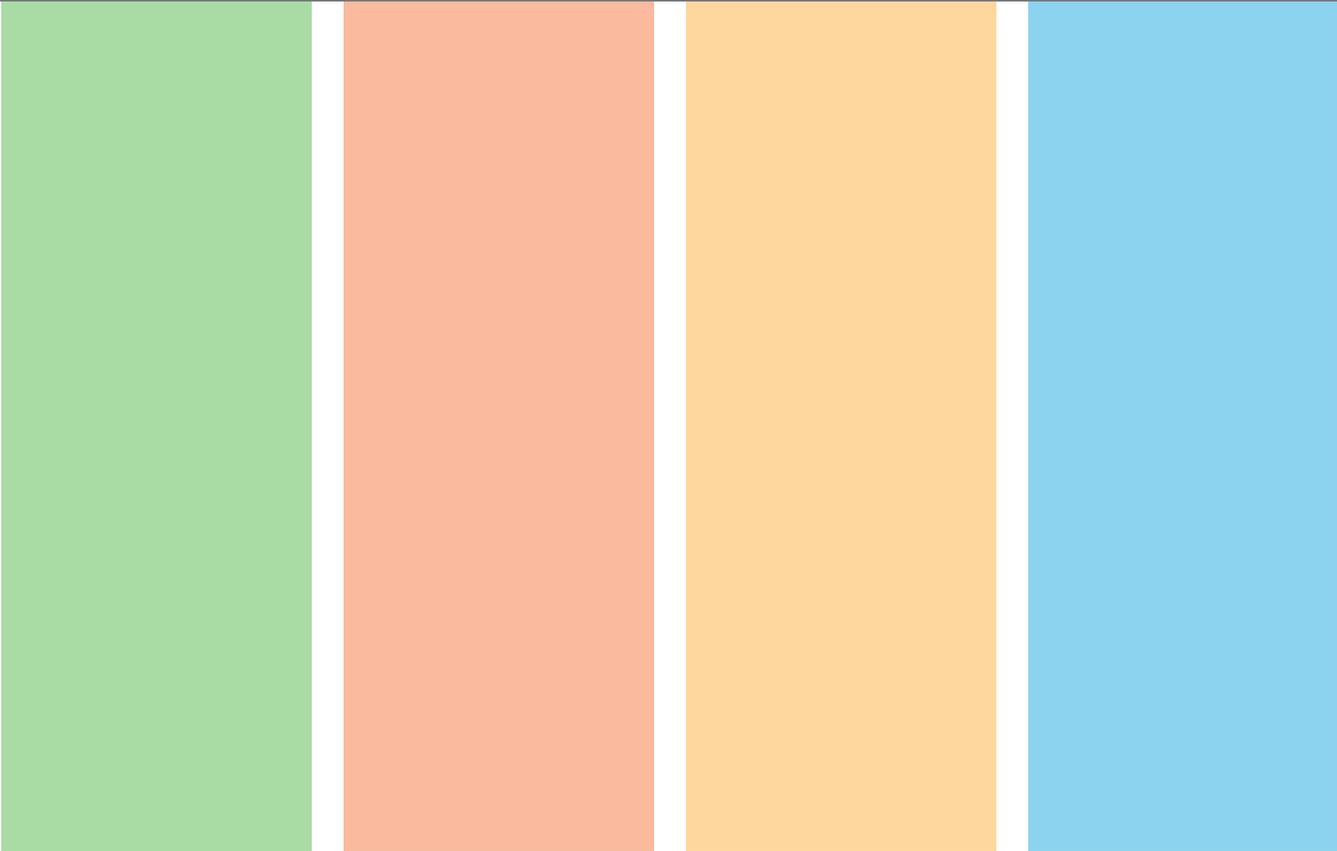


# Elev8 Final Report

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Prepared by *Research for Action & McClanahan Associates* • May 2016



Wendy S. McClanahan, Ph.D. • Kelly Piccinino, Ph.D.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	i
I. Introduction.....	1
Structure of this Report.....	2
II. What is Elev8?.....	4
Elev8 Regions.....	6
Elev8 Lead Agencies.....	6
Elev8 Schools & Districts.....	7
Elev8’s Implementation Timeline.....	10
Service Providers.....	12
Summary.....	12
III. What did Elev8 Accomplish?.....	12
Engagement in Elev8.....	13
Out-of-School Time/Extended Day Learning Programs.....	13
Family Supports and Family and Community Engagement.....	16
School-Based Health Centers.....	17
Service Integration.....	19
Elev8’s Outcomes.....	19
Student Outcomes.....	20
Elev8’s Health Outcomes.....	20
Elev8’s Socio-Emotional Outcomes.....	21
Elev8’s Academic Outcomes.....	22
School Outcomes.....	26
School Climate.....	27
Summary.....	30
IV. Conditions Supporting Robust Implementation.....	31
Condition 1. Building a Shared Vision.....	31
Condition 2. Clear and Consistent Communication.....	33
Condition 3. Strong Family and Student Engagement.....	34
Condition 4. Adequate, Predictable and Coordinated Resources.....	36
V. Final Thoughts.....	38

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## **Authors**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

A high-quality education helps young people develop into successful adults. Yet, far too many children across America face substantial barriers to educational success, including under-resourced schools. While educational reform efforts seeking to improve chronically underperforming schools abound, community schools are becoming an increasingly popular strategy for school turnaround. Community schools have a long history, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, in response to the educational issues facing our nation's most vulnerable youth, community schools exist in 49 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup> The draw of the community school educational model centers around a design that provides students and families with access to needed supports, such as healthcare services, educational enhancement and academic enrichment programs, family economic supports, and other services that address common barriers to students' educational success.

Since 2008, The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) has invested deeply in the community school model in a diverse group of high need, underperforming middle schools in New Mexico, Oakland, Baltimore, and Chicago spanning rural, large and small urban, and Native American pueblo settings. Atlantic made the decision to focus on middle schools because research shows that the transition from middle school to high school is a particularly critical turning point. How smoothly students make this transition is strongly related not only to the likelihood of finishing high school but also to the odds of staying in college until graduation. The effort, known as Elev8 Full Service Community Schools, builds on integrating four core pillars of support that research has linked with student achievement and success: out-of-school time (OST) or extended-day learning (EDL) opportunities, school-based healthcare, support for families, and community engagement—with the goals of alleviating non-academic systemic challenges associated with poor performance in school and improving school climate.

Elev8 implemented its four pillars in varied ways that were intended to meet the needs of the local communities. The effort was directed by a lead agency in each location with roots in the region, and the schools in which it operated were those that served a more diverse and disadvantaged population than the districts and states in which they were located. Atlantic also made investments in technical assistance for the partners and provided financing for communications, policy and national advocacy supports for Elev8.

Atlantic also allocated funding for evaluation supports. Recognizing that Elev8's success was contingent upon adaptation to the local context, Atlantic funded a local evaluation team in each of the regions, as well as a national evaluation team. Knowing that efforts to fully integrate non-academic supports into a school takes years, Atlantic dictated that early evaluation efforts focus on building a data-driven culture in each Elev8 region and generating formative feedback that could be used to strengthen Elev8's model and implementation. As the initiative matured, the local evaluation teams worked to answer research questions that were tailored to the needs of the grantees in their sustainability phases, and the national evaluation team turned its attention to documenting programmatic outcomes, and assessing the extent to which the regions were able to sustain Elev8's implementation. It is important to note that Elev8 was never subject to a rigorous impact evaluation. Atlantic recognized that assessing the impact of efforts like Elev8 requires patience—measurable results take time and sustained investment to achieve and are difficult to prove definitively. What Atlantic's investment in Elev8's evaluation supports did result in is more than 100 (mostly internal) research

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<sup>1</sup> Coalition for Community Schools (2009). Community schools: Research brief. Retrieved from <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CCS%20Research%20Report2009.pdf>

reports. This report, the final national evaluation report on Elev8, aims to summarize what we know about Elev8’s structure, accomplishments, and implementation for the field from this body of literature.

## What is Elev8?

Elev8 is a full-service community school model operating in low-income areas, with the goals of alleviating the non-academic systemic challenges associated with poor performance in school and improving school climate. Elev8 builds off of the recognized best practices of the community school approach—employing strategies that address the needs most prominently manifested by youth in high-poverty communities, while simultaneously promoting local customization and adaptation in programming to meet the unique context of each community and school in which it operates. Therefore, while each initiative looks different, Elev8’s core elements include:

- OST programming  ;
- School-based healthcare  ;
- Family supports  ; and
- Family and community engagement  .

