



Clarkston School District

ESSER ATTENDANCE & REENGAGEMENT EVALUATION CASE STUDY

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (OSPI)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	3
ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project Background.....	4
District Context	5
Location and Size.....	5
Student Demographics (2023-24).....	5
Regular Attendance Rates	6
Participation in ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project	6
Methods	6
Staffing.....	7
CEB Support.....	7
Collaboration with Schools	8
Community Engagement Board	10
CEB Purpose.....	10
CEB Structure	10
Collaboration among CEB Members	12
Culture of Attendance	13
ESD/District Collaboration.....	14
Serving Students	15
Positive Experiences in School.....	17
Reasons for Disengagement.....	18
Looking Ahead.....	19



Acknowledgement

The Evaluation Team is grateful to the Attendance & Reengagement Team and the Office of Native Education at OSPI and the many districts, STEC school and ESD staff who were part of the Attendance & Reengagement Project Evaluation. We also appreciate the students and families who shared their experiences and perspectives in their schools, and who are helping to inform future attendance and reengagement efforts.

Special thanks to the project partners who collaborated with the Evaluation Team on this case study of Clarkston School District and helped to make the site visit possible. We are honored and grateful to have had the chance to help tell the story of their work.



ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project Background

From late 2021 to June 2024, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) led the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund Attendance & Reengagement Project in partnership with Educational Service Districts (ESDs), school districts and State-Tribal Education Compact (STEC) schools across the state.

The Attendance & Reengagement Project sought to address the crisis of engagement and disengagement students experienced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly students and families furthest from educational justice. The project aimed to expand attendance and reengagement supports across the education system by increasing staff capacity for direct service reengagement supports (e.g., case management and group supports for students) and building or enhancing school and district systems (e.g., attendance teams, tiered interventions, actionable data). The project included 23 school district grantees (“priority districts”), 57 school districts that received ESD support, including ESD direct service staff and/or system-building support (“focus districts”), six STEC schools and nine ESDs.

Clarkston School District Case Study

This case study, focused on Clarkston School District, illustrates the work of building and strengthening systems in several areas:

Staffing
Community Engagement Board (CEB)
Culture of Attendance
District/ESD Collaboration

It also includes data on students served through direct service support and student perspectives on positive experiences in school, reasons for disengagement and barriers to reengagement.

This is one of six case studies that are part of the ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project Evaluation, conducted by the Evaluation Team at Puget Sound Educational



Service District (PESD) in partnership with OSPI. Attendance & Reengagement Project partners selected these case studies to illustrate a range of ways the project was implemented in districts and in STEC schools across the state. These case studies are intended to complement the statewide evaluation and results (final report available December 2024) by providing examples of how systems were built and strengthened and how students were served through support from this project. The Clarkston School District case study illustrates the work of building and strengthening systems in the areas of staffing, Clarkston’s Community Engagement Board (CEB), culture of attendance and district/ESD collaboration. The intent is to help tell the story of attendance and reengagement efforts in this district and provide some ideas and approaches that may support similar work in other contexts.

District Context

LOCATION AND SIZE

Clarkston is a district of 2,500 students in Clarkston, WA in southeastern Washington, just across the border from Lewiston, Idaho, in the ESD 123 region. Clarkston School District includes one high school, one alternative school, one middle school and four elementary schools.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS (2023-24)¹

RACE & ETHNICITY

- 77% White
- 12% Hispanic/Latino of any race
- 7% Two or more races
- <2% American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS

- 60% low-income students
- 21% students with disabilities

¹ Washington State Report Card.

<https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103300>



- 4% students experiencing homelessness
- 2% multi-lingual learners

REGULAR ATTENDANCE RATES²

- ◆ 2018–19 (pre-COVID) 78%
- ◆ 2021–22:..... 48%
- ◆ 2022–23: 61%
- ◆ 2023–24: Available January 2025

PARTICIPATION IN ESSER ATTENDANCE & REENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Clarkston School District received ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project funding in 2022-23 and 2023-24. The district hired an Attendance and Reengagement Specialist dedicated to this project, whose role included direct service work with students and families, leading the district’s CEB and working with schools to strengthen attendance systems. This grant-funded staff person worked closely with the ESD 123 Attendance Coordinator and other direct service staff in districts participating in the project throughout the ESD 123 region.

