



Annual Program Report

NJ4S Services

Supporting youth mental wellness in New Jersey

2023-2024 School Year



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



Executive Summary: SCHOOL YEAR 2023-2024

What is NJ4S?

To address growing concerns about youth mental health and wellness, DCF launched an innovative new program, the NJ Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S) Network in September 2023. NJ4S features a “Hub and Spoke” Model, in which **15** regional Hubs throughout the state provide specialized prevention and brief intervention services to meet the needs of students, parents/caregivers and educators in school and community locations. Services are delivered in tiers and cover topics such as mental health and wellness, life skills, substance use prevention, and bullying.



Youth in the United States are facing unprecedented mental health challenges. In 2023, **40%** of U.S. high school students reported feeling consistently sad or hopeless, up from **30%** in 2013. Additionally, one in five students seriously considered attempting suicide.[†]

What we learned after one year of implementation:

34% of eligible school districts received NJ4S services in the first year of implementation.

292 schools received [Tier 2](#) or [Tier 3](#) services through NJ4S. **45%** of all schools who received services were considered high need.

277 [Tier 2](#) interventions were delivered to students, staff and parents; **65%** were evidence based.

The **top** [Tier 2](#) program topics requested by schools were:

- mental health (**30%**)
- social connections (**13%**)
- substance use prevention (**12%**)
- anti-bullying and violence prevention (**9%**)
- classroom management (**7%**)

276,118

Total participants were served



[Tier 1](#)

Universal Supports
239,702 students, caregivers and staff served



[Tier 2](#)

Small Group Programming
15,352 students, caregivers and staff served



[Tier 3](#)

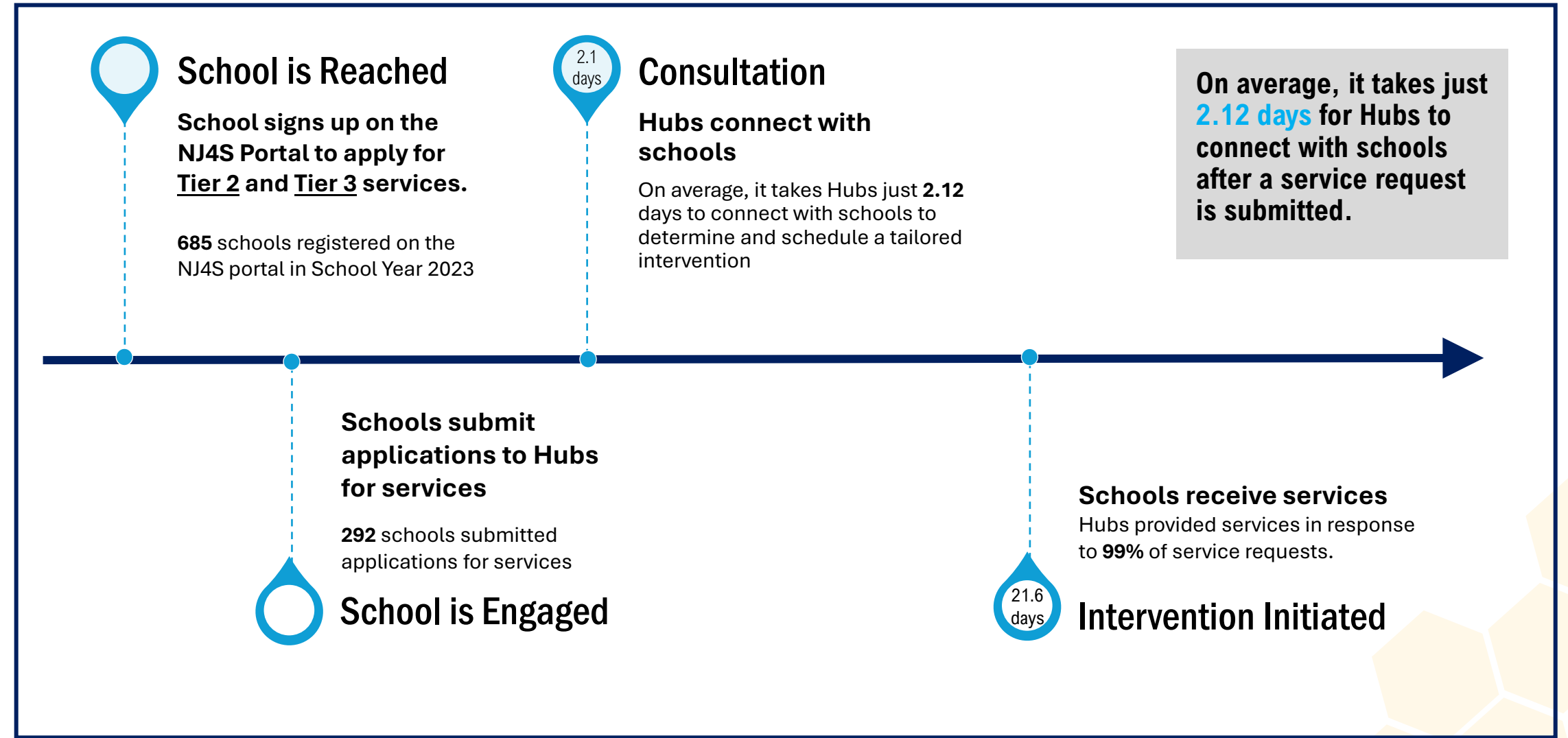
Brief Clinical Intervention
1,120 students and caregivers served

