www.desiredresults.us/sites/default/files/docs/forms/DRDP2015_PSC_Comprehensive_View_Combined-20200219_ADA.pdf)).



already interested in the program. Next year, the WKC plans to assess whether preschool students are proficient in number recognition on the kindergarten first quarter assessment.

## **Pipeline 2: Expanded Learning**

The WKC proposed to operate an afterschool program at Maple and Semitropic with the support of the community school coordinators and the Boys and Girls Club (BGC) of Kern County. As proposed, the afterschool program is designed as a three-hour, three-day-per-week program providing one hour each of the following activities: tutoring, intervention, or homework help meeting individual needs; physical activity and sports; and enrichment focused on project-based STEM activities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic guidelines in Kern County, the afterschool program transitioned to completely online during year three of the grant. The new virtual platform, called Virtual Clubhouse, offered exciting educational enrichment activities to spark the imagination of all members. The afterschool program was available to students four days per week, and scheduled sessions were led by paraprofessional activity leaders engaging in STEM forums.

The WKC also proposed to hold a five-week, half-day STEM summer program. The summer program is designed to prioritize English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students for enrollment.

### **Afterschool Program**

Between Maple and Semitropic, a total of 23 K-8 students enrolled in the afterschool program during year three of the grant. Before school closures, there were 74 students enrolled in the program. After schools were closed and for the duration of the school year, enrollment in the afterschool program dropped to 23 students, resulting in the WKC not meeting the target goal

of 100 students for year three (see Figure 5). Additionally, the districts were unable to track attendance rates due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**Figure 5. Afterschool Program Student Enrollment, Target vs. Actual**



As stated above, there were many challenges with enrollment and attendance in the afterschool program given virtual implementation. Parents were concerned that their children were receiving an excessive amount of screen time during the day and preferred to not add more if unnecessary. Leadership added that the afterschool program was not implemented for the entire school year because staff and students were experiencing burnout. One leadership member noted, “They were already working in the evenings. Some teachers couldn't start classes until later in the day, so they were working in the evening. They couldn't work in an afterschool program because [they were] already working with [their] regular class.”

Despite difficulties surrounding the program in year three, interviewees explained that there is hope to run the program again in year four. One community school coordinator explained that they would like to see afterschool tutoring for students. Parents also let leadership know that they would be interested in the program if it was held in person.

### **Summer Program**

The WKC plan to transition back to in-person instruction for the 2021 summer program. The program will be held in June for four days a week, three to four hours per day. In May 2021, staff at Semitropic and Maple were meeting to decide the logistics of the program, such as whether the program should be implemented as two separate programs or as one combined program at Maple. Additional funding sources could be allocated to support student transportation for the program. They also discussed student recruitment and enrollment; leadership noted that they anticipated higher enrollment compared to the 2020 virtual program.

Interviewees all expressed excitement for the upcoming summer program since the program was not implemented as planned in year two. One community school coordinator stated that there was training in reading intervention programs, and that they were excited and ready to

close the learning gap caused by the pandemic. Additionally, one interviewee stated that they planned on having their children attend the program, stating, “I think it gives them something productive to do in the day...Both my girls love projects, whether it's art projects, building things, they both are very hands-on kids. So the fact that it's a STEM based program, I think is going to be awesome.”

### **Pipeline 3: Supporting School Transitions through Mathematics Instruction**

The three participating districts in the WKC proposed to narrow the focus on school transitions through mathematics instruction and planned to implement three new practices: the use of visual representations as an instructional strategy, mathematics coaching, and the use of the Data Wise framework—an eight-step process that helps teams of educators make sense of data.<sup>9</sup> The WKC proposed to hire an internal mathematics coach to serve as a resource for teachers by conducting classroom observations and providing teacher training and coaching.

Similar to previous years of the grant, the WKC was unable to find a qualified candidate to fill the position of a mathematics coach in year three. The position was posted multiple times in different platforms, but no qualified candidate applied. Leadership noted that it is a challenge to get qualified candidates to work in rural communities. To address this challenge, the WKC hired professional mathematics consultants to provide one-on-one coaching and mentoring and all staff training at each site. In Lost Hills, a university mathematics professor provided services to teachers. This consultant provided read, draw, write strategy training to all teachers and instructional assistants at Lost Hills Elementary and A.M. Thomas Middle School.