Methods

The Evaluation Team conducted this case study using the following methods:

- Site visit to the district in Spring 2024 for in-person individual and group interviews with:
 - ◆ Clarkston Attendance & Reengagement Specialist
 - ◆ Parent Coordinators from all elementary schools and the district’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Lead
 - ◆ Two staff from Lincoln Middle School
 - ◆ Assistant Superintendent
 - ◆ ESD Attendance Coordinator and the Clarkston Attendance & Reengagement Specialist
 - ◆ Community Engagement Board members

² Washington State Report Card.

<https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103300> Regular attendance is defined as the percent of students with fewer than two absences per month, on average.



Two members of the Evaluation Team attended the site visit and participated in the individual and group interviews. The attending Evaluation Team members debriefed following all interviews to identify preliminary key themes and synthesized them into high-level takeaways to share with the points of contact for each site to ensure accurate understanding and representation of what was shared. The Evaluation Team then reviewed all interview transcripts, identified details to expand on within the high-level takeaways and incorporated relevant quotes into a detailed draft to share with sites for any feedback. (Note that quotes are attributed to general role groups, such as staff interviewee for district, school and ESD staff, or partner interviewee for CEB partners, to protect anonymity.) Next, the Evaluation Team incorporated any feedback into the final case study, which reflects additional data beyond site visit interviews. The Evaluation Team also analyzed district data from statewide data collection for the Attendance & Reengagement Evaluation, including data from students and families served via direct service.

Staffing

CEB SUPPORT

Clarkston hired an Attendance & Reengagement Specialist whose role was dedicated to the Attendance & Reengagement Project. The Attendance & Reengagement Specialist was hired to manage day-to-day responsibilities with the supervision of the Assistant Superintendent. The role was designed to “own” and facilitate the Clarkston CEB. Prior to the creation of this role, responsibility for the CEB had been integrated into other roles with other responsibilities.

“In the interview, they literally said ‘We would like [the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist] to be the facilitator of Community Engagement Board, that will be [the] main thing’... there was a CEB before, but it was being facilitated by the assistant superintendent or school nurse... they needed someone who could do that and only that.” – Staff Interviewee



COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOLS

In addition to managing the CEB, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist also provided direct service support to students and helped schools strengthen their systems. The Attendance & Reengagement Specialist supported colleagues and teams across school buildings, including Attendance and Student Success Teams. At the elementary level, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist worked with one school in 2022-23 and expanded to all four elementary schools in 2023-24. She collaborated with Parent Coordinators who provide initial supports when there were attendance concerns for students and provided staff with guidance and resources to support their work. These resources included a form with questions about the students they were working with, barriers to attendance, incentives/goals, what had been tried and a plan for the student and a document that listed tiered supports for students and is specific to Clarkston’s needs and context.

“The Parent Coordinators... are the attendance gurus in the elementary schools. They do all of the OSPI requirements for truancy, so they’re hitting those first meetings at five absences in a month, they are making those calls, having the attendance meetings, doing the conferences... working up to a truancy petition if need be... their job is... to work with those parents, so they are making those connections.” – Staff Interviewee

At the middle school level, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist attended student support meetings and assisted with student petitions for the CEB. She regularly provided a list of students who missed more than 15% of school, which the middle school team used to plan attendance conferences for those students and tracked changes in attendance.

With the high school in 2023-24, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist worked individually with students referred to their CEB, which was a shift from focusing on their attendance systems and teaming in 2022-23. The school had their own systems and requested additional CEB support for the second year of the project. In 2023-24, she also worked with Clarkston’s alternative school to adopt and implement truancy procedures. The school had worked to create a culture of support for students and was reluctant to implement a truancy process that they saw as punitive. With case management support from the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist, the school was able to develop a supportive approach to truancy.



Across schools, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist worked with staff to access data. They used data to identify attendance trends, and the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist helped build staff capacity around accessing and using data. This helped support sustainability because staff would not need to rely on the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist to access and use relevant data.

The Attendance & Reengagement Specialist also supported more consistent communication about attendance across the district. She coordinated with staff to connect and communicate with students and parents, recognizing the challenge of balancing support with accountability. This helped to maintain a positive relationship between school-based staff and families. With her role leading the CEB, she also was a bridge between students and families and the CEB. District and school staff shared that having a dedicated role focused on attendance was key to Clarkston’s accomplishments over the course of the Attendance & Reengagement Project.

