

Investing in Home Visiting in Connecticut

American Rescue Plan Community Profile

December 2023 | Children and Youth

American Rescue Plan Funding

Total Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief State Education Agency Funds in Connecticut: \$110 million¹

Total Governor's Education Emergency Relief Fund dollars in Connecticut: \$27.8 million²

Amount of Governor's Education Emergency Relief Fund dollars featured in this profile: \$10.7 million

Summary

In summer 2021, the Connecticut State Department of Education and Gov. Ned Lamont launched the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) to address student absenteeism and disengagement from school due to the COVID-19 pandemic.³ LEAP has three main goals:

1. Reacquaint students with their school communities.
2. Assist students in signing up for learning programs and summer camps.
3. Support families in transitioning back into school communities.⁴

Students identified as chronically absent in 15 school districts received home visits. These 15 districts were chosen by the State Department of Education due to their high rates of chronic absenteeism.⁵ Home visits targeted specific demographics of students, such as new immigrants, who demonstrated a higher need for attendance-related support.⁶ Some districts formed multidisciplinary teams comprised of teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff members to oversee and implement the home visiting model.⁷ Other districts partnered with community organizations for home visitations, which offered practical benefits such as increased staff availability and fewer restrictions on how



community districts' LEAP funds could be used to incentivize students and parents.⁸ These community partners included Connecticut's six [Regional Education Service Centers](#), city service bureaus in Stamford and Bridgeport, and organizations such as YMCAs and Boys & Girls Clubs.

Connecticut funded the initiative with \$10.7 million from the state's federal COVID-19 recovery funding through the Governor's Education Emergency Relief Fund. To start the initiative, the Connecticut State Department of Education partnered with [Attendance Works](#), a national organization dedicated to improving policies and practices related to student attendance. Attendance Works played a role in co-designing the home visitation model and assisted with the creation and initial delivery of professional training to prepare LEAP home visitors.⁹ As a result, a Connecticut Home Visit Hub has been established at the Capitol Region Education Center to provide training to all districts in Connecticut and interested districts in other states.

Age Group Served

Children and youth ages 5–17 years

Funding Stream Used

Governor's Education Emergency Relief Fund

Key Partners

- Attendance Works
- Regional Education Service Centers
- School districts
- City service bureaus
- Community-based youth organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCAs

Local Perspective

Chronic absenteeism in Connecticut had “more than doubled from 10.4 percent in 2018–19 to 23.7 percent in 2021–22,” and currently is at 99,017 students (20%) statewide as of the 2022–2023 school year.¹⁰ New Haven had the highest absentee rate with 58.1% of students chronically absent, which has since decreased to 36.6% for the 2022–2023 school year.¹¹ In the 2021–2022 school year, both Hartford and Windham ranked second with 46% of students chronically absent in each district (now at 38.9% and 36.2%, respectively), and in New Britain, 41.2% of students were chronically absent (now at 37.8%).¹²

Statewide, LEAP had a significant positive impact on student attendance and reached 8,690 students across 15 school districts as it continued into the 2021–2022 school year.¹³ Attendance rates increased by “approximately 4 percentage points” between June 2021 and September 2021 for students who received their first LEAP visit during the summer and the 2021–2022 school year, respectively, compared to “average yearly attendance rates during the 2019–20 school year.”¹⁴ Attendance rates continued to rise in subsequent months, with an average increase of “approximately [7] percentage points for students treated in the summer of 2021” and “nearly 15 percentage points for students treated during the 2021–22 school year in the 6 months or more after treatment,” compared to the “monthly attendance rates starting in September of 2020 and going through June of 2022.”¹⁵

Hartford schools saw the most improvements as attendance rates increased by nearly 30 percentage points six months after the initial intervention.¹⁶ In Hartford Public Schools, district administrators “analyzed attendance data to identify chronically absent students” and devised “school level lists” based on absenteeism tiers.¹⁷ They then arranged home visits and “community canvassing as an engagement strategy during key points of the year,” although these were not counted as LEAP home visits.¹⁸