Leadership teams conducted classroom observations and focused on mathematics instruction one meeting per month, when they also analyzed student work and reviewed observation data. Additionally, PLCs for each grade level met on a weekly basis for one hour. Teams spent a portion of their meeting discussing visual representation instruction strategies. They also analyzed data, planned for instruction, and shared best practices. At Maple, teachers worked with Next Gen math trainers to support their efforts to teach math. One teacher expressed their admiration and gratitude for the math trainer they worked with, calling the trainer “the math guru.” Finally, Semitropic relied on the Kern County Office of Education to provide math coaching. Semitropic also had two teachers coached by EdConnective.

In addition to the training and PLC efforts, Lost Hills developed a Read, Draw, Write Representation Focus Plan. The team worked toward developing awareness by training educators, including teachers, administrators and instructional assistants on using the read, draw, write strategy. Lost Hills also developed a First Instruction process through applying this

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<sup>9</sup> The eight steps include: Organize for Collaborative Work, Build Assessment Literacy, Create Data Overview, Dig into Student Data, Examine Instruction, Develop Action Plan, Plan to Assess Progress, and Act and Assess (<https://datawise.gse.harvard.edu/data-wise-improvement-process>).

strategy in intervention, general education, and special education classrooms using grade-level problems, as well as organizing for progress monitoring around this specific strategy using quarterly benchmarks, PLCs, instructional observations, and student outcome data.

Leadership noted that the intervention program continues to be a weak spot, as there is a lack of an effective intervention curriculum. In year three, the Lost Hills team focused on developing a consistent system where all students in need of further mathematics support receive additional instruction two days per week. All students were screened at the beginning of the school year, and those who fell below grade level were placed in small groups and received targeted instruction based on the concept(s) they were having difficulty with. Student progress was analyzed during grade level PLCs and student groups were modified according to the data. Semitropic developed organizational structures for First Instruction and assessment. Maple uses STAR but does not have formal structures in place to provide student intervention.

Challenges surrounding the math coaching include the inconsistency across districts. There were also challenges with administering assessments; due to internet connectivity issues, Lost Hills was not able to assess students mid-year.

## **Data Wise**

Leadership teams at each school site adopted the Data Wise framework, which helped the teams interpret their data. An external consultant facilitates this process, and each team went through this process several times. First, the team established organizing structures to prepare for inquiry. Then, the team established a priority question which drove an investigation into student work and other assessment data. Next, instruction was observed in order to find a problem of practice related to the strand of student work and assessment data. Teams then researched strategies and interviewed math experts. This was followed by the team developing a plan to improve practice and monitor or assess outcomes.

In year three, teams met and focused on monitoring the plan on a monthly basis. Team meetings included structured agendas, data analysis, and learning walks. As of April 2021, Lost Hills held a total of eight meetings in which they accomplished all thirteen tasks assigned this year. Leadership explained that the Data Wise process has been very successful at Lost Hills, explaining, “We do it on a normal basis. It's part of what we do now. Throughout the year we go back and we revise and look at our plans, and we look to see if we're going to continue to work on the same problem or practice or if it has shifted... Our little team I think does a good job with that.”

Maple and Semitropic both continued their work with the Data Wise process through all-staff and PLC meetings. However, they were implementing the process without the support of a consultant. An additional challenge for the Maple team is that the district does not have a

traditional benchmarking system, which makes it difficult to measure the extent to which their efforts are showing an impact on student learning.

## **Pipeline 4: Family and Community Engagement**

The WKC proposed to support family and community engagement through parent literacy education and community events. In the Family Literacy Program, parents learn to pose questions while reading with their children and teach school-readiness skills. Community events offer numerous opportunities during the school year for families and the community to engage with the school. The family and community engagement work is facilitated by the community school coordinators.