“[The Attendance & Reengagement Specialist] coming in [to work with Parent Coordinators] was really beneficial... because of that punitiveness... They struggle with having someone that’s punitive, but at the same time having to be that person for [families], that support person, because it gets gray. They’re like, ‘OK, you’re supporting me, but you’re telling me if we don’t do this, you have to take me to court.’ That was a big thing at [one elementary school] and she wears other hats, so it was nice to have someone... who could help do this.” – Staff Interviewee

“[The Attendance & Reengagement Specialist] was at our school a lot. [She] was helping me build things because in the past, one person has done all the attendance work. That’s the way it is. It shouldn’t be on one person, and everybody shouldn’t always think it’s all on you. We’re dealing with Tier 1, 2 and 3 problems. It’s been eye opening for me because you do try to do it all and then you get behind and you can’t... [Now] I feel like ‘okay, it’s not just me. I have a person to help me understand the reports and to really get the grasp and look at things the way they haven’t been done before. That’s been really nice. Getting some really good fresh ideas, because we’ve been there for so long.” – Staff Interviewee

Community Engagement Board

CEB PURPOSE

The intent of Clarkston’s CEB is to address barriers that prevent students from attending school and includes community partners and district staff. In 2022-23, the Board changed its name from Truancy Board to Community Engagement Board to reflect their focus on providing support for and not punishing students.³ After students meet with the CEB, partners identify what the student may need to help them get back to school (e.g., school supplies, hygiene supplies, clothing, connection to a doctor). CEB members noted the evidence of its impact in improved attendance among students who attend the CEB.

“The name changed, and that gives a completely different outlook. You used to come in here and you would give options and eliminate barriers but it was more ‘You have to go to school and this is a law and if you don’t go to school, you are going in front of the judge’ now it is more ‘You have to do this, but what can we do to make it easier and better for you to do it?’” – Partner Interviewee

CEB STRUCTURE

The school district convenes and facilitates the CEB. The Attendance & Reengagement Specialist hired for the Attendance & Reengagement Project led the CEB, a responsibility that shifted from the district’s Health Services Director. In 2023-24, CEB members included the district, local court and a range of community partners that each provide a unique perspective and resources for students and families, including:

- **Asotin County Community Services** connects students with job experiences and provides support for youth with disabilities
- **Asotin County Juvenile Court** works with the district on truancy petitions
- **CHAS Health** provides low barrier, low-income dental, health and behavioral health services
- **Quality Behavioral Health Services** is a behavioral health clinic that also provides services and support for sexual assault

³ https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/bulletin-026-21_0.pdf



- **Clarkston School District** members included the Student Services Executive Director, Health Services Director and the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist

In 2022-23, the CEB met weekly. They saw fewer students in 2023-24, typically three to five students each time, and reduced meeting frequency to every other week. The CEB process aims to build relationships with students and their families, so they feel comfortable to share their situations and what supports would be helpful. The CEB recently adjusted their process to talk with students alone (with parent/guardian permission), prior to meeting with their families. This helped students share possible barriers they may be facing in their home situation, or other issues they don't want to share with their parent/guardian present.

"Having [Attendance & Reengagement Specialist], she is more their advocate on their side, saying I am here to help you, sit next to you, make them feel comfortable enough to talk to the rest of us so we can figure out what to do to help them." – Partner Interviewee

"We talk to the kid first before we bring the parents in, and that has made a big difference. You get to see a side of the kid that you don't see when the parents come in. Sometimes they are a completely different person. Getting the kid's input without the adult next to them when they are like, 'How much can I say? How much can I not say?'" gives us a lot of insight into the child as well." – Partner Interviewee

"[The Attendance and Reengagement Specialist] has done a good job at coordinating the work with our community engagement board work that we're doing and finding solutions for kids outside of what might not be working in their brick and mortar traditional school environment, whether that's having them be successful in that environment or whether it's having them attend our alternative program or our online program. That work and that partnership with the families and the schools has been really beneficial and helped kids, I think, stay engaged in a way that works for where they are in their life." – Staff Interviewee

They also adjusted their process to have all students and parents/guardians convene at the same time, and then wait for their turn to meet with the CEB rather than having each student/parent come to an individual time slot. With the CEB aim to be a supportive, positive space, the members shared that this structure helps convey that coming to CEB is serious enough that students and parents/guardians have to wait for their appointment.



CEB members noted several potential improvements to their process, including getting students to CEB sooner (i.e., with a lower number of absences) and streamlining the process. In planning for 2024-25, they want to connect at the start of the year with students who had attendance concerns in previous school years or where petitions were filed at the end of 2023-24. CEB members also wondered if, in creating a more supportive, positive environment, the CEB is now “too friendly” and there are not enough “teeth” in the CEB process.