These “pillars” are carefully integrated in each Elev8 school, as youth and their families become advocates for improving education and increasing access to vital resources. Elev8 schools employ a team of staff, service providers, and an Elev8 coordinator to implement the core pillars.

By design, Elev8 is implemented in middle schools that are located in high poverty communities and perform consistently below their district and state averages. At the height of its implementation phase, Elev8 was located in 20 schools. In the 2013-14 school year it was located in 16 schools.

## What Did Elev8 Accomplish?

### Engagement in Elev8<sup>2</sup>

Each region customized Elev8 to meet local needs. The four Elev8 regions adopted different OST models. Some schools provided intensive one-on-one supports to select students who were at the highest risk of failing academically. Some schools provided before- and after-school programming, summer programming and weekend programming, and other schools provided more traditional place-based after school programming. Elev8’s family supports also took various forms over the years of the initiative’s implementation and were customized to the needs of the community. Supports ranged from benefits maximization, to legal services, to family events, to parent resource rooms at schools. While substantively different, they commonly aimed to help parents achieve greater economic stability and become involved in their child’s schooling.

Community engagement also consisted of a broad variety of activities, ranging from parents’ nights and school open houses to parent and community involvement in school governance bodies. Last, school-based health centers’ (SBHC) scope of services also varied from region to region; in some schools, SBHCs were open to the community, and in others only students were served. Table ES-1 displays the number of

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<sup>2</sup> Data in this section are from 2010-11 through the 2014-15 school year, and does not include the earliest years of the initiative, unless otherwise noted.

students who participated in OST, the number of adults who participated in supports or engagement activities, and the number of SBHC visits over the last five years of Elev8.

Table ES-1. Annual Use of Elev8 Services

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total Number of Students Using Elev8 OST/EDL	2,877	2,580	2,056	2,879	3,333
Total Number of Adults who Received Support Services or Participated in Engagement Activities	718	1,068	303	2,140	2,067
School Based Health Center Visits	27,762	22,011	22,440	24,631	21,447

**OST DOSAGE.** While the total number of students using Elev8’s OST/EDL services demonstrates the scope of the program, dosage is a key factor in determining if those services will be effective. A report published in 2013 looked closely at participation in Elev8’s OST programs while it was still receiving full funding for program services and participating in a comprehensive tracking system in the 2010-11 school year (McClanahan, et al., 2013).<sup>3</sup> According to that study, **40 percent of students in middle grades in Elev8 schools participated in Elev8 OST programs.** On average, **Elev8 students who took advantage of OST attended those programs 43 days on average over an average of 5.3 months in the school year.** It is unknown if these figures are representative of the experiences of students across all years of Elev8.

**NUMBER OF ADULTS SERVED.** From year to year there has been broad variation in the number of adults who participate in Elev8’s family supports and engagement activities. Overall, across regions the greatest number of adults were served through Elev8 during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years, likely due to an increased emphasis among Elev8 schools on family engagement in the sustainability phase of the initiative.

**SBHC DOSAGE.** The average number of school-based health center visits per user ranged from one to nine over an academic year, suggesting that some students used the center sporadically (such as for immunizations or school or sports medical check-ups) and others used it for ongoing medical care.

## Profile of OST, Family Support, and Engagement Activities Participants

**Elev8 participants generally reflected the communities in which Elev8 schools were located.**

Unfortunately, demographic data on SBHC users is not available.

**STUDENTS.**<sup>4</sup> Students who opted to participate in Elev8 OST generally reflected the racial composition of the schools in which Elev8 were located. In two sites, a greater percentage of OST participants were female. Two regions served youth in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade in addition to middle schoolers because they operated in K-8 schools. The vast majority of students were low income.

<sup>3</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students’ experiences in school.* Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Due to funding and program leadership changes, after the first four years of the initiative sites were not required to provide identified data to RFA; therefore it is not possible to link student data from year to year to generate a whole initiative sample. We present data on just one year of implementation, 2013-14, that is generally reflective of all years.

**ADULTS.**<sup>5</sup> Generally, Elev8’s family supports and community engagement activities served adults whose racial/ethnic background reflected the majority group of the school. Adults who participated in Elev8 were most likely Hispanic (three regions) or African-American (one region). Elev8 reached far fewer adult males than females.

## Service Integration

Elev8 strived to integrate services for students, aiming to create school environments where school, Elev8 and service partner staff all work together to provide students and their families with a seamless comprehensive set of services. Ideally, students would participate both in school based health and OST programs, and their parents would also benefit from offered family support services. It was not possible to systematically assess the extent to which students and families in Elev8 schools received or participated in multiple services. The clearest picture available of student experience focuses on 2012-2013. Using a sample created by matching students in Elev8 schools who completed a survey to Elev8’s participation data, McClanahan and colleagues (2013) measured the extent to which students in Elev8 schools participated in OST and/or SBHC. As shown in Table ES-2, **about a quarter of students in Elev8 schools did not participate in either the SBHC or Elev8 OST; about one half participated in only one of the two Elev8 services, either Elev8 OST or the SBHC; and a quarter of students utilized both services.** The extent to which this pattern of use holds over time is unknown.

Table ES-2. Distribution of Student Participation in Elev8 Services: SBHC and OST, 2010-11

Number of Services	0	1 <i>(either OST or SBHC)</i>	2 <i>(both OST and SBHC)</i>
% of Sample	25.8%	50.9%	23.2%

## Elev8’s Outcomes

As a data-driven initiative, Elev8 schools collect data on an annual basis to understand the extent to which key Elev8 goals are being achieved. Additionally, Elev8 evaluators have conducted a handful of ad-hoc studies investigating various Elev8 outcomes at student and school levels. In this section we share select findings from these sources. We start with student’s academic, health, and socio-emotional outcomes and then turn to what we know about outcomes for Elev8 schools. Importantly, no study to date has rigorously explored if Elev8 has *caused* changes in students’ health, socio-emotional, or academic outcomes (see page 30 for upcoming reports on Elev8); what we can discern is whether Elev8 students are getting health care and whether they are experiencing socio-emotional and academic outcomes.

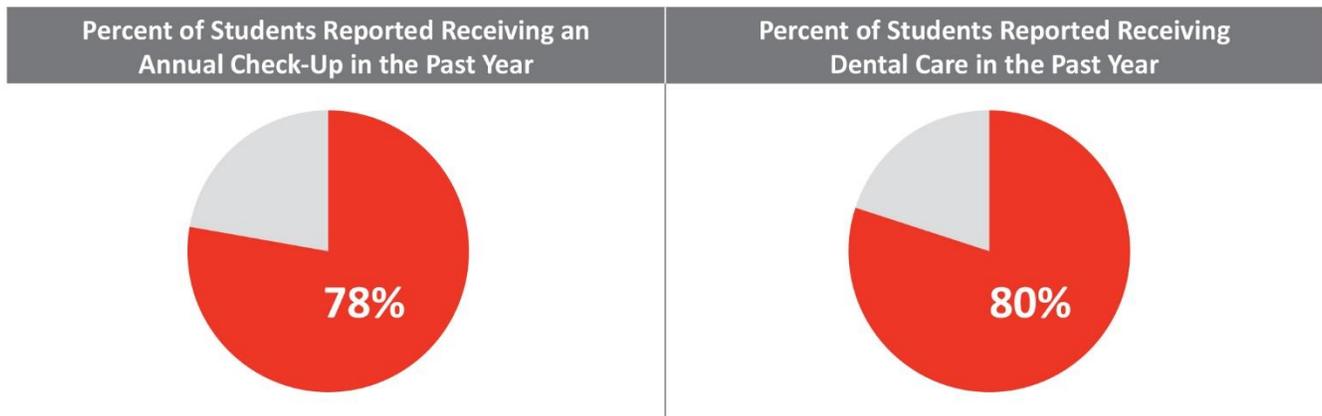
## Student Outcomes

### Elev8’s Health Outcomes

The majority of Elev8 students received annual health screenings or check-ups as well as dental care, as seen in Figure ES-1. In the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year for which data are available), across all four sites, **78% of Elev8 students reported receiving an annual check-up in the past year, and nearly 80% of students indicated they had dental care in the last year.**

<sup>5</sup> Due to funding and program leadership changes, after the first four years of the initiative sites were not required to provide identified data to RFA; therefore it is not possible to link adult data from year to year to generate a whole initiative sample. We present data on just one year of implementation, 2013-14, that is generally reflective of all years.