### **Community School Coordinators**

The WKC developed the role of the community school coordinators as part of the FSCS grant and they have proved to play an important role in engaging the community. The coordinators lead the organization of community events, often in collaboration with other staff members. They also facilitate the Family Literacy Program, and assist the school social worker to refer services. The coordinators often do many more tasks to help students and families, such as providing transportation when needed and assisting families and students with technology during distance learning. The coordinators work closely with leadership and report directly to the school principals.

To facilitate the work of the community school coordinators, leadership and community school coordinators from each district meet biweekly to discuss the grant and implementation plans and challenges. Community school coordinators noted that they enjoy the meetings and the chance to collaborate with one another. These meetings also gave coordinators the opportunity to work with school staff on other initiatives, such as working with the school social workers on family referrals. Leadership also saw the benefit of the meetings, stating, “The fact that they're able to collaborate across and think across schools I think is nice too. It's like the one time where you can actually get a feel for what different people are doing and how we might problem-solve across campuses.”

Community school coordinators were also proud of their work in year three. One of the main roles of the coordinators during year three of the grant was to address student attendance. Coordinators stated that they were often calling homes and parents to get students logged in during distance learning or picking up students during in-person learning. Community school coordinators often serve as the bridge between the school and parents and community

members. One community coordinator explained that they are an advocate for students, in any way that they need, “We're still showing up when the kids need us.”

Teachers and leadership were pleased with the work of the community school coordinators, and all of them praised their work as liaisons between the school and community. One teacher called the community school coordinator at their site the district “cheerleader” stating, “It's been a blessing for the school. I mean, [the coordinator] has so much energy and is so great at reaching out and making sure that everybody's involved that it's a perfect fit, both ways—for the position and the position being available for [the coordinator] to fill.”

Challenges noted for the community school coordinator role during year three were turnover and being overwhelmed with the needs of the role. Semitropic and Lost Hills each had two individuals leave the coordinator position during year three of the grant. Fortunately both sites hired new staff and all three districts have someone in the role going into year four.

Additionally, because the coordinators serve so many important roles for the district, some expressed feeling overwhelmed with their duties, especially during distance learning as coordinators were often the ones contacted by parents and students to address technology issues. One coordinator explained, “We do other tasks at school besides our own tasks of the community school coordinator. And sometimes that is a little bit challenging, trying to do both at once, especially during events...It's hard...it is really challenging.” One suggestion by a community school coordinator to help ease the stress was to incorporate breakout rooms and more discussion among coordinators during their biweekly meetings.

## **Family Literacy Program**

In year three, the Family Literacy Program began in March 2021, serving eighteen preschool parents and fourteen parents of K-5 students.<sup>10</sup> The WKC provided parents with the opportunity to participate in the courses online through Zoom. Parents were also provided with devices to facilitate their participation and incentives to increase participation. Leadership noted that allowing parents to participate remotely helped increase the number of parents enrolled in the program; however, the WKC did not meet the target goal of 20 parents enrolled for each parent

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<sup>10</sup> Although the Family Literacy Program is open to all parents, the program is targeted to parents in the preschool program.

group (preschool and K-5). The WKC was able to meet the target attendance goal of 90 percent, with the attendance rate among parents being 95 percent (see Figure 6).

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**Figure 6. Attendance Rate in the Family Literacy Program, Target vs. Actual**



Additionally, through surveys administered during the first and last sessions of the program, 100 percent of parents (14) reported changes in at-home literacy behaviors, meeting the target goal of 80 percent (see Figure 7).

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**Figure 7. Percent Change in Parent At-Home Literacy Behaviors, Target vs. Actual**



One challenge noted by parents was the difficulty they had attending the classes. Some parents stated that it was difficult for their children to participate in distance learning at the same time that they participated in the literacy course due to lack of devices or slow internet. In year four, leadership explained that the WKC will continue to provide parents with the opportunity to participate in these courses online; however, there is uncertainty about how some parents will

remain connected because the districts stopped paying for internet in June 2021 for all families except those with students in special education.