COLLABORATION AMONG CEB MEMBERS

In the small community of Clarkston, relationships are key among the CEB partners. The agencies regularly connect and communicate with one another (at and beyond CEB meetings) about students and how to support them. Across their different areas of expertise, CEB partners can quickly refer and follow-up on student needs. There is also a longstanding partnership between the district and Asotin County Court. The Clarkston High School Vice Principal was formerly the Truancy Coordinator for the district and was familiar with working with the court when she started in her new role, which included supporting students with attendance.

“One of the best things about a small community working with CEB and Core [another support structure of community partners that provides supports to Clarkston students] is that we have relationships, so I don’t need to wait for the next meeting to say, ... ‘I am worried that this kid isn’t coming to school.’ Or ‘This student has an IEP, can we talk about this child?’ ... The relationships that have come out of CEB and out of Core are really foundational to what we are doing.” – Partner Interviewee

“[The CEB is] here to be able to help the kids... we see a lot of people saying they’re not going to school due to anxiety or depression or things like that... we can have someone schedule instant intakes. We’ve had a child say that they’ve been sexually assaulted, and we were able to bring in the advocate that day, within 20 minutes, to have someone respond immediately... the same with crisis and recovery navigator program, if they have some need they need now, we have those instant programs where we can bring them in and have them meet with those people right after they meet with us in CEB.” – Partner Interviewee



Privacy regulations (e.g., FERPA or HIPAA) have presented some barriers to collaboration among agencies, specifically related to communicating about the needs of individual students. Another challenge is that the capacity of existing community resources can be limited in their small, rural community.

“When I found things to help people with, the resources weren’t there or there wasn’t a place they could go other than this one place, and they have already tried that place and don’t want to try it again.” – Staff Interviewee

Culture of Attendance

The adjustments to Clarkston’s CEB reflect a broader district shift in creating a supportive culture of attendance and building enthusiasm for regular and improved attendance through attendance challenges and incentives. The district expanded their Tier 1 efforts to build attendance awareness, particularly in the elementary schools. In the elementary schools, they held class competitions and attendance “star of the month” awards to keep students engaged. At the middle school, they offered incentives including field trips, drawings and celebrations for attendance and positive behavior. They also provided incentives for chronically absent students to attend school more regularly. Attendance letters sent by staff to parents/guardians included positive notes to highlight their student’s progress, with the hope that the letters would be positively received. They saw evidence of progress with the existence of the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist’s role and her collaboration with schools, and that attendance is more visible and is talked about more.

“The success is that it [attendance] is there.” – Staff Interviewee

“The tiered response I thought was helpful last year was really focusing on how to celebrate attendance and how to be positive...Just thinking about how to create creative ways to really incentivize and bring light to all the positives of attending school. A lot of times, it’s all about the consequence. I like the shift of last year of ‘how do we incentivize it and celebrate kids. That’s where the shift comes [for the kids] of ‘Why should I go to school? Because it’s important and I can be celebrated.’” – Staff Interviewee



The district increased participation in family nights, especially at the elementary school where the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist was based in 2022-23. They increased their district-wide communications and social media posts about attendance. They also noted the importance of having teachers involved in Tier 1 efforts, to increase the engagement of students and to help with the workload of attendance staff.

ESD/District Collaboration

Clarkston collaborated closely with ESD 123 over the course of the Attendance & Reengagement Project. An existing relationship from the Assistant Superintendent's prior work with the ESD Teaching and Learning department helped in their collaboration to apply for and implement the grant. For example, the Assistant Superintendent shared ESD-led professional development focused on attendance with principals in the district and encouraged them to attend.

The ESD Attendance Coordinator and Clarkston's Attendance & Reengagement Specialist were part of a regional team, which also included three other specialists working in districts in the ESD 123 region. They were all new to attendance, and they focused on collaborating with one another, with weekly virtual meetings to connect, learn from and support one another. Clarkston's Attendance & Reengagement Specialist was also able to connect with the specialist in another participating district (Kiona Benton School District) as the two held similar job responsibilities.