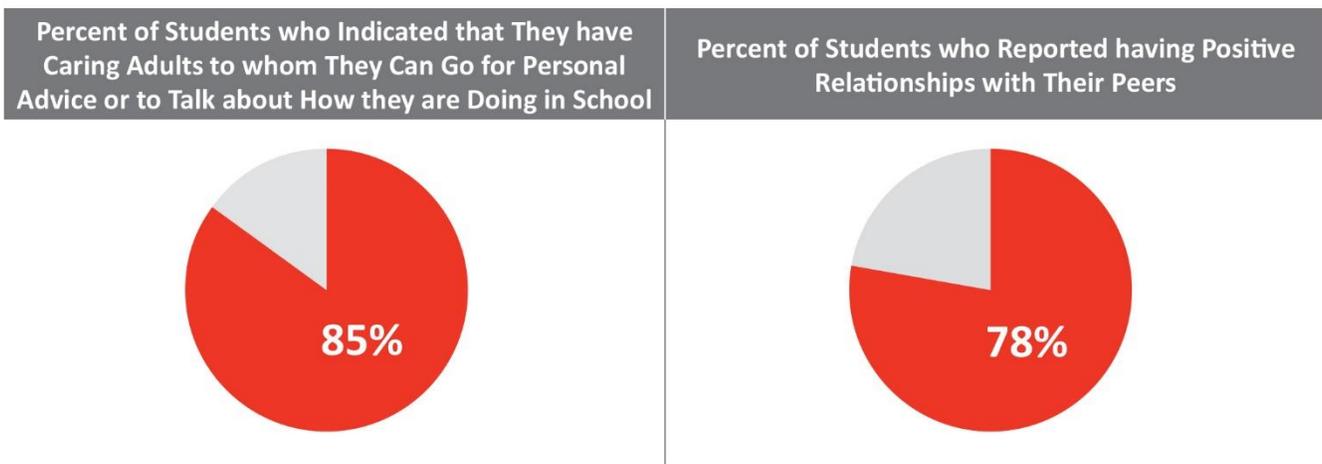
Figure ES-1. Elev8 Student Health Outcomes



### Elev8’s Socio-Emotional Outcomes

**CARING RELATIONSHIPS.** As displayed in Figure ES-2, a majority (85%) of Elev8 students<sup>6</sup> indicated that they have caring adults to whom they can go for personal advice or to talk about how they are doing in school. Just over three quarters of Elev8 students<sup>7</sup> report having positive relationships with their peers. These indicators show that Elev8 students have good adult and peer networks, a key indicator of positive youth development.

Figure ES-2. Elev8 Students’ Socio-Emotional Outcomes



Elev8 students who were interviewed said that they are benefitting from Elev8 services, particularly social-emotional supports (DeNike et al., 2013<sup>8</sup>). Several noted the impact of Elev8 on their ability to cope with family problems, feelings of isolation, and personal losses. One Elev8 student who participated in the Elev8 OST program shared,

<sup>6</sup> This question was asked across a sample of Elev8 students—all OST participants in three Elev8 regions, plus two other region-selected targeted populations of Elev8 students and all students in Elev8 schools in the fourth region.

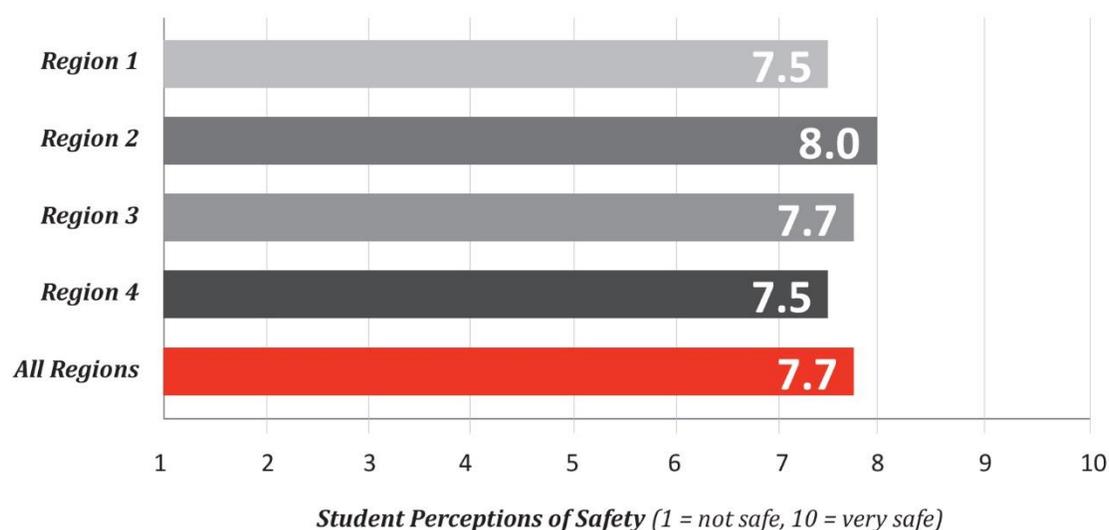
<sup>7</sup> This question was asked across a sample of Elev8 students—all OST participants in three Elev8 regions, plus two other region-selected targeted populations of Elev8 students and all students in Elev8 schools in the fourth region.

<sup>8</sup> DeNike, M. & Ohlson, B. (2013). *Elev8: Oakland community school costs and benefits: Making dollars and cents of the research (Policy Brief, 1)*. Oakland: Bright Research Group.

*I like the afterschool [program], and I talk to [Elev8 staff members] if I am having a problem. I've been through a lot in my life. My dad died when I was two years old; my stepbrother died two months ago, and a couple years ago my grandfather died. It was so tough. When other kids are talking about their dad—they have the best dad—I feel so sad and want to cry. Or when my brother died, I was crying a lot. My family is busy; I try not to bother them. So [Elev8 staff member] helped me; she gave me someone to talk about [it with]. If not, I would be walking around the hallway crying. (p.5)*

**FEELING SAFE.** Feeling safe in school is another key factor in student success both academically and developmentally. Elev8 students feel relatively safe in school, on average. As can be seen in figure ES-3, **on a scale from 1 (not at all safe) to 10 (very safe) students provided, on average, a daytime school safety rating of 7.7.**

Figure ES-3. Elev8 Students' Perceptions of Safety



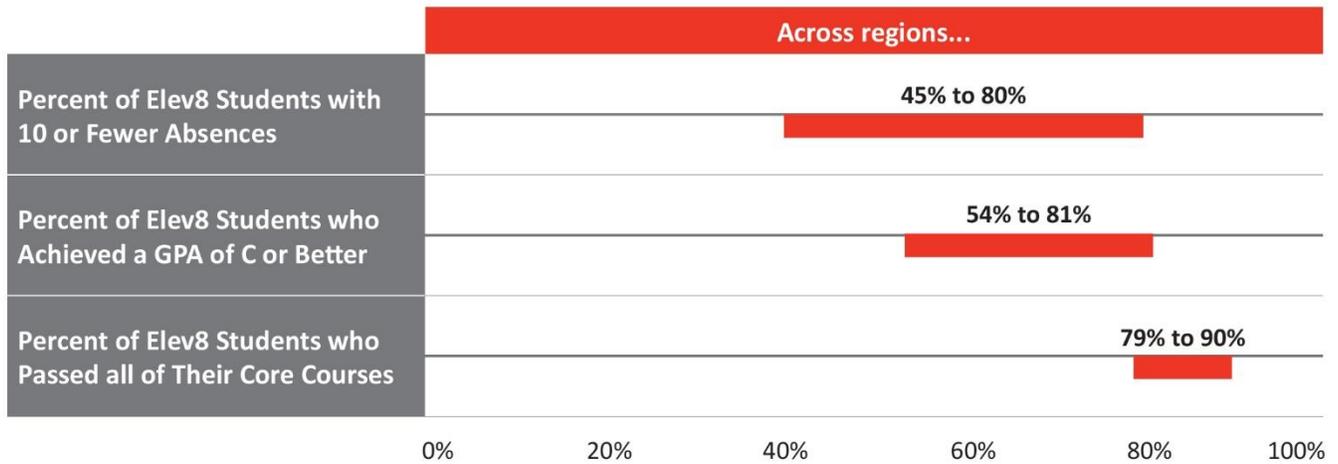
## Elev8's Academic Outcomes

One of Elev8's core goals—perhaps the hardest to achieve—has been to *improve* the academic performance of Elev8 students. Elev8 measures itself against progress on three academic indicators: the percent of Elev8 students with 10 or fewer absences, the percent who have a GPA of C or better, and the percent who pass their core courses. Each of these indicators has been shown to be associated with long-term academic success (see, for example, Balfanz et al., 2007).<sup>9</sup> As displayed in Figure ES-4, **across regions the percent of Elev8 students with 10 or fewer absences varied substantially, ranging from 45% to 80%.<sup>10</sup> Between 54% and 81% of Elev8 students achieved a GPA of C or better, and between 79% and 90% passed all of their core courses. Importantly, Elev8 students' grades have been constant or climbing in three of the four Elev8 regions over time.**

<sup>9</sup> Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D.J. (2007). Presenting student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist* 42(4), 1-13.