## Parent and Community Events

Community events serve as one means to engage families and members of the community in the schools. During year three of the grant, the WKC held 13 school events across the three districts, which did not meet the target goal of 24 school events (see Figure 8).

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**Figure 8. Parent and Community Events, Target vs. Actual**



Community school coordinators organized these events to bring the community together, and used the biweekly meetings to brainstorm ideas across districts. All family and community events during year three of the grant were moved online or were held as drive-thru events to adhere to COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. These events included virtual bingo, a Halloween Parade and Drive-Thru, a Christmas Lights Drive-Thru, a Daddy/Daughter Date Night Box, a Mother/Son Virtual Adventure, an event with United Farm Workers and other organizations, and a Drive-in Movie Night. Staff noted that text messages, social media, and paper flyers informed the community about the events. Similarly, parents said that they heard about the events through social media and texts, and that they enjoyed attending the community events. Participation logs accounted for a total of 748 attendees at the 13 events this year, with an average of 58 participants at each event. Interviewees expressed that the need to hold events online required staff to think creatively about event logistics and content, which they believe contributed to high participation and attendee satisfaction.

## Pipeline 5: Social and Health Services

Through the FSCS grant, the WKC proposed to provide social and mental health supports for their students and families. To provide these supports, the WKC partnered with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools' School Social Worker Program, the Project 180<sup>11</sup> School

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<sup>11</sup> [www.kernproject180.org](http://www.kernproject180.org)



Social Work Program, and the Building Healthy Communities AmeriCorps Mentor Program. These supports are intended to improve a number of student academic and behavioral outcomes, including attendance.

### **School Social Worker Program**

Two School Social Worker (SSW) Program staff (trained mental health professionals with a master's degree in social work and a Pupil Personnel Services credential) were placed at each of the four school sites. The social workers provided interventions to students and families, offered general services within the school, such as assessment and consultation with school teams, and worked directly with students.

Social workers moved many of their student check-in meetings to Zoom or FaceTime during year three of the grant. They also used phone calls and home visits to check-in with students in their caseload. Social workers provided the following direct services to students: counseling, check-in-check-out, social skills group/individual, and forward thinking interactive journaling.

School social workers conducted 44 home visits in year three. Social workers also spent time identifying solutions to get students to log on for distance learning and supported teachers in the implementation of district-wide social emotional learning (SEL). Social workers facilitated seventeen parent workshops on the topics of dealing with negative behavior, self-care, gratitude, grief and loss, substance abuse, depression in children, suicide prevention, strategies for children with ADHD, SEL strategies to support distance learning, and emotional regulation techniques. Finally, social workers made 25 referrals to community agencies such as AmeriCorps, College Community Services, and Shafter Healthy Start.

During year three, 97 students were referred for services and 84 students were placed in case management, which met the target goal of 40 students enrolled in case management (see Figure 9). Some of the reasons for referrals included: chronic absenteeism, grief and loss, poor impulse control, at risk of not graduating, withdrawn, suicidal ideation, anger issues, anxiousness, sadness, trauma, low self-esteem, substance abuse in home, and fighting.

Additionally, seven students were pending assessment and twelve refused services or consent was not given.

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**Figure 9. Students Enrolled in Case Management, Target vs. Actual**



School social workers continue to face challenges with referral forms not being returned or signed by parents. Social workers believe that this is due to the lack of parents' understanding of the role and benefits of school social workers. In year four of the grant, school social workers and community coordinators will continue their work to raise parent awareness about the benefits of student participation.

Community school coordinators and teachers explained that the school social workers are helpful to both students and staff. Coordinators explained that the school social workers helped them think of new ideas for community events and the content of the events. One teacher explained that they see the social worker around campus talking with students, "She's very visible on campus and she is out getting to know the kids and the community and doing things. So she has made herself very available and involved." Similarly, one community school coordinator said that the school social worker immediately integrated herself into the community to get an understanding of the existing culture, "She wanted to know what the pulse of our community was. Obviously, every school has a school culture and a school community. And she wanted to know about our parent culture and our parent community."