"[One of] our norms are "I'll teach, I'll learn." and I feel like it was that aspect of no one was the big expert. I wasn't always the expert, just because I was the coordinator at the ESD. We all brought something different to the table... Recognizing they're experts in their field in working with students. [I wanted to] elevate their voices." – Staff Interviewee

As the regional team developed processes to access and use data, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist shared these processes in Clarkston to build capacity of other staff. With this support, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist regularly ran and shared reports from Skyward to identify which students were chronically absent and needed support, especially for Tier 2 and 3 supports.



“Well, since the very beginning, [ESD staff] taught us how to run the monthly Skyward report. As soon as we started doing that, it changed everything. As soon as I would show that to anybody, [it was] like the light was coming off of it... all of the schools were using the Skyward generated 15% letters... it transitioned from using Skyward for compliance to using it for support. So, they were using that going through those and identifying the students in their own attendance meetings who needed to be met with, Tier 1, 2, 3 on all them. Now they have this that they can run it anytime, or I can run it anytime.” – Staff Interviewee

Serving Students

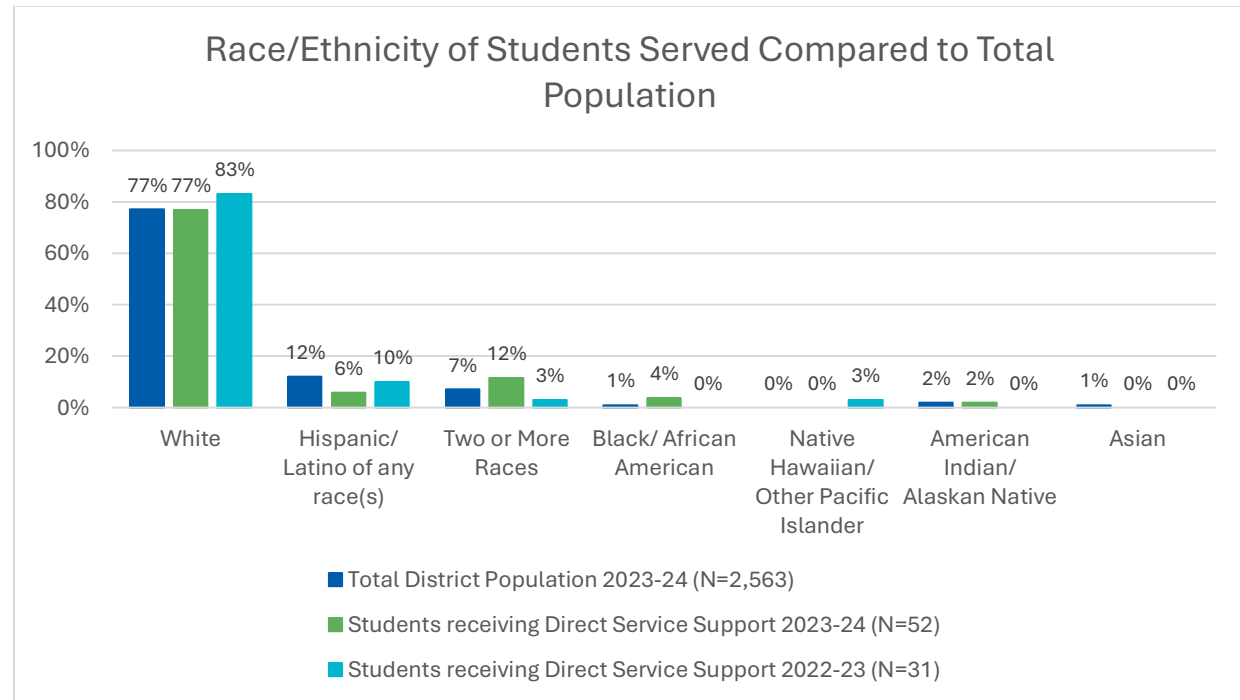
In both years of the project, Clarkston’s Attendance & Reengagement Specialist worked with students to support their engagement and/or reengagement in school. The Reengagement Specialist reported data on student demographics, positive experiences in school, reasons for disengagement, barriers to reengagement and progress toward reenrollment for the students she supported.⁴

In the 2022-23 school year, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist supported 31 students on their caseload, six of whom were unenrolled from school. Among these students, five reenrolled in an educational pathway, including enrolling at a comprehensive school (N=1) and transitioning to an alternative school (N=3).⁵