<sup>10</sup> These figures are for the subset of youth who participated in Elev8 OST or academic services.

Figure ES-4. Elev8 Students' Academic Outcomes



One Elev8 study explored the relationship between attending an Elev8 school and academic outcomes; it showed that **attending an Elev8 school was associated with significantly higher odds of positive academic outcomes in at least some years of Elev8's implementation** (Carson Research Associates, 2015).<sup>11</sup> This same study showed that **students who attend Elev8 schools for longer experience more positive academic outcomes than those who attended fewer years.**

Other studies have demonstrated an association between participation in Elev8 OST and students' academic outcomes. Gao and colleagues (2015<sup>12</sup>) investigated the relationship between student OST participation levels and grades in school. After controlling for differences in student demographics such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and grade levels, the authors found that, on average, **greater Elev8 OST participation levels were associated with:**

- **Higher GPAs in reading, math, science, and social science**
- **Higher school attendance**
- **Higher levels of school engagement**
- **Higher likelihood of participating in a wider range of high school planning activities**, which, in turn was associated with a greater likelihood of having a plan for high school.<sup>13</sup>
- **Higher likelihood of planning to apply for a competitive college preparatory high school** (defined as a selective enrollment—public or private—or charter high school).

## School Outcomes

The previous section focused on outcomes among Elev8 students—that is, students in Elev8 schools who have participated in Elev8 services. However, Elev8 is a whole-school initiative, and all students attending Elev8 schools are expected to benefit from improvements in school climate and performance that result from Elev8 activities and programs.

<sup>11</sup> Carson Research Associates (2015). *Elev8 Baltimore: Outcome evaluation report*. Baltimore: Carson Research Associates.

<sup>12</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: MAI & Research for Action.

<sup>13</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students' experiences in school*. Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

## School Climate

One indicator of positive school climate is the degree to which positive and respectful relationships exist among Elev8 partners, school leadership, Elev8 staff and school faculty at each Elev8 school. In 2014-15, the most recent year for which data were available, **staff at all Elev8 schools in three of the four regions reported positive and respectful relationships existed; in the fourth region, positive relationships were reported at three of the four schools.** Similarly, Elev8 endeavors to create school environments in which students feel that they belong; **between 37% and 52% of students by region “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they felt part of the school community in the 2013-14 school year** (the most recent year in which data were available). Lastly, a 2015 study of one Elev8 region assessed the extent to which Elev8 schools experienced improvements in school climate. **All of the region’s Elev8 schools displayed stable school climate over from 2012 to 2014, and schools improved on ratings of their physical environment** (e.g., cleanliness; Carson Research Associates, 2015).<sup>14</sup>

*Elev8 schools displayed stable school climate over the three-year period.*

## School Performance

Using publicly available data about school performance, Elev8 researchers explored how its implementation was associated with school outcomes such as school attendance rate, school truancy rate, and the percent of students proficient or better<sup>15</sup> on standardized tests (Gao et al., 2015<sup>16</sup>). The evaluators collected this data, where it was available,<sup>17</sup> annually from before the start of Elev8 in each of the regions, and tracked trends in the outcomes for several years following.<sup>18</sup> The analysis explored the changes in measured school-level outcomes before and after implementation of the Elev8 programs, and the difference between the district or state average and the average Elev8 performance in the years after its implementation.<sup>19</sup> Given the limitations of the design and data, the analysis is descriptive rather than causal—factors other than Elev8 may influence school performance, both in Elev8 and non-Elev8 schools, and were not considered in this study.<sup>20</sup>

**Overall, there were no large changes in school performance.** Given the fact that school performance is affected by many factors and is very difficult to change, it is notable that **some Elev8 regions did show some small improvements that might be associated with the implementation of Elev8.** While the implementation of Elev8 was not consistently associated with school performance improvements, some Elev8 regions

*...some Elev8 regions did fare better after the implementation of the community school model.*

<sup>14</sup> This is a composite index comprised of 5 questions such as “the school building is clean and well maintained” & “students have satisfying food options at this school.”; Carson Research Associates, (2015). *Elev8 Baltimore: Outcome evaluation report*. Baltimore: Carson Research Associates.

<sup>15</sup> For Baltimore, percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on MSA; for New Mexico, percent of students scoring proficient or above on SBA; and for Chicago, percent of student met or exceeded standards on ISAT.

<sup>16</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: MAI & Research for Action.

<sup>17</sup> Not all states report on all three of these outcomes.

<sup>18</sup> Data varied in terms of its availability. In some cases, data are available from as early as the 2004-05 school year, and in other cases, the earliest availability of the data was the 2008-09 school year. At the time this report was drafted, data were available as late as the 2012-13 or 2013-14 school year. Elev8 implementation began at different times for different regions within this range. In some cases, we also confirmed the accuracy of the data we received with local educational agencies.

<sup>19</sup> We calculated unweighted averages of all Elev8 schools that have data in each state and compared them with the district or state averages that are released by each state. For 8th grade standardized tests, all data is from 8th grade scores at the school, district, and state levels. Oakland was not included because testing varied by grade level.

<sup>20</sup> This approach was used for two reasons 1) Elev8 leadership felt strongly that there were no comparable schools in their districts and 2) the initiative was not designed to produce valid reference schools.

did fare better after the implementation of the community school model. However, in some cases gains declined or were reversed during the later years of Elev8 implementation—coinciding with years in which regions began to rely more heavily on matching funds for services or because Atlantic’s funding for direct services ended. The concurrent economic downturn rendered leveraging of state and local funds to bridge the service gap an elusive goal.

Lastly, Gao and colleagues (2015)<sup>21</sup> asked Elev8 school principals and staff, both past and present, during interviews and focus groups, about their perceptions of Elev8’s benefits to schools and students. Most notably across all schools, both **groups reported that Elev8 benefitted schools by providing for students’ physical well-being, in the form of school-based health care.**

Most principals and school staff across sites reported that **Elev8 afforded benefits to schools in two additional ways: 1) by providing Elev8 staff who delivered additional resources and supports to the school; and 2) by bolstering opportunities for educational enrichment that students might not have had the chance to experience otherwise.**

The most important take away from these studies is that there are no quick fixes—large and complex change efforts within established sectors, such as public education, require consistent, adequate resources over a long period of time (seven to 10 years) to achieve and sustain. In the case of Elev8, the small improvements noted in school performance seemed to reverse as Elev8 received smaller resources from Atlantic. It is possible that Elev8 schools may have experienced ongoing improvement if the integrated and high quality implementation of the four pillars had been sustained at levels equal to its early years. In other schools, an effort like Elev8, which is designed to address the myriad barriers students from deep poverty face when attempting to achieve their educational potential, may require an equally deep parallel investment in school reforms, such as continuity in leadership, curriculum improvements, and increased accountability.

## Conditions Supporting Robust Implementation

We turn last to the conditions that appear to support Elev8’s implementation. Elev8 has been rolled out in a variety of contexts, and our analysis of Elev8’s evaluations suggests that regardless of the context, there are four key conditions essential for Elev8’s success. These four conditions—building a shared vision, clear and consistent communication, strong family and student engagement, and adequate, sustained resources—connect to provide the foundation of all strong community schools models. In this way, the lessons learned from Elev8 can serve as a roadmap for similar efforts.



### Condition 1. Building a Shared Vision

By definition, Elev8 is built upon a foundation of relationships that exist both within schools, and across schools and supporting organizations. For this reason, robust implementation of the model requires a jointly-built shared vision of both the goals of Elev8, and the path towards meeting them. Although this vision can and should vary by school to account for differences in the needs of student populations and available resources, it is a first and ongoing key to collaboration in community school efforts like Elev8.

As is the case with all community school models, each of Elev8’s stakeholders came to the initiative with a distinct agenda, and early research on Elev8 showed that the success of Elev8’s efforts was partly a function of whether all stakeholders bought into the concept of Elev8 overall so that they were working collaboratively rather than against one another. There is a need for a concrete understanding of how

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<sup>21</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: MAI & Research for Action.

multiple services and entities fit together as a whole for the Elev8 model. Knowing “how their pieces fit into the larger initiative” provides an essential vision that guides the implementation and identifies appropriate roles and responsibilities for all players.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPAL.** Principals are at the center of Elev8 implementation, and can greatly affect the degree to which the model takes hold. When Elev8 implementation is most successful, principals play a leadership role in developing the vision for Elev8, customizing it to the particular needs and culture of their students and schools.