[†]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention . Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023 . U . S . Department of Health and Human Services; 2024



Process for Schools to Receive NJ4S Services

BY THE NUMBERS





Reach & Engagement: SCHOOL YEAR 2023-2024

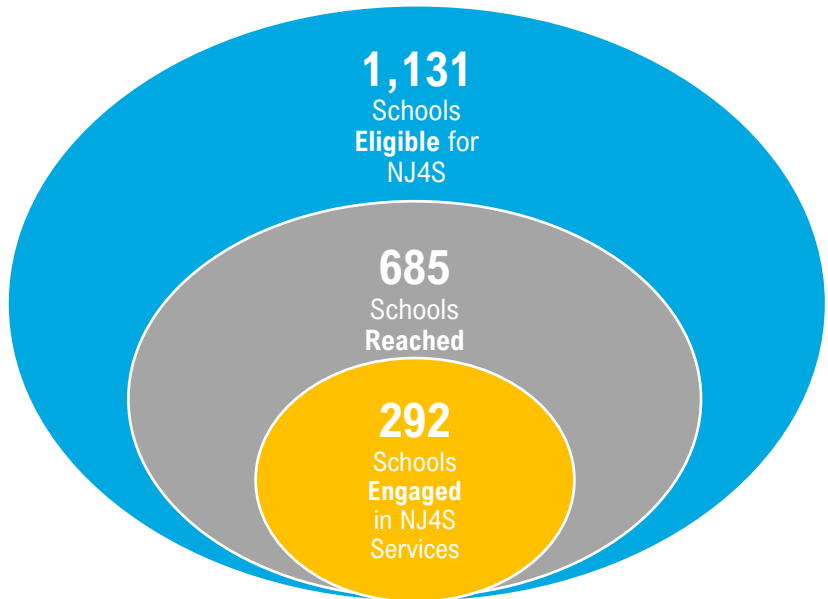
Over one thousand schools in New Jersey are eligible for NJ4S services. The program proactively outreaches to schools and communities – particularly ones with the highest needs - to register them for, and engage them in, service delivery.

What is reach?

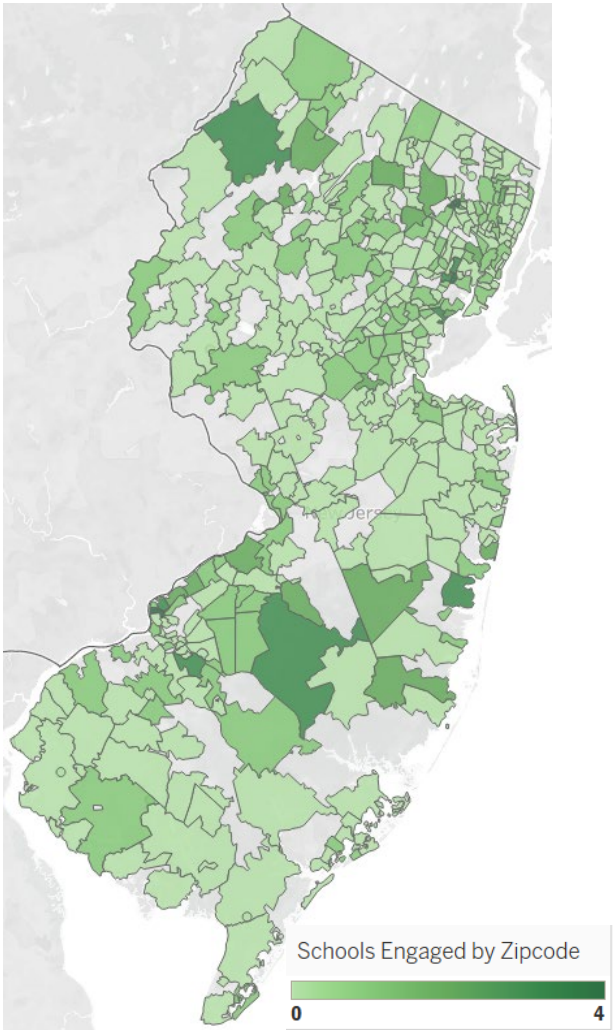
Reach means a school has at least one school representative signed up to receive NJ4S Tier 2 or Tier 3 services through NJ Connex, the program’s information management system.