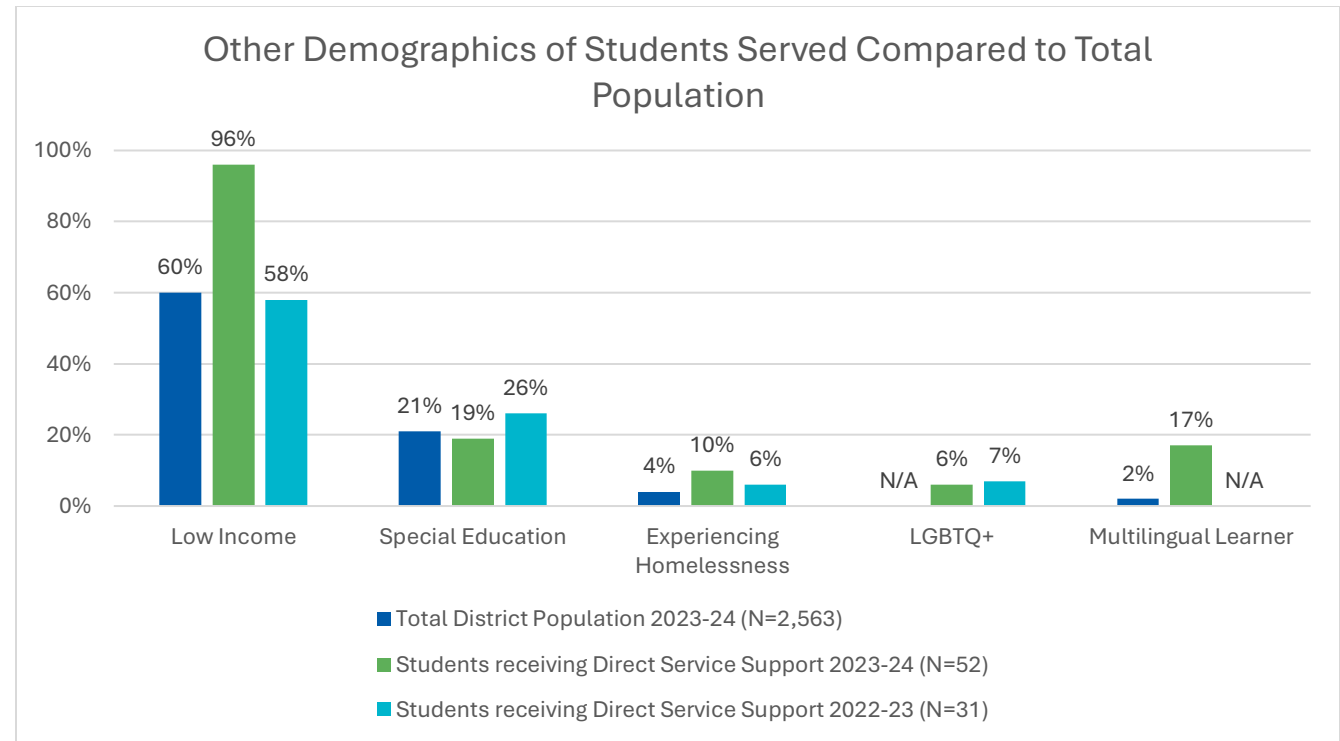
In the 2023-24 school year, the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist supported 52 students, eight of whom were unenrolled from school. Of the eight unenrolled students, five reenrolled in an educational pathway, including enrolling at a comprehensive school (N=3) and transitioning to an alternative school (N=2).

⁴ For the 2022-23 direct service report, data was reported for 31 students. In the 2023-24 direct service report, there was data for 52 students. Not every student had data reported for each section of the direct service reporting tool (i.e., student demographics, positive experiences in school, etc.) The percentages throughout this case study include the number of students for whom data was provided in the relevant section.

⁵ No educational pathway was reported for one student.