In contrast, LEAP had no noticeable impact on attendance rates in New Haven Public Schools because the district did not follow the LEAP program’s intended approach.¹⁹ Instead of conducting individual LEAP visits with students, New Haven outsourced this responsibility to a nonprofit organization, primarily focusing on canvassing neighborhoods with high concentrations of chronically absent students.²⁰ However, in response to feedback from the LEAP evaluation team and the Connecticut State Department of Education, New Haven adjusted its

LEAP model to align more closely with the models used in other districts for the 2022–2023 school year.²¹

The program’s expansion plans include using additional American Rescue Plan funding to extend LEAP’s reach until 2026. To ensure continuity beyond federal relief funds, the Connecticut State Department of Education will keep its virtual training for home visitors, LEAP 101, available to spread the program’s approach even in the absence of increased funding.

The impact of LEAP in improving student outcomes can be attributed to its integration with existing student support systems. In collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education, the [State Education Resource Center](#) conducts biweekly [Talk Tuesdays](#) throughout the school year. These state-level online sessions held via Zoom are open to all stakeholders, providing a platform to discuss best practices for attendance, engagement, and support for all students, including those with diverse needs. Districts statewide can showcase attendance improvement strategies, family engagement, and collaboration with external partners.

Likewise, the involvement of noncertified community staff who resembled the local population and knew the community well facilitated relatable interactions and genuine connections. LEAP’s flexible approach toward staff was pivotal, creating an environment where home visitors who volunteered were paid fairly and engaged willingly. Connection Sessions were held by Capitol Region Education Centers as a platform for home visitors to share success stories and struggles.

Additionally, LEAP’s unique multivisit model, which prioritized relationship building over focusing solely on attendance or grades, contributed to its effectiveness. This approach involved home visitors actively listening more than speaking during initial visits and engaging in follow-up phone calls centered on the aspirations and dreams of children and families.

Another key factor was the requirement of home visitors to be fluent in the home language of the families they served.²² This emphasis on language proficiency acknowledged the importance of effective communication and cultural understanding to ensure families felt heard, respected, and engaged.²³ These strengths are evidenced by LEAP’s comprehensive evaluation framework, which encompasses home visitor log data, data-driven home visits prioritized by districts, and attendance logs. As a result, LEAP’s personalized approach and evidence-based decision-making boosted student attendance by nurturing a

supportive environment for students and their families with the support of community partners.

Lessons Learned

The emergence of hybrid and remote learning models had profound effects on students' learning outcomes, demonstrating a need for intervention while simultaneously presenting an opportunity to realign perspectives on student absenteeism. Initially, intervention focused on implementing a 1:1 model and equipping students with hot spots to mitigate widespread connectivity issues, especially in urban areas. However the challenges faced by teachers handling both remote and in-person classes proved there was a need for further intervention. Amid these changes, a pivotal realization emerged—the need to rebuild the essential connections between students, families, and schools.

Spearheading this approach, Kari Sullivan, Connecticut's state attendance and engagement lead, understands the importance of hands-on initiatives. This transformation necessitated a shift, one driven by a "people-powered approach" through home visits to reinforce schools' relationships with students and families. It also presented an opportunity to shift mindsets from punitive to empathetic in regard to student absenteeism. Sullivan summarized this shift, stating, "Nothing grows in a garden of shame. Truancy is built on a garden of shame. When you're truant, you're a bad kid. A lot of times when kids are late for school or chronically absent, it's not their fault. But they're often penalized for it."

A [2022 report on LEAP outcomes](#) by the Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration interviewed district leaders, LEAP home visitors, and families that received LEAP services about the program's impacts, reasons for success, and lessons learned from program implementation:²⁴

- **In-person visits:** District leaders agreed that in-person visits were more effective than virtual ones.
- **Staffing matters:** District leaders believed involving school community members in home visitations was important, but opinions differed on using community partners. Some district leaders preferred school personnel exclusively, while others used a mix of school staff and community volunteers. Representation mattered, and using home visitors from the same ethnic/racial background as the families improved communication.