Many interviewees expressed that they greatly appreciate the work of the social workers and wanted them on campus more often. Leadership hope to retain the social workers they have been working with. One leadership member noted that the school social worker spent a year learning about the school and its climate and wanted to make sure that process did not have to be repeated, "Every time we got one, they build relationships with our kids. Our families kind of finally let them in and then they were gone, and that's really hard to provide a consistent level of support...you build a relationship with them. They finally trust, and then they're gone and it's somebody else. That's hard, especially in a small community." The pandemic revealed to staff in

each district how important mental health is, so leadership and community school coordinators stated that they will continue to prioritize access to mental health services for students.

### *Family Referral Program and Counseling*

During year three, the WKC expanded the Family Referral Program, and found that the resources needed are available through the existing partnerships and staff hired under the grant, such as College Community Services (CCS), Omni Family Health, Kern County Behavioral Health, Kern Social Services, Shafter Healthy Start, Kaiser Behavioral Health Department, Lost Hills Family Resource Center, Migrant Education and Community School Coordinators.

As part of the Family Referral Program, two committees created through the grant, the Student and Family Assistance Team and the Community School Coordinator Committee, worked to align services to maximize resources for families. These two committees meet bi-monthly to collaborate and discuss the services that can be provided to WKC families and are focusing on educating parents and students about the benefit of social emotional services.

Combined, the organizations made 57 family referrals. Of these 57 family referrals, 41 families were successfully connected to services (72%), which met the target goal of 55 percent referral uptake (see Figure 10). Two families refused services; and three families did not follow through with services.

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**Figure 10. Family Referral Uptake, Target vs. Actual**



One success related to this work in year three of the grant was the development of a universal tracking system to track family services and referrals. An external consultant for the grant created a document that allows the sites to coordinate with one another and make sure staff from CCS are placed at each site. However, there were still some questions and challenges about tracking where staff are placed, and if there was any follow-up after their visit. Also, the universal tracking system lacked a way to disaggregate students receiving referrals or services

by outside agencies. In year four, leadership plan to continue updating tracking documents and flow maps to make the process of placement as efficient as possible.

Twenty-three families participated in family counseling, which exceeded the target goal of 20 families (see Figure 11). Parents were provided with support via check-in sessions and home visits.

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**Figure 11. Families Engaged in Family Counseling, Target vs. Actual**



The WKC reported seeing a greater need for family counseling, but there are still some families who are hesitant to accept the services. One partner explained that parent participation has always been low, but having students in-person at school helps increase referrals and participation in services because staff are able to physically see students who need services. To address low parent participation, CCS held a parent education group, but there is still room for improvement. In year four of the grant, the social workers and partners will focus on formulating an action plan to connect with families and increase the number of families receiving services.

### **AmeriCorps**

The AmeriCorps mentors provide one-on-one and small-group mentoring for a minimum of one hour per week for a total of 30+ hours for K-5 students who are chronically absent or who present discipline issues. During year three of the grant, the WKC had one AmeriCorps mentor placed at A.M. Thomas Middle School and one placed at Semitropic. Unfortunately, Maple was

unable to fill their vacant position. In year three, 27 students enrolled in AmeriCorps mentoring, which did not meet the target goal of 50 students (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Students Enrolled in AmeriCorps Mentoring, Target vs. Actual**



Table 2 below details the number of students mentored at each district, and the total number of hours mentored. AmeriCorps mentees were mentored for a total of 215.75 hours.

