

Resiliency: Restoring the Balance in School Reform

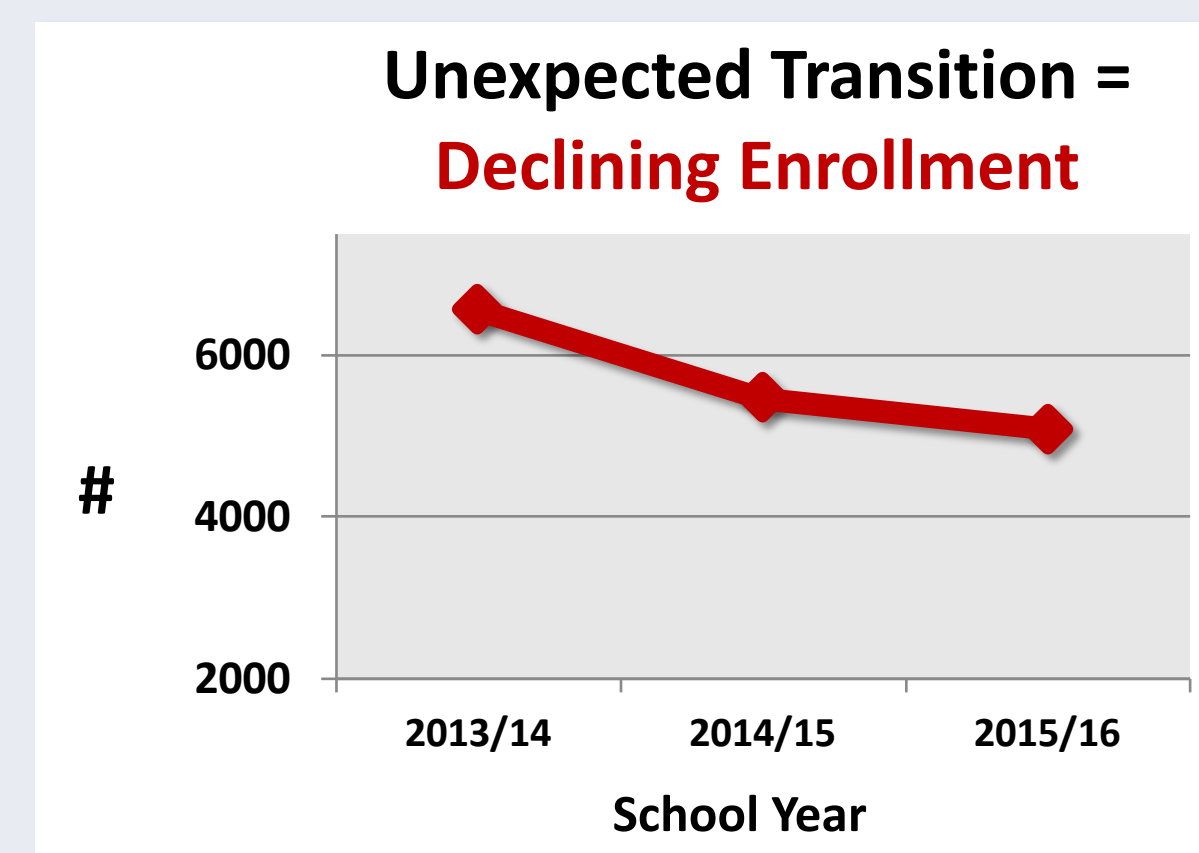
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1. What happened?

Unexpected Transition to Another District.

The Education Achievement Authority (EAA), a grantee of the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) initiative in Detroit, closed their doors in July 2017 and merged with the newly reorganized and largest district in Michigan – the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD). This created real challenges in achieving collaboration and maintaining services for schools, children and families that were successfully being provided in EAA through SS/HS. The SS/HS team represented local and state agencies, school districts and community partners from mental and behavioral health, and law enforcement. Realizing the need, we struggled with the uncertainty of how to move the impactful work of SS/HS forward with the transition to DPSCD.

Consequently, the EAA experienced enormous instability and challenges over several years, which impacted students, parents and teachers in Detroit and resulted in an enrollment decline of 22% in three years.



2. What were you thinking at the time?

Restore Trust. Develop a Shared Mission.

We desperately needed to restore trust and to develop a shared mission to stay engaged in school, understanding that this would lay the foundation for our work moving forward. This required district-level buy-in with key strategic alliances, and it was going to be challenging.

We focused on the key strategies from SS/HS to support the multiple needs of students, teachers, parents and community partners to repair relationships. With such a major transition on the horizon, their voices would make-or-break the transition. The key question: How do we carry forward SS/HS in a way that provides support during and beyond the transition, while recognizing the compounded issue of distrust associated with the transition?

We believed SS/HS could help by providing activities to address mental health and well-being as a counterbalance to the stress and anxiety that was weighing them down. We were committed to providing transition support and professional development for staff that included:

Restorative Practices
Trauma-Informed Care
QPR –Suicide Prevention
Culturally Responsive Teaching

3. What have you thought about since?

Priority: Be Needs-Driven.

As our efforts through SS/HS led to a deeper understanding of the strengths, challenges and opportunities related to the transition to DPSCD, we recognized a need to be responsive to the diverse cultural needs of our schools and community.