What is engagement?

Engagement means a school has filed an application for Tier 2 or Tier 3 services through the NJ4S portal. During the 2023-2024 school year, NJ4S engaged with **201** school districts (34%).

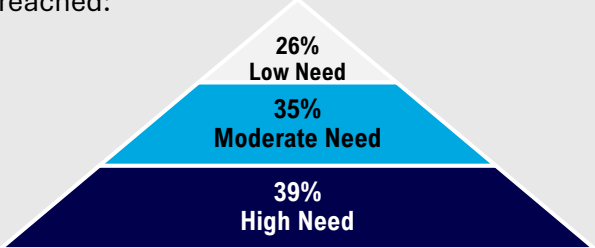


292 Schools Engaged in NJ4S Services this School Year



Tool For Targeting and Prioritizing Program Delivery: School Needs Index

- The School District Needs Index (SDNI) is a measurement tool used to identify the level of need in school districts and charter schools within New Jersey.
- The index combines school district and community level indicators to create one composite “needs score” for an NJ4S eligible school in each district.
- Out of the **354** New Jersey School Districts, NJ4S reached:



“...one of the most important things that we did to support our schools...early on was we sent [scheduling coordinators] out to schools...they went to school districts and ...brought a computer and put up NJ Connex and navigated through everything.”
-Hub Leadership

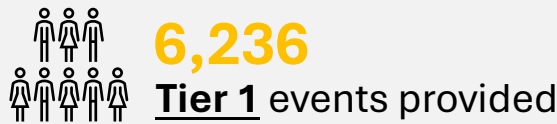


Interventions Delivered: SCHOOL YEAR 2023-2024

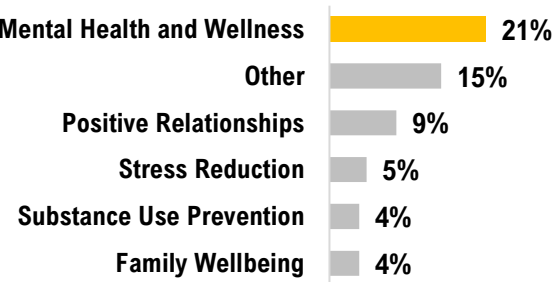
Hubs are administrative and organizational centers that mobilize prevention specialists and mental health counselors to provide targeted, tiered services locally. The services include public events, small group programming and brief clinical interventions focused on mental health, social connections, classroom management and career readiness.

TIER 1: UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS

Universal (Tier 1) supports include virtual and in-person workshops, webinars, assemblies and training. They are available to students (grades Pre-K through 12), their families, school staff and community members.

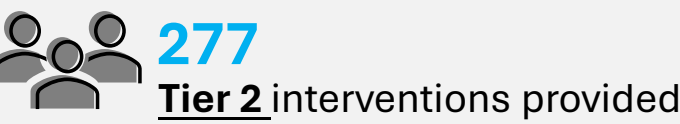


Most Tier 1 Interventions focused on **mental health**.

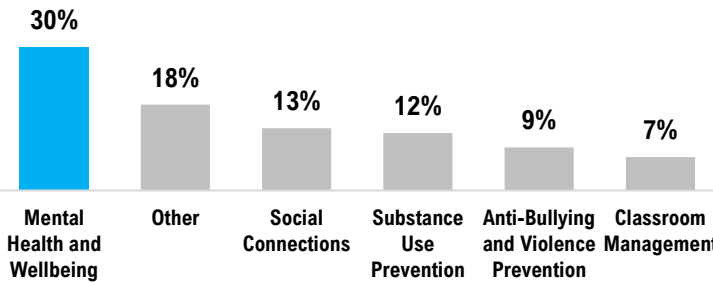


TIER 2: SMALL GROUP PROGRAMMING

Small Group Programming (Tier 2) includes early identification and focused prevention interventions. It can be delivered through small group interventions, brief individualized prevention programs, mentoring, or low-intensity classroom support to students identified as at-risk. Tier 2 interventions also include linkages to existing community programming and resources.

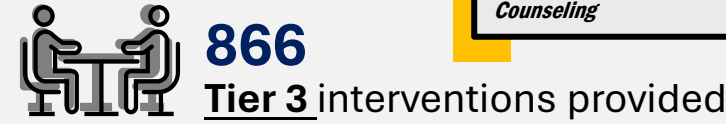


Most Tier 2 Interventions focused on **mental health**.