**Table 2. AmeriCorps Mentees**

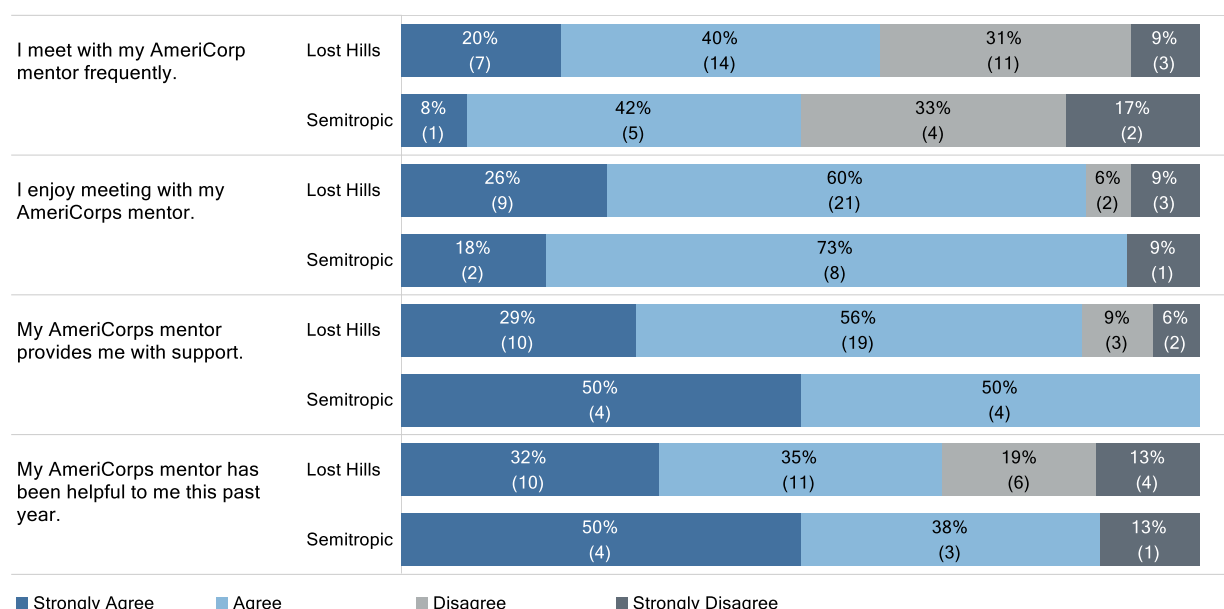
|   | Lost Hills | Semitropic | Total  |
|---|------------|------------|--------|
| Number of Students Mentored   | 21         | 6          | 27     |
| Number Exited Early   | 1          | 0          | 1      |
| Number of Current Mentees   | 20         | 6          | 26     |
| Number of Students Receiving Minimum Dosage of 20 hours <sup>12</sup> | 0          | 0          | 0      |
| Total Number of Hours Mentored  | 156.5      | 59.25      | 215.75 |

Lost Hills and Semitropic students were surveyed to assess their experiences in the AmeriCorps Mentor Program. The survey asked students whether they met with their AmeriCorps mentor frequently, if they enjoyed meeting with their AmeriCorps mentor, if support was provided by the AmeriCorps mentor, and if AmeriCorps mentor have been helpful over the past year.

<sup>12</sup> As of March 2021

Overall, 57 percent of students strongly agreed or agreed that they met with their AmeriCorps mentor frequently (see Figure 13). Additionally, 87 percent of students strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed meeting with their AmeriCorps mentor, 88 percent strongly agreed or agreed that their AmeriCorps mentor provides them with support, and 72 percent of students strongly agreed or agreed that their AmeriCorps mentor was helpful to them this past year.

**Figure 13. Student Reflections on AmeriCorps Mentoring Program by District**



Overall, students believed that the AmeriCorps mentors were beneficial, and that the mentors were someone that students could talk to when they needed emotional or academic support. Teachers also saw the benefit of the AmeriCorps mentors and believed that they were an asset to have in the district. One teacher explained that their students were having difficulty transitioning back to the classroom after distance learning, and noted, “Our AmeriCorps worker has been really helpful in reaching out and getting a relationship with those students. I see a lot of excitement with some of my reluctant students to meet with her, and they've really been able to have a good relationship.”