**BUY IN AMONG SCHOOL STAFF.** Early research on Elev8 implementation illustrates why school staff should also participate in the construction of a concrete, shared vision. When teachers and school staff could make the link between how Elev8 goals would help them educate students, it was more likely that they would become full partners in the initiative—referring youth to Elev8’s services and interfacing with Elev8 staff.

**SHARED VISION AMONG PROVIDERS.** Partners in an effort like Elev8 often lack effective ways of balancing their organizational interests with the interests of the collaboration. In Elev8, partners, along with the school, held planning meetings to discuss these potential challenges and concretely plan for how each provider could achieve its own mission while simultaneously delivering on their jointly developed shared vision. Educating each other on their culture and operations was critical, as was generating shared expectations as dictated by the vision for Elev8.



## Condition 2. Clear and Consistent Communication

Routine and strategic communication across Elev8 staff, school staff, and service providers and community members is another key condition of Elev8’s successful implementation. At the most basic level, communication keeps stakeholders updated on programming, informed of events, and helps to recruit individuals for services. But the need to communicate effectively in Elev8 went deeper.

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND ELEV8 COORDINATORS.** Effective communication and strong trusting relationships between principals and Elev8 coordinators were a backbone of effective Elev8 implementation. Clear and consistent communication and mutual respect led to strong relationships between Elev8 coordinators and principals. Effective Elev8 coordinators provided clear and ongoing communication to the school principal about the day-to-day implementation of Elev8’s services.

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ELEV8 SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SCHOOL STAFF.** Elev8 service providers and school staff had to effectively communicate to assure that services were integrated, to reinforce programming, and to guard against duplicative services. Cross-partner meetings, cross-site meetings and committee structures all helped facilitate integration of Elev8 into the school and promote changes at the school level.

**COMMUNICATION ABOUT SERVICES TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS.** For Elev8’s services to be effective, school staff—including teachers, counselors administrative, and facilities staff, parents, and students--all need to know about available services. Many Elev8 schools and providers struggled with communicating effectively with multiple audiences. One effective strategy that was used by schools were daily announcements reminding school staff and students about services and events on campus. Personal outreach to parents also proved effective in some schools.



### Condition 3. Strong Family and Student Engagement

Family and student engagement is at the heart of Elev8's success. Indeed, community school models are designed to break down traditional divides between schools and families, and replace them with strong, mutually supportive relationships that strengthen both families and schools.

**CREATING STRONG FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.** Despite the robust and inclusive planning processes that occurred in many schools, Elev8 still struggled with family engagement as the model rolled out. In order to ensure strong implementation of the Elev8 model, schools had to become welcoming environments for parents and community members. Space, cultural competency, and accessibility were keys to creating this environment. Schools that succeeded in implementing the model provide the following important take-aways:

- Parents desired private spaces within the schools to ensure confidentiality and a sense of belonging.
- Providing basic family supports such as food and clothing also helped improve parents' trust of the schools and Elev8.
- Elev8 regions worked to maximize cultural competency by hiring staff with shared backgrounds, holding meetings in parents' native language, and providing services in a way that was respectful and built on parents' unique cultural backgrounds.
- Elev8 increased the accessibility of supports by making information about all services more visible and accessible to parents.

**ENGAGING STUDENTS.** Many factors promoted student participation in Elev8 programs, including:

- Family participation.
- High interest programming.
- Trust of the service providers.
- Accessibility of the services.
- Strong relationships between Elev8's OST leaders and students.
- Safety.



### Condition 4. Adequate, Predictable and Coordinated Resources

As is the case with all community school initiatives, Elev8 is based on the well-supported premise that success for disadvantaged students requires a holistic, comprehensive approach to address the needs of the child, family, and community. Such approaches involve multiple partners and, relatedly, multiple funding streams. The costs fall into four main buckets:

- **Start-up costs** for planning, contracting and capital expenditures.
- **Fiscal resources** for service sub-contracts, personnel, materials and supplies, leadership (e.g., the lead agency), marketing and development, training, and research and evaluation.
- Elev8 schools also provided significant **in-kind resources**, including facilities and staff time.
- The **costs of sustaining** the Elev8 model are also great. Policymakers, funders, school districts and programs interested in implementing a model like Elev8 should be prepared to make a significant multi-year investment in the launch of a community schools effort and focus immediately on leveraging sustainable funding in order to sustain and build upon early benefits. Philanthropy in particular should explicitly support efforts to identify and leverage alternative, sustainable funding sources early in a community school's implementation.

Finally, a complex effort like Elev8 requires resource coordination and integration. Elev8’s initial Atlantic funding brought many partners to the table, including schools, service providers, and community leaders. Coordination of these diverse resource streams was critical to Elev8’s success.

## Final Thoughts

Elev8 was created to address the myriad of challenges middle school students in chronically underserved communities face when striving to reach their educational potential. Offering a multifaceted solution—including family supports and resources designed to promote economic stability, good health, and academic success—Elev8 provides an approach that considers the “whole” child, including the context within which the child is developing. Overall, Elev8 made great strides; it has served thousands of students and families. And while there is no definitive answer to the question, “Does Elev8 result in better schools and greater academic success among students?,” evaluations of Elev8 show promising outcomes, and more rigorous evaluations of other community school efforts suggest they can bolster students’ academic success and return significant savings on money invested. Even in its sustainability phase, Elev8 has experienced some successes; the crux of the community school approach lives on in most of the original Elev8 schools, and in two regions, districts’ involvement in Elev8 has spurred the growth of community schools district-wide.

Despite its successes, however, Elev8 also struggled with implementation and sustainability. Community schools like Elev8 aim to address tremendous and persistent inequities that exist in low performing schools in vulnerable communities. The challenges of providing students and their families with needed supports is great enough; yet basic implementation challenges, such as integrating services, securing participation and engagement, and coordination are further exacerbated by other factors, including inconsistent leadership at the school and district levels (e.g., key personnel departing, challenges in maintaining support among incoming leaders with less familiarity). And changes in the political and economic landscape can have even more profound impacts on community school implementation, continuity, and sustainability. Each change in leadership comes with new reform ideas and priorities.

What is the main take-away for policy makers and program leaders? Community schools are a long-term change effort that, at a minimum, requires building a shared vision for the initiative, strong and effective cross-stakeholder communication, ample resources, and authentic family and student engagement. Community schools should not be entered into lightly; they are complex and expensive efforts, involving multiple partners collaborating in a well-established and highly-regulated school environment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A high-quality education helps young people develop into successful adults. Yet, far too many children across America face substantial barriers to educational success, including under-resourced schools. These schools are often located in vulnerable communities, and lack the facilities, materials and supports needed to fully support students and achieve excellence. This under-resourcing often results in a less than optimal school climate, causing frustration among students and faculty, and a parent base who is disconnected from the school and its efforts. As a result of the challenging environment, unmet need, and instability, these schools are underperforming and, more importantly, are not able to adequately prepare students for their futures.

While educational reform efforts seeking to improve chronically underperforming schools abound, community schools are becoming an increasingly popular strategy for school turn around. Community schools have a long history, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, in response to the educational issues facing our nation's most vulnerable youth, community schools exist in 49 states and the District of Columbia (Coalition for Community Schools, 2009).<sup>22</sup> And their profile in the school reform arena continues to grow. The mayors of New York City and Philadelphia have launched ambitious community schools efforts in chronically low-performing and/or under-resourced schools in those cities. Portland, Cincinnati, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Boston also have used community school approaches to improve schools.

The draw of the community school educational model centers around a design that provides students and families with access to needed supports, such as healthcare services, educational enhancement and academic enrichment programs, family economic supports, and other services that address common barriers to students' educational success. Community schools are not typically designed to change curriculum in core courses, intervene in the delivery of academic material, or lead teacher selection. Instead, the model's approach is more holistic—addressing vulnerable students' non-academic needs and improving school climate to maximize students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach effectively.