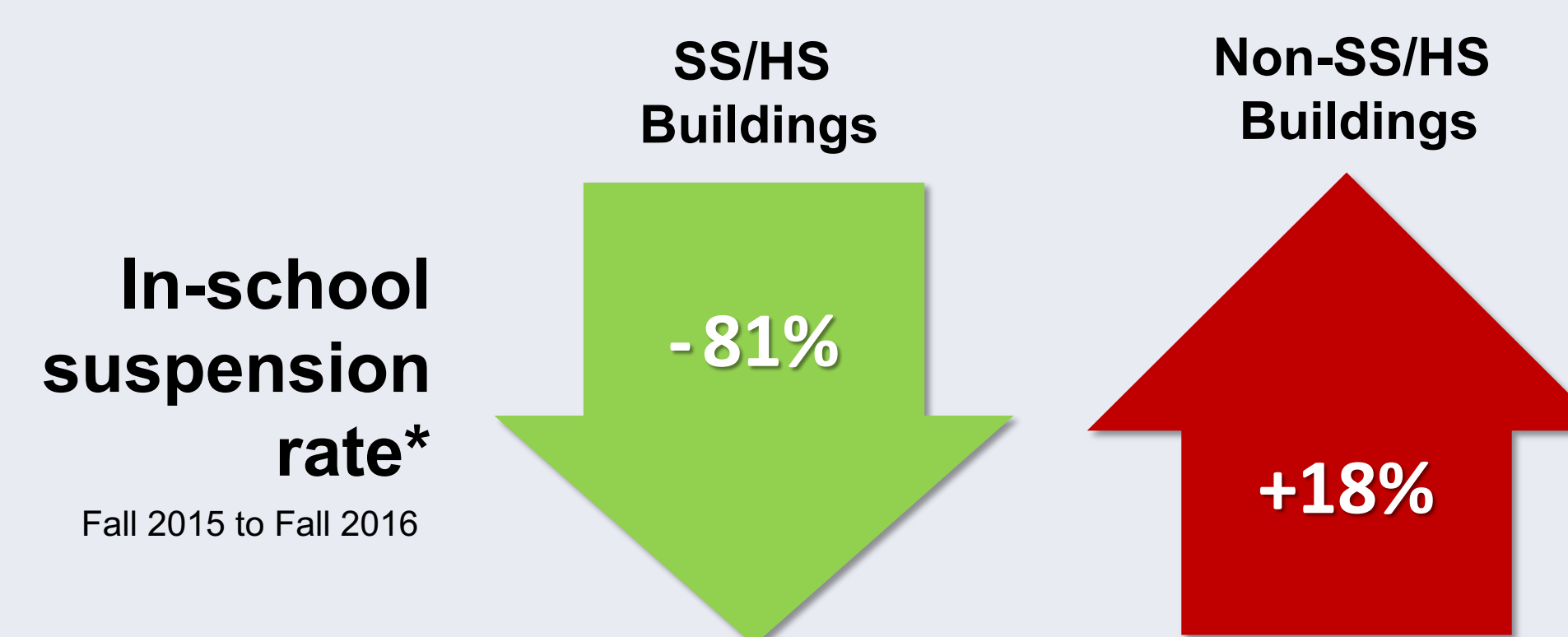
To that end, an analysis by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) revealed a disproportionate number of African-American and Latino students living in poverty in Detroit, and the related challenges affecting children's behavioral or overall health and success in school and life. Poverty does matter, and the longstanding strategy for successfully moving families out of poverty and into prosperity is an education that motivates and excites all children to learn in a healthy and safe school, stay in school and have a sense of hope for a successful future (2015).

Meeting the diverse needs of students within the scope of SS/HS would have to be our main priority. Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority (DWMHA) and their providers were identified as key partners to build capacity, integration and sustainability.

4. Who was impacted by what you did and in what way?

Student Outcomes.

Through DWMHA and their community partnerships, along with EAA School Social Workers and SS/HS staff, over 450 teachers and staff were trained to support mental health and well-being as well as provide referrals to mental health services. This led to the unprecedented goal of providing mental health services to over 1,000 students, which led to statistically significant reductions in suspension rates for SS/HS schools, compared to non-SS/HS schools.



Teacher Outcomes.

75% of the more than 450 teachers trained, felt committed to SEL.

From analysis of two years of implementation data, the MDE recognized the impact the SS/HS framework had on improving the learning conditions for students and families and became even more committed to integrating and aligning these efforts with DPSCD's strategic plan and organizational structure.

Currently, DPSCD plans to sustain the work prioritizing teachers in the Partnership Schools training in Youth Mental Health First Aid, and Social and Emotional Learning and are committed to expanding the trainings district-wide over time. DWMHA is committed to providing additional training including Trauma Loss in Children and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) to DPSCD staff.

5. What has been the hardest thing for you?

Instability.

The hardest issues were one of stability in a community that already experienced so much instability. Now that the EAA schools were returning to DPSCD, it created a new set of issues and caused many feelings of hurt and resentment to resurface as voiced by staff from both the EAA and DPSCD. Many things were happening outside of our control and we often felt like spectators as things were quickly unfolding. We were disappointed that we could not be a larger part of supporting the EAA schools' transition in to DPSCD. Continuing the work of SS/HS required a lot of behind-the-scenes efforts to embed and advocate for SSHS practices, including conversations directly with top administration at both the MDE and DPSCD. Finally, we were authorized to re-instate some of our efforts over the next six months, focusing on some of the partnership schools. Although it looks differently than anticipated, we are in awe at the remarkable resilience of our community, our students and parents to heal from adversity, restore hope and maintain an optimism for the future!

Key Takeaways.

- A strong partnership with MDE was critical to the continuation of the SS/HS grant.
- Leadership buy-in and action was imperative for both MDE and DPSCD to remove barriers and support community partnerships.
- Strong, sustainable collaborations with DWMHA to continue to increase access to mental health services.

References

Behavioral Health Disparity Impact Statement, 2015. Safe School/Healthy Students, Michigan Department of Education
SAMHSA Strategic Framework and Guiding Principles
Safe Schools/Healthy Students Logic Model, 2018