Community Statistics

Community Size

Total population (2022): 3,626,205

Racial Demographics

- White 78.4%
- Black or African American 12.9%
- American Indian and Alaska Native 0.7%
- Asian 5.2%
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander 0.1%
- Two or More Races 2.7%
- Hispanic or Latino 18.2%
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino 63.9%

Socioeconomic Status

- Median household income (2021): \$83,572
- Children living in poverty (2021): 12.9%

Sources: "QuickFacts: Connecticut." U.S. Census Bureau, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CT,US/PST045222> and "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates: Connecticut," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed August 30, 2023, https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/saie/#/?map_geoSelector=u18_c&s_measures=u18&s_year=2020&s_state=09&s_county=&s_district=&s_geography=us.

- **Flexibility in implementation:** Many districts had existing models to address absenteeism, and they adapted or integrated the new LEAP approach to fit their needs.
- **Relationship building:** The LEAP model emphasized family engagement over punitive truancy measures and relied on community members to engage with chronically absent students.
- **Location of family visits:** While LEAP is described as a home visitation model, it's not necessary for visits to occur at home. Meetings happened in public spaces too.
- **Importance of data collection and reporting:** District leaders emphasized the need to think about how to collect data and share it with those

who could use it to improve practices.

- **Additional support and resources:** Home visitors expressed a desire for more resources and continued support for LEAP. They highlighted the success of connecting Spanish-speaking families with Spanish-speaking staff members and suggested incorporating additional services like therapy and counseling for families.

The outcomes of LEAP strongly support the effectiveness of home interventions for improving attendance. LEAP's integrated foundation, family engagement initiatives, and structured communication platforms for communities provide a valuable foundation for home visits. In the LEAP outcomes report a majority of district leaders emphasized the long-term viability and effectiveness of LEAP are more crucial than the immediate level of funding allocated to it.²⁵ Engaging chronically absent students requires sustained effort and a commitment to serve students and families in need through interpersonal connections.

Acknowledgment

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Endnotes

- ¹ Connecticut State Department of Education, "Connecticut State Department of Education Announces Submission of ARP ESSER Plan," news release, June 9, 2021, <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Press-Room/Press-Releases/2021/Connecticut-State-Department-of-Education-Announces-Submission-of-ARP-ESSER-Plan>.
- ² "Governor's Education Emergency Relief Fund," State of Connecticut, Office of Policy and Management, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Coronavirus/Coronavirus-Relief-Fund/GEER#:~:text=The%20Governor's%20Education%20Emergency%20Relief,by%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic>.
- ³ Connecticut State Department of Education, "Governor Lamont Launches State Initiative to Address Student Absenteeism and Disengagement," press release, April 12, 2021, <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Press-Room/Press-Releases/2021/Governor-Lamont-Launches-State-Initiative-to-Address-Student-Absenteeism-and-Disengagement>.

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Steven E. Stemler et al., *An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Home Visits for Re-Engaging Students Who Were Chronically Absent in the Era of COVID-19* (Hartford, CT: Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration, 2022), https://portal.ct.gov/ccerc/-/media/CCERC/Reports/CCERC-Report-LEAP_FINAL.pdf.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Catherine Cooney, "New Analysis: Building Relationships During Home Visits Improved Attendance During the Pandemic," (blog) Attendance Works, January 23, 2023. <https://www.attendanceworks.org/new-analysis-building-relationships-during-home-visits-improved-attendance-during-the-pandemic>.

¹⁰ "Chronic Absenteeism," CT.gov., accessed October 17, 2023, https://public-edsight.ct.gov/students/chronic-absenteeism?language=en_US.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Stemler et al., *An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Home Visits*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.