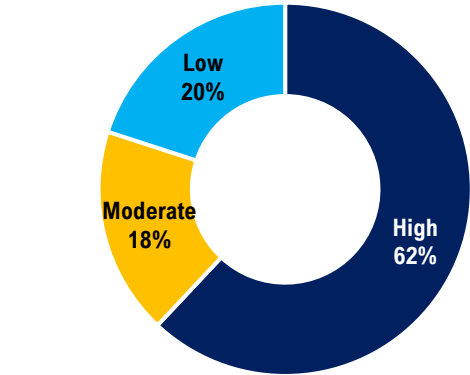


TIER 3: BRIEF CLINICAL INTERVENTION

Brief Clinical Interventions (Tier 3) include assessment and brief individualized therapeutic interventions for youth while they are being referred and connected to a community provider to support ongoing mental health needs.



"The therapist we have - I can't find enough good words to describe her. She's been so **extremely helpful and **extremely caring** and gone above and beyond . . . it's really been **amazing**."**
- NJ4S Parent of Student in Tier 3 Counseling



Most students who accessed Tier 3 supports were from **high needs** school districts.



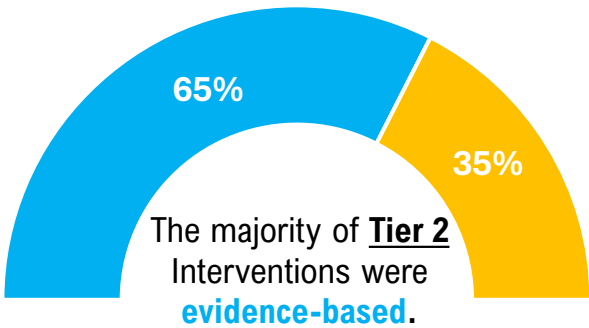
Evidence-based Models: TIER 2 SERVICES SCHOOL YEAR 2023-2024

Hubs prioritize implementation of evidence-based models in schools.

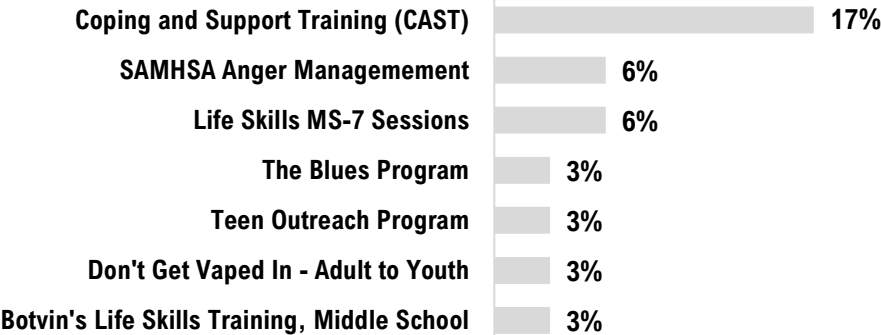


4,707

unique students received evidence-based Tier 2 services.



Programs used:



Referrals

What happens if students need supplemental services?

NJ4S works in partnership with local communities. Students may be referred to community providers if requested interventions already exist, rather than NJ4S duplicating community services. Students may also be referred if there is a need that NJ4S cannot meet, or to provide continuing services after NJ4S interventions are complete.



710 referrals made in school year 2023.

72% of students referred were from High Need school districts

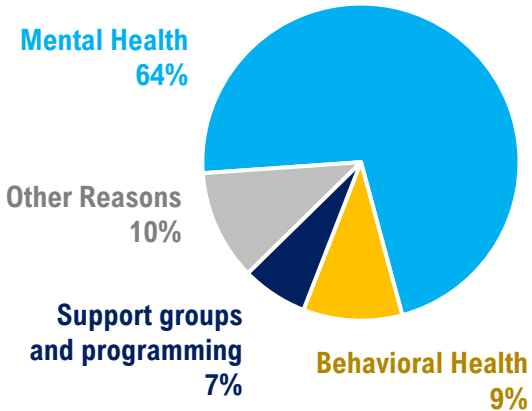
16% Moderate Need
12% Low Need



97%

of students referred successfully accessed the community resource or service.

Referral Reasons included:

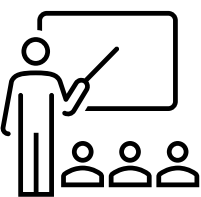




Deeper Dive: STUDENTS SERVED BY TIER 2 AND 3 INTERVENTIONS

(school year 2023-2024)

NJ4S serves diverse students from across the state of New Jersey. We highlight the age, gender, race and ethnicity of students who participated in NJ4S.



