



Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports
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Consortium Grants that Support School Attendance

Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more days of school, has been linked with lower math and reading scores, lower graduation rates, worse social emotional outcomes, and even employment and relationship challenges later in life. A number of factors may contribute to absenteeism, including anxiety and other mental health issues, substance use, transportation barriers, family and childcare issues, physical health challenges, bullying and other peer difficulties, academic struggles, immigration concerns, poor sleep hygiene, and other factors. According to the Maryland School Report Card, 25% of Maryland students were chronically absent during the 2024-2025 school year. Chronic absenteeism affects students of all ages, including about 35% of Maryland high school students and about 23% of elementary and middle school students.

The Maryland General Assembly created the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Consortium is responsible for expanding access to comprehensive behavioral health services for Maryland students, pre-K through grade 12, in all areas of the state. Consortium programs are holistic and address a wide range of mental health and substance use challenges. A number of Consortium programs address school attendance, including: (1) grants that focus on chronically absent students, and (2) grants that support student behavioral health generally, which often lead to improved school attendance.

1. Grants that focus on chronically absent students. Programs that support chronically absent and disengaged students tend to be intensive and highly individualized, with smaller caseloads and a higher per-student cost than many other Consortium services. Generally, referrals are made by school staff such as Pupil Personnel Workers (PPWs), school counselors and social workers, attendance liaisons, Truancy Prevention Councils (TPC), truancy courts, Student Services Teams (SST), and/or Community Agency School Services (CASS) Coordinators. Grantees typically work with the student as well as their family to discern the root causes of school avoidance, develop personalized strategies, and link students and their families to behavioral health, somatic (physical) health, and/or nonmedical Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) services that support regular school attendance. Goal-oriented treatment plans are developed, involving significant wraparound support and frequent contact between the student, family, service provider, and school staff. Program staffing may include licensed clinicians; non-licensed staff such as mentors, community health workers, and care coordinators; or multidisciplinary care teams. Services are provided in the family's home, the school, and/or another community setting. Grant funds support only those services that cannot be billed to Medicaid or commercial insurance.

Consortium programs are selected according to the needs and assets identified by each community and school district. While absenteeism is a challenge in all parts of the state, the Consortium currently funds chronic absenteeism programs in nine jurisdictions (see map). Below are examples of Consortium programs that address chronic absenteeism:



Villa Maria Behavioral Health / Catholic Charities (Anne Arundel, Frederick, and Baltimore Counties).

Consortium grants to Villa Maria focus exclusively on chronic absenteeism. Villa Maria uses the Family Care Coordination (FCC) model to offer individualized assistance to students and their caregivers. Family Care Coordinators use an evidenced-based communication tool, the Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST), to identify the specific needs of each family. Then, they work with families to help them access needed resources, including behavioral health and nonmedical supports. Vila Maria provides motivational interviewing and care coordination to build on the strengths and interests of the child and family. Villa Maria is utilizing two of the Consortium’s priority EBPs: the Student Check-Up; and Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). The primary indicators of progress are: improvements in school attendance provided by the school district, increase in academic focused behaviors measured by the Student Subjective Well Being Questionnaire (SSWQ), and decrease in substance use measured by the GAINS-SS. To date, these programs have served 378 students and 72% have demonstrated improvements in attendance.

Linking All So Others Succeed - LASOS (Harford County). The Consortium grant to LASOS provides at-risk youth and families with an array of prevention, intervention, and diversion services to address behavioral, mental health, substance use, and academic challenges, focusing on non-native English-speaking residents. One aspect of the grant is the Embrace program, in which a therapeutic mentor meets with identified students in school to provide the Check and Connect intervention and motivational interviewing. The mentor also meets with school staff and the student’s families to address barriers to attendance and other issues. LASOS is utilizing three of the Consortium’s priority EBPs: Therapeutic Mentoring, Student Checkup, and Safety Planning. The primary indicators of progress are school attendance data accessed jointly with the student as well as Self-Esteem Index (SEI) assessments. This grantee is new for the 2025-2026 school year. 421 students have received services across LASOS’ programs, including 23 students in the Embrace program. Outcomes data are not yet available.

Other Consortium grantees focusing on chronic absenteeism include:

- Life Renewal Services (Carroll County)
- Jewish Community Services (Baltimore County)
- Sheppard Pratt (Frederick and Montgomery Counties)
- Advanced Behavioral Health (Carroll and Frederick Counties)
- Center for Anxiety and Behavioral Change (Frederick County)
- Mental Health Association of Frederick County (Frederick County)
- Cornerstone (St. Mary’s County)
- Youth Empowerment Source (Cecil County)
- Anne Arundel County Community Action Agency (Anne Arundel County)
- The Y in Central Maryland (Baltimore City)
- The Children’s Guild (Anne Arundel County)

2. Impact of other Consortium grants on attendance. The Consortium program includes over 150 service provider grants delivering a wide array of behavioral health services and supports in every jurisdiction of the state. Even programs that do not focus on absenteeism are impacting school attendance. For example, services for anxiety or bullying provide students with tools that help them overcome fears about attending school. Below are case studies that demonstrate the impact of other Consortium grants on school attendance.

St. Mary’s County Health Department (St. Mary’s County). A middle school student had missed 47 days of school due to severe anxiety prior to beginning services. After initiating therapeutic services focused on addressing anxiety and related barriers, the student’s attendance improved dramatically. From the start of services through the beginning of winter break, the student attended school 100% of scheduled days.

Hazel Health (Charles County). One student was missing a lot of school due to anxiety. The student had some past history with mental health treatment but wasn't currently able to afford therapy. At first, the student was skeptical of Hazel Health's 6-8 week program, however, the student was willing to try. Through treatment, the student told us that they learned coping skills that "actually worked" and eased their symptoms. Prior to this treatment, the student would miss school for weeks at a time. By the end of treatment, the student returned to school on a regular basis. The student says these coping skills are the reason they are able to go to school.

Higher Heightz (Prince George's County). One of our students was struggling with daily marijuana use and had multiple suspensions because of it. After being referred to Higher Heights, the student began attending weekly sessions and opened up during group. Over time, the student's behavior improved, and the student started showing up to class more often. By the end of the semester, the student was off suspension, more focused, and even helped another student who was dealing with similar issues. The support from Higher Heightz truly gave the student a chance to reset. - School Social Worker

Thrive Behavioral Health (Montgomery County). Thanks to our Thrive partnership, a student who was experiencing chronic absenteeism due to school-based anxiety has improved their attendance tremendously! At the end of the previous school year, the student's absence rate fell below 20% for the first time in their school career. The student hasn't missed a day yet this school year! The student's parents couldn't access therapy outside of school, but Thrive provided exactly what this kiddo needed. - School Counselor