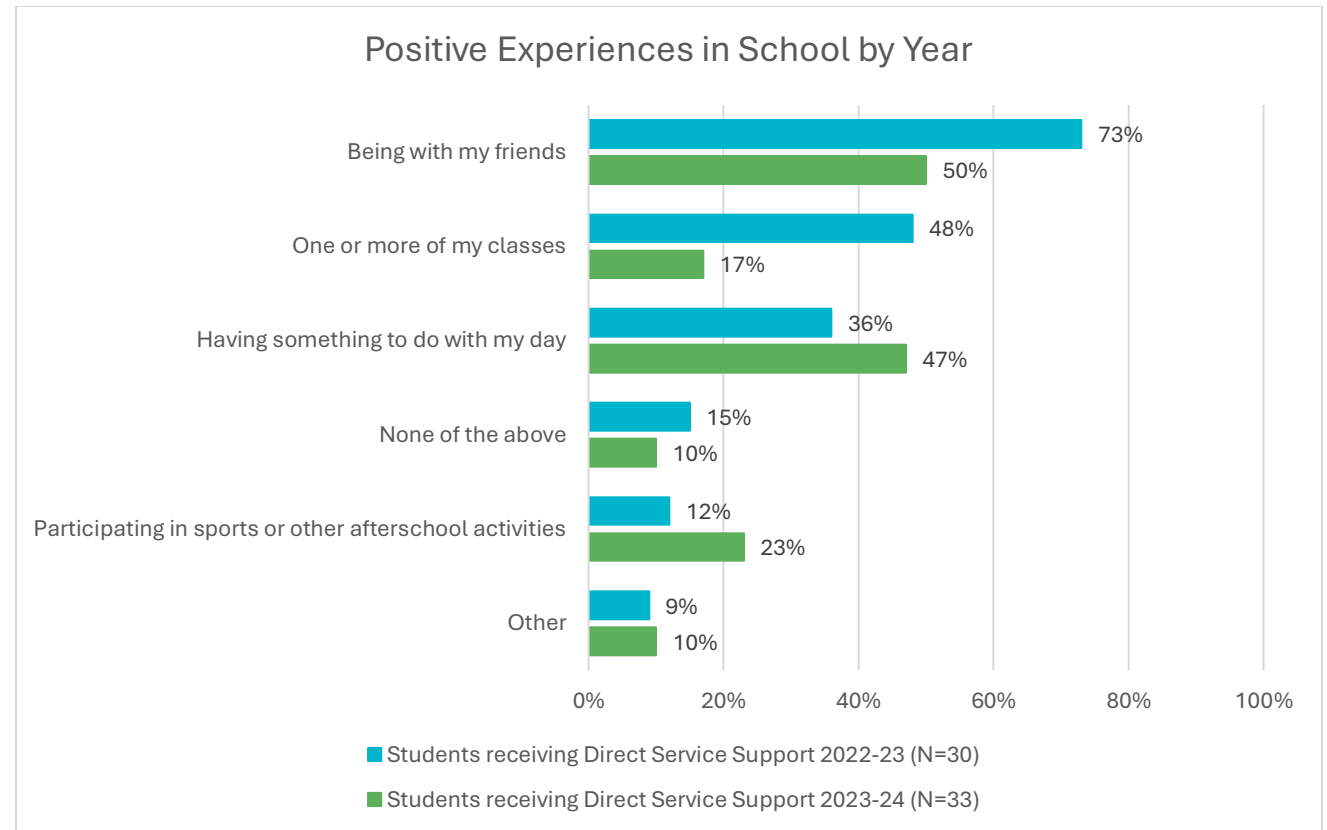
In both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, over three quarters of students served through direct service and the total district population were White (83% of students in 2022-23. 77% of students in 2023-24 and 77% of the total district population in 2023-24). In 2023-24, a higher proportion of Black/African American students (4%) and students who identify with Two or More Races (12%) were served directly through direct service than are represented in the total district population (1% and 7%, respectively).



Compared to the district population, direct service staff served more students who were low-income and multilingual learner students in 2023-24. In both years of the project, the Reengagement Specialist supported a larger percentage of students who were experiencing homelessness and students who identified as LGBTQ+ compared to the districtwide population. Additionally, in 2022-23, the Reengagement Specialist served more students in special education relative to the total student population overall.