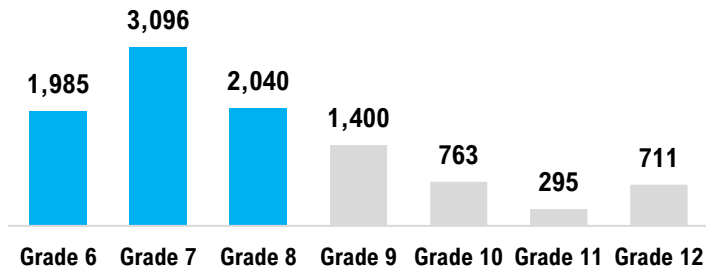
13,990

students were engaged in an NJ4S Tier 2 or 3 service.
16,472 total participants (including students, teachers, and parents) were engaged in services.

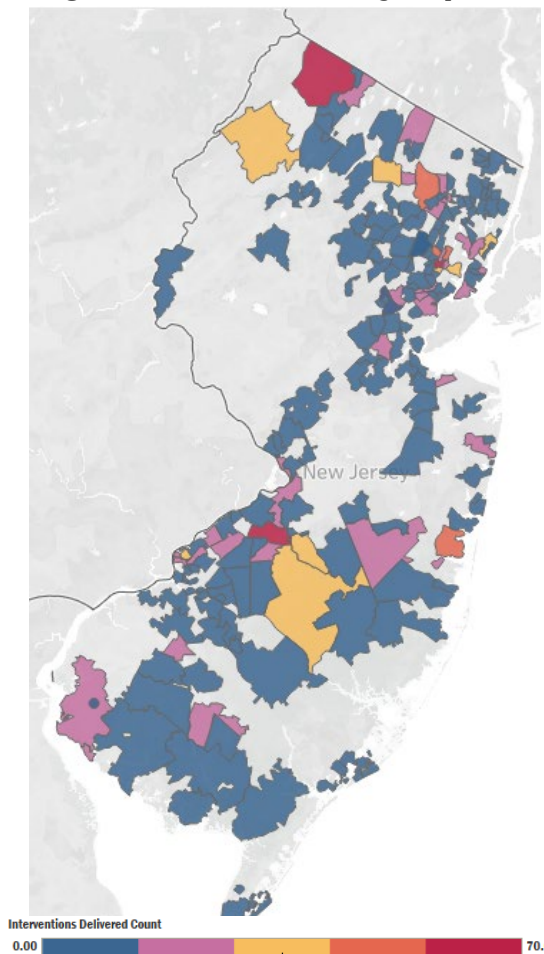
1,143

total Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions were delivered.

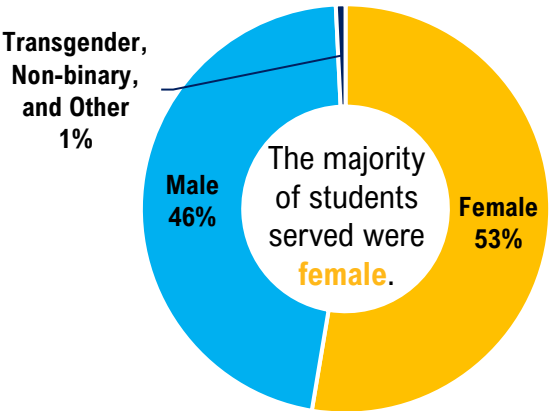
Most participants were **Middle Schoolers**.



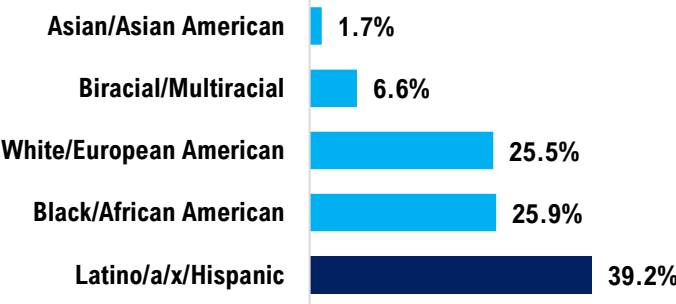
Programs Delivered by Zip Code



This map highlights the geographic distribution and intensity of interventions. Regions colored in darker shades, have higher counts of interventions, while those in lighter shades have fewer interventions.



The majority of participants were **Latino**.