Since 2008, The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) has invested deeply in the community school model in a diverse group of high need, underperforming middle schools in New Mexico, Oakland, Baltimore, and Chicago spanning rural, large and small urban, and Native American pueblo settings. Atlantic made the decision to focus on middle schools because research shows that supports in middle school can provide transformative change in the lives of youth, preparing them educationally and socially for the high school transition. How smoothly students make this transition is strongly related not only to the likelihood of finishing high school but also to the odds of staying in college until graduation. The effort, known as Elev8 Full Service Community Schools, builds on integrating four core pillars of support that research has linked with student achievement and success: out-of-school time (OST) or extended-day learning (EDL) opportunities, school-based healthcare, support for families, and community engagement— with the goals of alleviating non-academic systemic challenges associated with poor performance in school and improving school climate.

To aid Elev8's implementation, Atlantic also made investments in technical assistance for the implementing partners and provided financing for communications, policy and national advocacy supports through a variety of entities, including a national program office, the Coalition for Community Schools, the School Based Health Alliance, The Shriver Center, The Hatcher Group, The Finance Project and others. Lastly, Atlantic allocated funding for evaluation supports. Recognizing that Elev8's success was contingent upon adaptation to the local context, Atlantic funded a local evaluation team in each of the regions, as well as a

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<sup>22</sup> Coalition for Community Schools (2009). Community schools: Research brief. Retrieved from <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CCS%20Research%20Report2009.pdf>

national evaluation team. Knowing that efforts to fully integrate non-academic supports into a school takes years, Atlantic dictated that early evaluation efforts focus on building a data driven culture in each Elev8 region and generating formative feedback that could be used to strengthen Elev8's model and implementation. Local evaluation efforts during the first four years included documenting the stories, including successes and challenges, of each Elev8 school and region's implementation of Elev8, how the school environment changed and student's Elev8 experiences.

As the initiative matured, Atlantic reduced its programmatic support for the initiative, and the local evaluation teams worked to answer research questions that were tailored to the needs of the grantees in their sustainability phases. The national evaluation team turned its attention to documenting programmatic outcomes, and assessing the extent to which the regions were able to sustain Elev8's implementation. It is important to note that Elev8 was never subject to a rigorous impact evaluation. Atlantic recognized that assessing the impact of efforts like Elev8 requires patience—measurable results take time and sustained investment to achieve and are difficult to prove definitively. What Atlantic's investment in Elev8's evaluation supports did result in is more than 100 (mostly internal) research reports. This report, the final national evaluation report on Elev8, summarizes what we know about Elev8's structure, accomplishments, and implementation for the field from this body of literature.

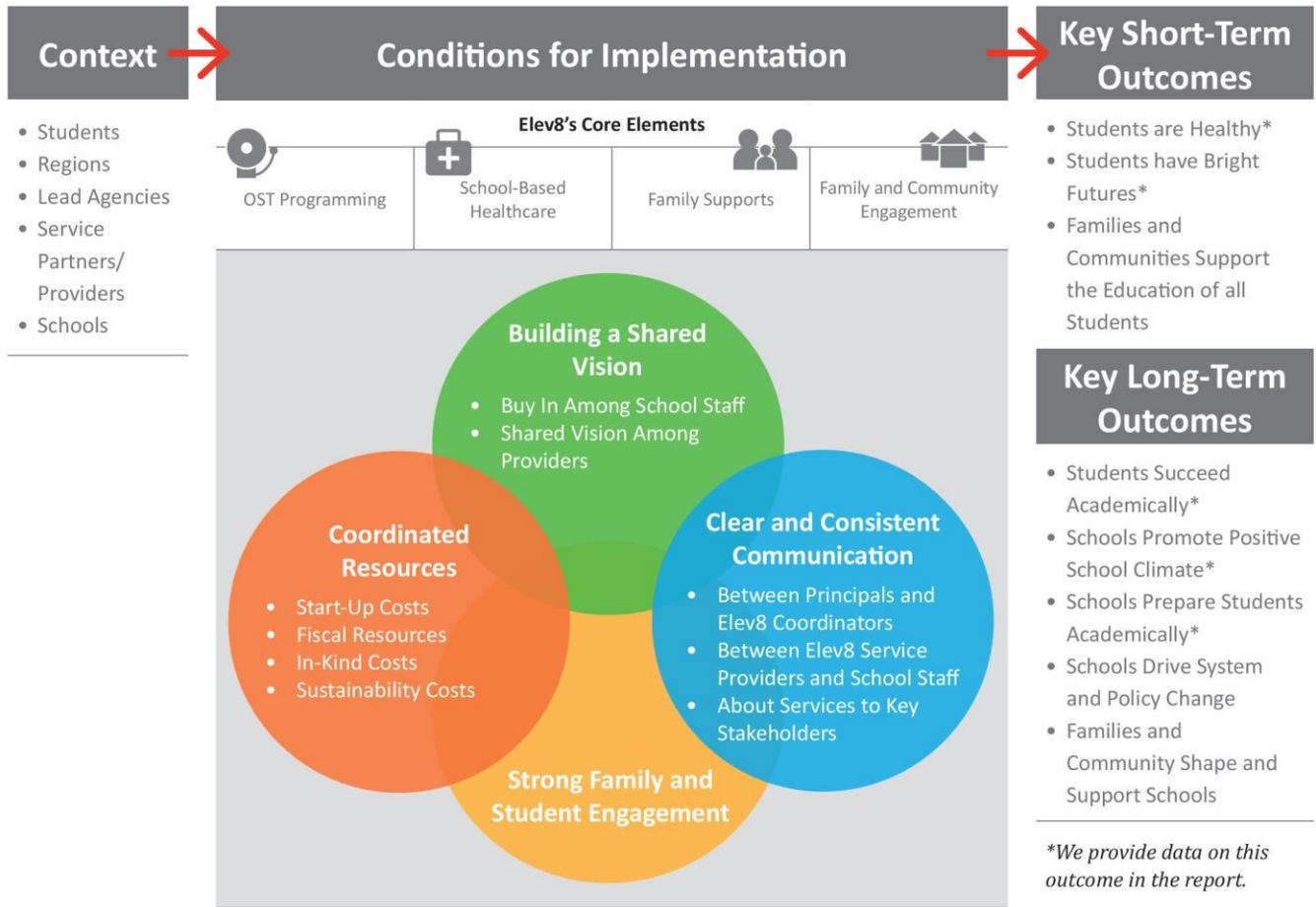
## Structure of this Report

This report is designed to summarize what is known about Elev8. It was compiled using data and findings from both internal and external reports generated by the team of local and national Elev8 evaluators. Elev8's evaluation strategy was strongly influenced by local Elev8 needs and interests, and data definitions and collection changed over time. Setting aside these challenges, by pulling information across sources a story of Elev8's successes and challenges emerges.

This report is divided into three sections. The first describes Elev8's structure; it is here the reader will find information about the context in which Elev8 operates, its services and its participants. The second section is about Elev8's accomplishments. It summarizes Elev8's services and key outcomes as described in Elev8's evaluation reports. The next chapter shares the results of an analysis across research reports that illuminates the key conditions for Elev8's successful implementation—a critically important factor influencing both effectiveness and sustainability. The last chapter concludes the report with brief final thoughts.

Figure 1 provides an illustration of the logic model that undergirds Elev8.

Figure 1. Elev8 Logic Model



## II. WHAT IS ELEV8?

Elev8 is a full-service community school model operating in low-income areas, with the goals of alleviating the non-academic systemic challenges associated with poor performance in school and improving school climate. Elev8 builds off of the recognized best practices of the community school approach—employing strategies that address the needs most prominently manifested by youth in high-poverty communities, while simultaneously promoting local customization and adaptation in programming to meet the unique context of each community and school in which it operates. Therefore, while each initiative looks different, Elev8’s core elements include:

- OST programming;
- School-based healthcare;
- Family supports; and
- Family and community engagement.

These “pillars” are carefully integrated in each Elev8 school, as youth and their families become advocates for improving education and increasing access to vital resources. Elev8 schools employ a team of staff, service providers and an Elev8 coordinator to implement the core pillars.



**OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME.** In the United States, the deleterious effects of low academic achievement have evolved into a formidable epidemic for our nation’s marginalized youth. Over the past two decades, a variety of programs and policy reforms have been implemented in an attempt to boost young people’s academic outcomes. OST programming is one such approach that has shown promise—providing young people with educational and social benefits. Nationally, and within

Elev8, there exists tremendous variety in OST activity type, the number of youth served, and funding. OST programs in community schools are focused on strengthening school achievement among students by providing educational support and/or enrichment, supportive adult relationships, and friendships with positive peers in a safe and accessible setting.

Elev8 schools offered a diversity of OST experiences for students, including before- and after-school programming that provides tutoring and homework help, summer programming, comprehensive extended day (EDL) programming, and Saturday school.