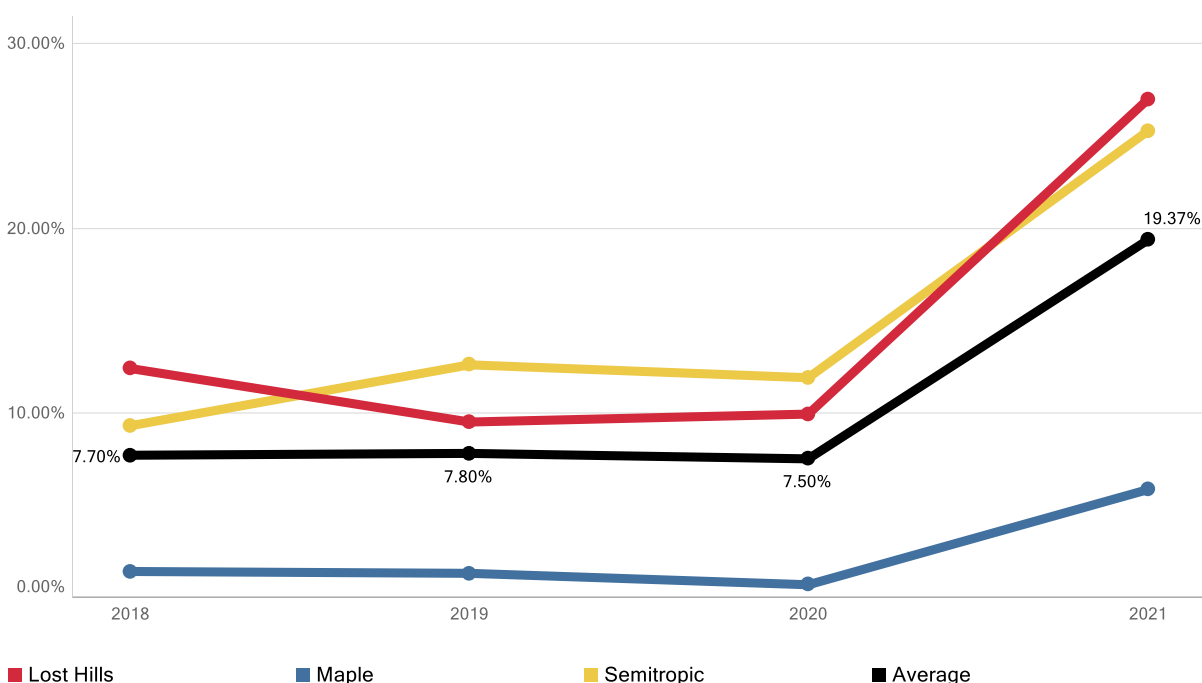
Turnover for the AmeriCorps mentors were a challenge during year three of the grant. Leadership stated, “We had a new AmeriCorps person this year, which that's not unusual. Almost every year I've gotten a new person.” Leadership also explained that it is difficult for the

AmeriCorps mentors to do their work with the students when they could not go into the classrooms.

## Attendance

Overall, chronic absenteeism increased in year three of the grant (see Figure 14). In the 2020/21 school year, the average chronic absenteeism for the three districts was 19.37 percent, compared to 7.5 percent in the 2019/20 school year.

**Figure 14. Chronic Absenteeism, Years 2017-2021**



While attendance rates also increased, leadership and community school coordinators attribute the increase in chronic absenteeism to the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. One community school coordinator explained, “I think it's just a byproduct of the pandemic. People got used to doing things through Zoom, and I know that [students and parents have] gotten very comfortable with us picking them up late.” Another community school coordinator stated that addressing attendance at their site was difficult during in-person learning because if students were absent, there was no way of getting them to school.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the definition of attendance changed throughout the pandemic, as attendance during distance learning could mean students were logged into Zoom at a certain time, instead of them being “present” all

<sup>13</sup> Lost Hills uses vans to pick up students who are absent, while Semitropic and Maple do not.

day. A member of leadership explained, “It’s hard because we have basically said if they join your Zoom, if you talk to parents, because parents will call [and say] we couldn’t get on today, [then] we give them credit, give them credit for trying to make sure that [they’re on].” Finally, mental health workers noticed that students who were chronically absent were also the students who were in need of receiving mental health services. School staff and mental health providers noted challenges with getting in contact with these students.

To address chronic absenteeism, community school coordinators made phone calls and conducted home visits to try to get students to go to school. Additionally, EveryDay Labs Letters were sent out to students who are at risk of becoming or were already chronically absent. One community school coordinator believed that letters may be more effective since they appear to be “more official.”