“I can’t say enough good things... The program is fantastic... I think it’s a great resource and I think it can help so many people.”
- **NJ4S Parent**

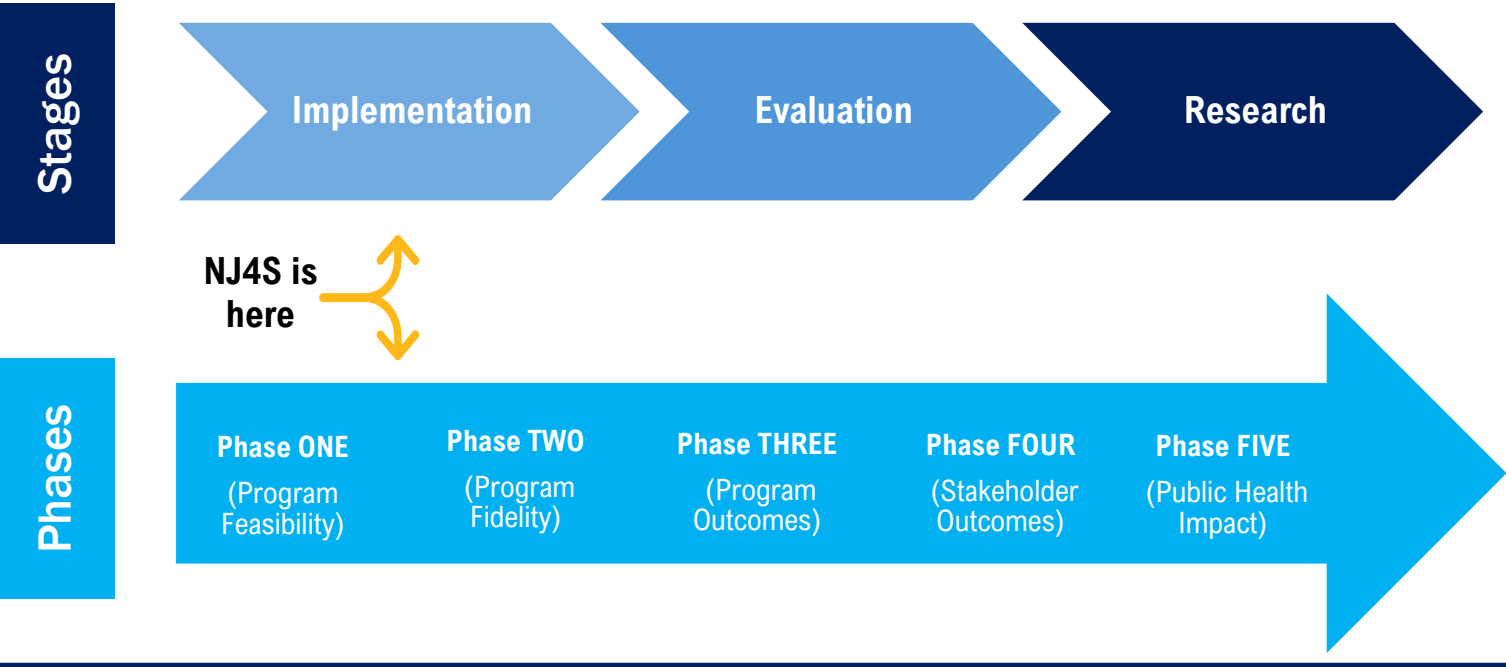


Evaluating NJ4S

Multi-Phased Evaluation Plan and Methods

To ensure that NJ4S is being implemented with fidelity to the model and achieving intended outcomes, NJ DCF is undertaking a collaborative, multi-year, phased evaluation of the program using a mixed-methods approach.

This brief reports on findings from Phase 1, assessing program feasibility by using quantitative program data collected from September 2023 to August 2024 through NJ Connex, the program’s information management system. Data were analyzed for frequencies, proportions and overtime. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions with parents and Hub staff.



"There was a lot going on at the time when I was in the program. ...[NJ4S] helped guide me and like, **give me resources on how I could calm myself down** because I was really stressed. [NJ4S offered] different ways I could kind of distract myself, but also like get away from everything for a little bit just so I could **ease my mind**. ... I still use those things like to this day ...they're really helpful."

-NJ4S Student

Questions?