**SCHOOL-BASED HEALTHCARE.** Good health begins in childhood, making health care disparities among our Nation’s poor and minority youth a major concern. These disparities have notable implications, not only for long-term health, but also for student success in school. In order to be “ready to learn,” students need to have their healthcare needs addressed. School-Based Health Centers (SBHC), a pillar of Elev8, provide easily accessible

services to children at little or no cost to families. SBHCs provide important primary care services, such as wellness visits and vaccinations, mental health care, dental care, and sexual health services, and are

## TERMINOLOGY

**Elev8 Region:** The geographical location in which Atlantic makes its investments in Elev8.

**Elev8 School:** The schools in which Elev8 is implemented. Each region implements Elev8 in multiple middle schools.

**Elev8 Lead Agency:** The intermediaries in each Elev8 region that manage Atlantic’s investment in Elev8.

**Elev8 Director:** The individual at each Lead Agency whose responsibility is to manage the Atlantic grant and the overall Elev8 effort in the region.

**Elev8 Coordinator:** The on-site staff person responsible for overseeing Elev8’s implementation at the school level.

**Elev8 Student:** A student in an Elev8 school who participates in an Elev8 service, such as School-Based Health Care or OST.

designed to remove many of the barriers students from vulnerable communities face in getting high-quality health care (such as payment or insurance, transportation, and availability).

Elev8's school-based health services were customized to local needs. While all regions offered services to students, some also provided family members and even community members access to health services. Physical, mental and/or behavioral health services were provided, and some schools were able to offer dental services. In some schools, SBHC staff taught health education classes. Students could receive immunizations and school- and sports-required physicals at the centers. In one region, Elev8 schools in close proximity shared SBHCs.



**FAMILY SUPPORTS.** In recent years there has been increasing awareness of the nexus between stress among students and academic failure. While stress comes in a variety of forms, youth from low-income communities are often facing financial strains and the associated “poverty-related stress” that accompanies it.<sup>23</sup> Family supports are among the growing array of services provided at, near, or in conjunction with schools to help support academic success among students. Like OST, family supports encompass a variety of services: legal assistance, benefits and income maximization, employment help, food pantries, and more, all tailored to the needs and culture of the local community. Because meeting basic needs is seen as a prerequisite to academic success, family supports provided in the school setting are a programmatic pillar of Elev8.

As was the case with SBHC and OST, family supports were tailored to the needs of students’ families in each Elev8 region. These services were offered within the schools to make it easy for parents to access them. In the early years of the initiative, schools partnered with providers who offered a range of services, including helping families who qualified to access public benefits, tax preparation services, and legal assistance. Some schools offered adult education classes, such as English language for non-native speakers, GED, literacy and workforce development. Several regions used their Elev8 funding to develop family resource centers within the schools—providing parents with welcoming spaces where they could receive information and referrals. Clothing closets and food pantries were other supports select Elev8 schools offered.



**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.** It has been long known that families and communities exert a large influence on schooling—both among students and at the school level. Research has demonstrated that students do better academically when parents are involved in school, and that schools with strong community involvement provide more positive and robust educational experiences.<sup>24</sup> Elev8 sites provide varied opportunities for families and community members to get involved in schools, with the goals of teaching parents to support their children academically, and of training the community to advocate for school reforms and school excellence. Parents and community members participating in school governance and as volunteers in school; and schools hosting community events, providing information to parents about academics and school choice, and encouraging parent and community participation in school activities and advocacy efforts, comprise this pillar of Elev8.

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<sup>23</sup> Wadsworth, M.E., & Berger, L.E. (2006). Adolescents coping with poverty-related family stress: Prospective predictors of coping and psychological symptoms. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 35, 57-70.

<sup>24</sup> Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 740-763. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/dev453740.pdf>; Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement (annual synthesis 2002). Austin, TX: National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. Retrieved from <http://www.seidl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>; Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement (Report conclusion). Austin, TX: National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. Retrieved from <http://www.seidl.org/connections/resources/conclusion-final-points.pdf>.

Elev8 schools employed diverse strategies to increase family and community engagement in their child’s education and school transformation efforts. As a start, many Elev8 schools sought parent input into the services that Elev8 provided in the school. Some regions used intensive parent outreach efforts and community-based networking to lessen parents’ distrust of the school and to get them involved in advocating for better school policies. Family nights and open houses were other strategies employed across Elev8 schools. One school expanded a mentoring program where parents could actually help out in classrooms, and others formed culturally informed parent-school organizations. Several Elev8 schools provided parents with comprehensive information about their students’ schooling and high school choices, and educated parents about how to support their children’s learning at home.

## Elev8 Regions

Atlantic engaged in a due diligence process to identify the regions that received Elev8 funding. Working with national education and health experts, Atlantic analyzed profiles of 35 localities across the country, considering poverty rates, school performance, availability of high quality health services, political appetite, and local capacity for leadership and implementation. Atlantic’s goal was to test Elev8 in a variety of settings, both geographically, and in terms of district and school types. Atlantic made its first investment in the state of New Mexico—five middle schools were targeted, including a charter school, a rural school, a tribal school, and two schools led by Albuquerque Public Schools. To build out the Elev8 vision over the years that followed, Atlantic invested in developing community schools in three additional regions—Chicago, Baltimore, and Oakland, including traditional and charter schools in both very large and moderately large urban districts. Some basic statistics about the regions where the investments were made shows some of the challenges students and families face:

- In the city of Chicago, there is a 50% high school graduation rate, compared with 70% statewide.<sup>25</sup>
- In the state of New Mexico, over 25% of children live in poverty.<sup>26</sup>
- In the city of Baltimore, 50% of public school 8th graders scored in the “basic” category on the Maryland School Assessments in reading and math.<sup>27</sup>
- In the city of Oakland, 21% of children live below the poverty line.<sup>28</sup>

## Elev8 Lead Agencies

Each Elev8 region has a lead agency that is responsible for guidance and oversight of the local initiative. Initially, the lead agency roles were distributed across a wide variety of organizational types—the New Mexico Community Foundation in New Mexico, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in Chicago, Safe Passages in Oakland, and East Baltimore Development, Inc. in Baltimore. However, Elev8 shifted lead agencies in two of the four regions. Today, Elev8 is led in two regions by direct social service providers: Humanim in Baltimore and Youth Development, Inc. (YDI) in New Mexico, and by an intermediary in one: Safe Passages in Oakland. Elev8’s structure in Chicago is slightly different. There, LISC serves as the lead agency, but the implementation of Elev8 is decentralized among five organizations with deep roots in the Elev8 school communities.

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<sup>25</sup> Source: Illinois Department of Education, 2010

<sup>26</sup> Source: American Community Survey (2009)

<sup>27</sup> Source: Kids Count (2012)

<sup>28</sup> Source: Oakland Unified School District, CA: DP3 Economic Characteristics. ProximityOne. Retrieved from [http://proximityone.com/acs/dpca/dp3\\_0628050.htm](http://proximityone.com/acs/dpca/dp3_0628050.htm)

## Elev8 Schools & Districts

By design, Elev8 is implemented in middle schools that are located in high poverty communities and perform consistently below their district and state averages. At the height of its implementation phase, Elev8 was located in 20 schools. In the 2013-14 school year it was located in 16 schools. The sections below describe the schools, based on available data,<sup>29</sup> in which Elev8 was located during the 2013-14 school year, the most recent year complete data were available at the time this report was drafted, and compares them to district and state averages.

### BALTIMORE



**Four K-8 Baltimore schools with a total enrollment of 1,856 students are implementing Elev8:** Collington Square Elementary/Middle School, Commodore John Rodgers Elementary/Middle School, Dr. Rayner Browne Elementary/Middle School, and Tench Tilghman Elementary/Middle School. Three of the schools have been implementing Elev8 since the 2009-10 school year. Commodore John Rodgers began implementation of Elev8 in the 2012-13 school year. It was preceded by East Baltimore Community School (EBCS) who discontinued its participation in Elev8 in 2012. As seen in Table 1, Baltimore's Elev8 schools differ from one another in terms of size and racial/ethnic profile and do not mirror the demographic profiles of students in the city or state in which they are located.