## Successes And Challenges

A number of successes and challenges emerged regarding implementation of the FSCS grant during the third year. Like last year, facilitators of grant efforts included the community school coordinators and the work of the Children’s Cabinet of West Kern. Barriers included staff turnover and the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Successes

**Community school coordinators.** The community school coordinators continue to be drivers of the work, and their colleagues at each district appreciate their hard work and commitment to the communities. Community school coordinators expressed passion and commitment to their work. One community school coordinator said that they are enthusiastic about what they do, expressing, “I love what I do. I do. I love serving kids. You know that...That’s really where my heart lies. And whatever that means, whatever that looks like because that looks different for every kid that I come in contact with.” The work of the community school coordinators is supported by the biweekly PLC meetings, which are used to discuss the grants and implementation concerns.

**Children’s Cabinet of West Kern.** During year three of the grant, the Cabinet continued to grow, now including thirty organizations. Chevron, Community Action Partnership of Kern, First Five Kern, and the Kern Community Foundation were added as new partners during year three. Despite some Cabinet members being occupied addressing the pandemic-induced needs of the broader community, the Cabinet continued to drive behavioral and mental health work forward. Leadership expressed being particularly proud of the partnership with College



Community Services, as this partnership allowed for staff to be placed at each site to provide services.

## Challenges

**Staffing.** The WKC dealt with a number of changes in staffing in year three. Community school coordinators and teachers left during the school year, and an AmeriCorps mentor still had not been replaced since last year. One leadership member revealed, “It’s not because they don’t love this place, but because they find better opportunities. We always feel like we’re the district they come to, they get trained up really well, [and then] go on to a different location.” A number of staff at Maple also had to be let go, which resulted in the district being understaffed for much of the year. Leadership mentioned that staff across the board missed work for long stretches of the year for medical or personal reasons. The districts also continue to struggle with hiring a mathematics coach to support educator development.

**COVID-19.** Year three of the grant represented the second year supporting students during a pandemic. Staff and students experienced “Zoom fatigue” and grew tired of spending time in front of a screen. Parents were also concerned with the amount of screen time students were exposed to. This affected the afterschool program, resulting in the cancellation of the program for the year. By May 2021, leadership and teachers reported that the majority of their students were back in person, but some teachers continued conducting online class for students who were not back at school.

The issue of reliable internet connection continued to be a challenge for distance learning. To address this challenge, all three district partners provided internet services for their families. However, the complete coverage payment ended in June 2021 (except for those families with students in special education). If families want to continue receiving internet service, they will need to pay at a discounted rate.

Leadership noticed that the pandemic also affected the socioemotional and mental health of students in the districts, which increased the need for staff to provide mental health services.

# Recommendations

Based on the findings from the relevant documents, extant program data, and the interviews conducted during year three of the grant, WestEd provides the following recommendations to WKC leadership as they embark on year four of FSCS grant implementation.

- Sustain high enrollment in the preschool program by surveying current parents about the learning options, in-person and virtual, to understand their preferences, trying with additional effort to gather feedback from parents of migrant and special education students.
- Utilize community school coordinators and current parents to tell others in the community about the afterschool program, especially highlighting the tutoring aspect, to increase enrollment in year four.
- Continue to celebrate the work of the community school coordinators in engaging the community in school events, facilitating the Family Literacy Program, and providing numerous supports to students and staff at the schools, and ensure they have the necessary supports to fulfill their many obligations.
- Disseminate the results from the Family Literacy Program in terms of the change in at-home literacy behaviors – follow up with parents on their use of learnings and share success stories with the broader school community to increase participation.
- Continue to offer virtual options for community events to appeal to parents who are concerned about the possible health consequences of attending in-person and those who appreciate the ease of access to attend a school event virtually.
- Address staffing challenges through the consideration of a grow-your-own program to prepare members of the local community to be teachers and instructional aides, through partnering with a local university and structuring a program tailored to the unique needs of rural districts. This would be a significant effort for the districts but could lead to a long-term solution for the ongoing staffing challenges.