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NJ4S: Growth Over Time

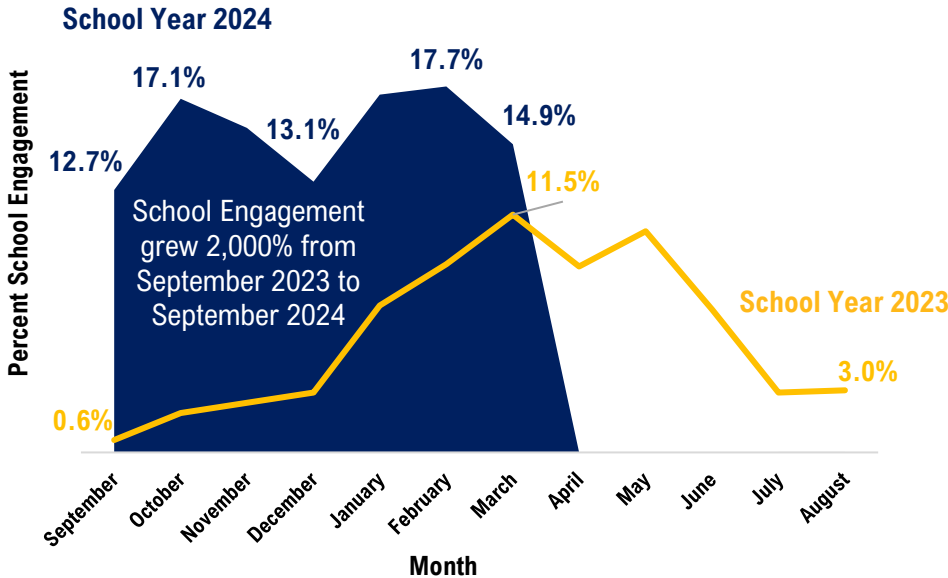
School Year 2023-2024 (September 1, 2023 to August 31, 2024) to School Year 2024-2025 to date (September 1, 2024 to April 1, 2025)

Key Findings

- With 5 months left in the 2024-2025 school year, the number of NJ schools engaged in NJ4S (424) has **grown 45%** from the 2023-2024 School Year (292).
- **19 of 21** NJ counties had growth in school engagement in NJ4S during the 2024-2025 school year.

NJ4S School Engagement

School Year 2023 versus School Year 2024, to date



% Growth in Schools Engaged

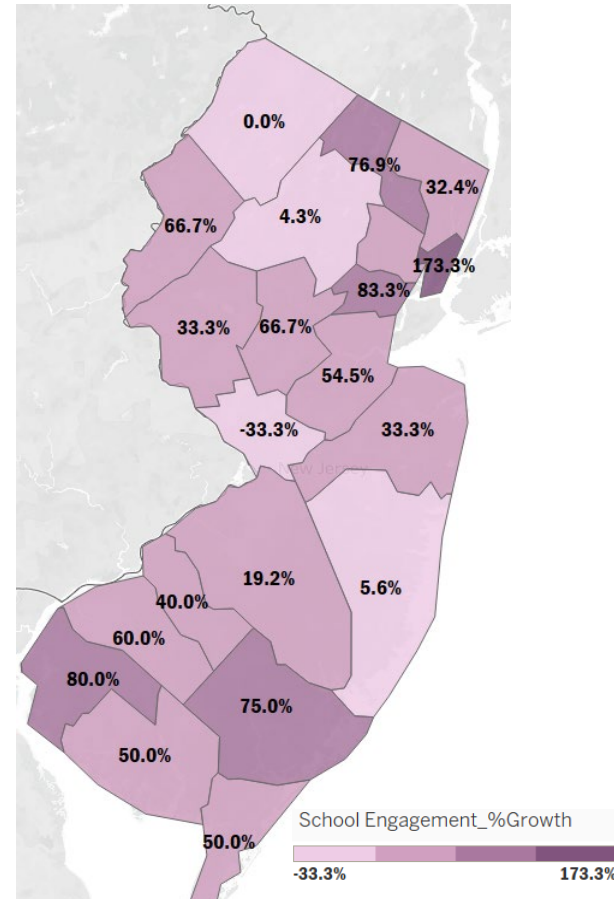


Figure Note: Lighter shades indicate lower growth and darker shades indicating higher growth. The range of values is from -33.3% to 173.3%.

Looking to the Future:

NJ4S aims to continue this growth trajectory with a focus on deepening engagement and expanding reach, leveraging the hub and spoke model to maximize our impact across more schools and communities.



NJ4S: Growth Over Time

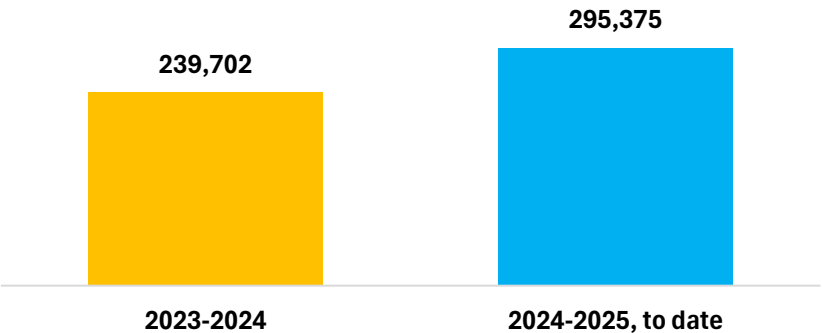
School Year 2023-2024 (September 1, 2023 to August 31, 2024) to School Year 2024-2025 to date (September 1, 2024 to April 1, 2025)

Key Findings

With 5 months remaining in the 2024-2025 school year, NJ4S has surpassed the prior school year in Tier 1 service participants and Tier 2 and 3 interventions delivered.