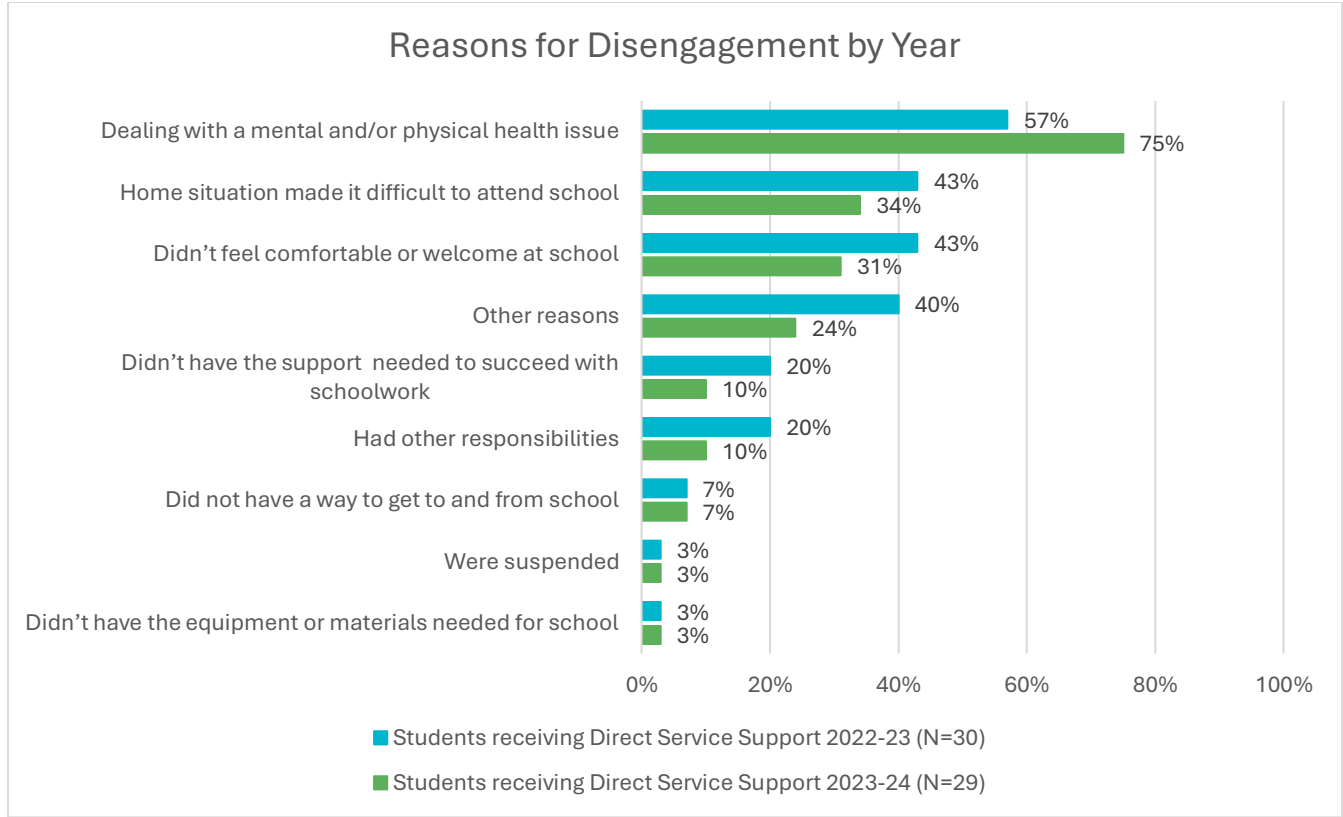
POSITIVE EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

Students receiving direct service support most frequently reported “being with friends” as a positive experience in school in both years (73% in 2022-23, 50% in 2023-24). “Having something to do with their day” was another common positive experience in both school years (47% in 2022-23, 36% in 2023-24). In 2022-23, “one or more of their classes” was a positive experience for 48% of students, which decreased to 17% in 2023-24. 12% of students reported “participating in sports or other afterschool activities” as a positive experience in 2022-23, which increased to 23% the following school year.



REASONS FOR DISENGAGEMENT

During both years of the project, health issues were a common reason for disengagement for 57% of students in 2022-23 and 75% of students in 2023-24 in the direct service data. Students' "home situations that make it difficult to attend school" was another common reason for disengagement in both 2022-23 and 2023-24 (43% and 34%, respectively). Students indicated "not feeling comfortable or welcome at school" was another common reason for disengagement in both school years (43% in 2022-23 and 31% in 2023-24).



Looking Ahead

As the grant-funded Attendance & Reengagement Project came to an end, staff and partners identified ways to sustain the work in Clarkston. The district aimed to have a team addressing attendance in each school, where they would review and discuss relevant data. This could be incorporated into existing structures, such as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) meetings. The ESD also noted an opportunity for district administrators to prioritize attendance in the district's professional development structures.

"[It's] getting buildings to really think about what teams do we have and how do we make that consistent as an expectation across schools...How do we really tighten up that system? What should that team look like? And what's the purpose?" – Staff Interviewee



The ESD also considered what support they could provide to the district after the grant ended. They intended to work with the district to identify the highest priority areas of the Attendance & Reengagement Specialist position and plan for how some of those responsibilities, such as direct service supports for students and data reporting could be integrated into other roles.