- The number of students, parents and staff receiving Tier 1 services grew from **239,702** in the 2023-2024 School Year to **295,375** in the 2024-2025 school year, to date.
- **420** Tier 2 Interventions have been delivered in the 2024-2025 school year, to date, up from **277** in the 2023-2024 school year.
- **1,310** Tier 3 interventions have been delivered in the 2024-2025 school year, to date, up from **866** in the 2023-2024 school year.

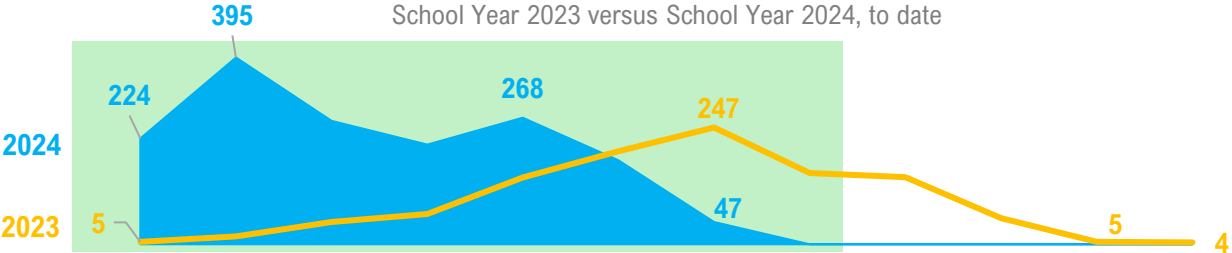
Total Number of Individuals Receiving Tier 1 Services By School Year



Total Number of Interventions by Month

Tier 2 and 3 Services

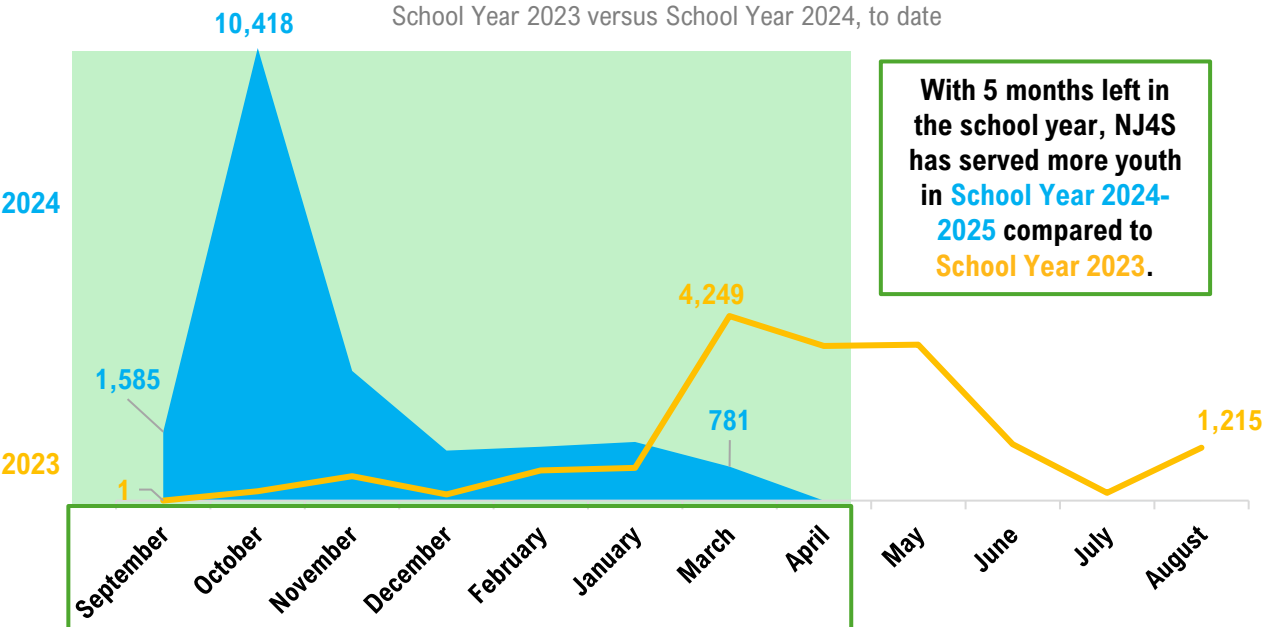
School Year 2023 versus School Year 2024, to date



Total Number of Individuals Receiving Interventions by Month

Tier 2 and 3 Services

School Year 2023 versus School Year 2024, to date



With 5 months left in the school year, NJ4S has served more youth in **School Year 2024-2025** compared to **School Year 2023**.