Table 1. Characteristics of Baltimore Elev8 Schools, Baltimore Public Schools, and Maryland's Public Schools, 2013-14

	Kindergarten - 8th Grade				District Average (Baltimore City)	State Average
	Collington Square	Commodore John Rodgers Elementary/Middle	Dr. Rayner Browne Elementary/Middle	Tench Tilghman Elementary/Middle		
<b>TOTAL ENROLLMENT</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>84,730</b>	<b>866,169</b>
% Asian	0%	2.1%	0%	0%	1.0%	6.0%
% Black/African American	97.9%	69.7%	97.0%	95.6%	83.8%	34.9%
% Hispanic	0%	24.2%	0%	2.6%	6.2%	13.7%
% White	0%	2.4%	0%	0%	8.0%	41.0%
% Other*	0%		0%	0%	0.9%	4.5%

\*Includes HI/Pacific Islander, American Indian/AK Native, and Multiracial

<sup>29</sup> 2014 data were retrieved from each state's Department of Education, with the exception of Wilson and Grant middle school demographic data (Albuquerque) which is from the National Center for Education Statistics.

## CHICAGO



**Five schools in Chicago Public Schools with a total enrollment of 4,907 are implementing Elev8:** Ames Middle School, Orozco Elementary School, Perspectives Charter High School, Reavis Elementary School, and Marquette Elementary School. Each school participated in Elev8 since its full roll out in the 2008-09 school year. As shown in Table 2, these five schools serve varying grades, with different numbers and demographic profiles of students. These schools also serve populations that look demographically different from the district and state as a whole, including higher rates of poverty and lower percentages of White, non-Hispanic students.

Table 2. Characteristics of Chicago Elev8 Schools, Chicago Public Schools, and Illinois' Public Schools, 2013-14

*Pre-Kindergarten -  
8th Grade*

	Orozco	Reavis	Maquette (Grades K-8)	Perspectives (Grades 6-12)	Ames (Grades 7-8)	District Average (City of Chicago)	State Average
<b>TOTAL ENROLLMENT</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>1,290</b>	<b>2,159</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>395,079</b>	<b>2,046,857</b>
% Asian/PI	0.2%	1.3%	0%	0.4%	0.7%	3.6%	4.6%
% Black, non-Hispanic	0.5%	97%	41.2%	91.9%	4.3%	39.9%	17.5%
% Hispanic	97%	1.3%	56.7%	5.2%	94%	45.6%	24.6%
% White, non-Hispanic	0.3%	0.3%	1.3%	0.9%	0.2%	9.3%	49.9%
% Other*	2%	0%	0.8%	1.4%	0.7%	1.6%	3.4%
% Limited English/ELL	28.7%	0.7%	34.1%	0.5%	22.6%	17%	9.5%
% Low Income	97%	97.4%	98.8%	92.5%	98%	85.7%	51.5%

\*Includes Multiracial and American Indian

## NEW MEXICO



**Two schools in Albuquerque Public Schools implemented Elev8 in the 2013-14 school year: Grant Middle School, with an enrollment of 621 6th to 8th graders and Wilson Middle School, with an enrollment of 532 6th to 8th graders.** Each school participated in Elev8 since it was launched in 2007-08 in New Mexico. As shown in Table 3, there are some demographic differences in the characteristics of the students across the two schools. Three additional schools in New Mexico launched Elev8 but discontinued participation before 2013: Native American Community Academy (NACA), Gadsden Middle School, and Laguna Middle School.

Table 3. Characteristics of New Mexico Elev8 Schools, Albuquerque Public Schools, and New Mexico’s Public Schools, 2013-14

	6th - 8th Grades			
	Grant Middle	Wilson Middle	District Average (Albuquerque Public Schools)	State Average
<b>TOTAL ENROLLMENT</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>92,618</b>	<b>337,054</b>
% Asian	3.4%	1.7%	2.5%	1.5%
Black, non-Hispanic	2.3%	6.8%	3.0%	2.2%
% Hispanic	61.8%	69.8%	66.7%	60.8%
% White, non-Hispanic	25.9%	11.5%	22.7%	25.1%
% Other*	6.6%	10.3%	5.11%	10.4%
% Limited English/ELL	N/A	N/A	67.0%	69.0%
% Low Income	N/A	N/A	17.0%	15.0%

\*American Indian/AK Native and individuals with two or more races

**Note:** Source for school level data is NCES from 2013-14 school year data, and the source for district and state data is the New Mexico Public Education Department. Because the sources of data are different, the percent of multi-race students is not aligned. No data on economic disadvantage or ELL is available for Grant or Wilson middle schools.

## OAKLAND



**Five schools in the Oakland Unified School District are implementing Elev8:** West Oakland Middle School, Coliseum College Prep Academy (CCPA), Roosevelt Middle School, James Madison Middle School, and United for Success Academy (UFS). Each of these schools participated in Elev8 since it began in Oakland in September 2008. These schools serve either grades 6-8 or 6-12. Overall, as seen in Table 4, Elev8 schools serve 2,211 students of various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Further, these schools serve more students living in poverty than the district or state as a whole, with the exception of Roosevelt Middle School.

Table 4. Characteristics of Oakland Elev8 Schools, Oakland Unified School District Schools, and California’s Public Schools

	6th - 8th Grades			6th - 12th Grades			
	Roosevelt Middle	United for Success Academy	West Oakland Middle	CCPA	James Madison Middle	District Average (Oakland Unified School District)	State Average
<b>TOTAL ENROLLMENT</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>47,194</b>	<b>6,236,672</b>
% Asian/PI	45.4%	8.6%	6.6%	1.3%	1.4%	15.1%	11.6%
% Hispanic	34%	75.9%	8.9%	87.5%	76.1%	42.7%	53.3%
% Black, non-Hispanic	17.1%	14%	70.6%	10.8%	21.6%	28%	6.2%
% White, non-Hispanic	1.9%	0.9%	10.3%	0.2%	0.2%	9.8%	25%
% Other*	0.6%	0.2%	1.9%	0%	0.2%	2.9%	3.3%
% Limited English/ELL	34.7%	45.4%	14.5%	37.6%	45.4%	30.7%	22.7%
% Low Income	96.3%	95.6%	88.3%	98.5%	95.6%	75.3%	59.4%

\*Includes Multiracial and American Indian

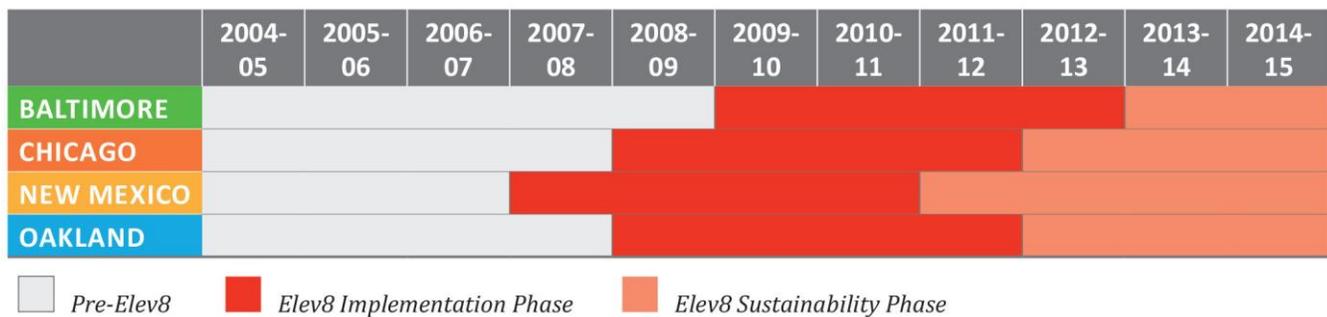
## Elev8’s Implementation Timeline

Atlantic’s initial four-year investment in these four regions totaled over \$65 million across 20 schools. These funds, which came with a matching requirement intended to promote sustainability, supported the build-out of SBHCs, Elev8 staffing and infrastructure, and direct services to students and their families. Once SBHCs were built out and began programming, funding from Atlantic continued to support the SBHCs while they were establishing sustainable billing models. Multiple Atlantic-funded OST and EDL programs were instituted at each school (some through partnerships, others directly), and family supports services funded by Atlantic were provided by partner organizations at the Elev8 schools. The first four years of Atlantic funding was also used to support the infrastructure of Elev8. While each region had a slightly different staffing and leadership structure driven by the local context, at a minimum, each had a regional Elev8 director as well as a school coordinator. The grant also supported other key positions that aimed to

achieve Elev8’s goals of integration into the school, school reform, local and national policy change efforts, and sustainability, such as policy, and communications staff.

Atlantic’s initial vision for Elev8 was premised on 10 years of infrastructure and service funding investments. However, a few years into the initiative, Atlantic’s strategy shifted toward supporting policy and advocacy work exclusively, rather than funding Elev8’s direct services. As such, the regions only received four years of service funding. After this, regions were funded at about 20 percent of the first four years to support policy and advocacy work exclusively. Unfortunately, this shift coincided with the collapse of the economy, which made it very challenging for the regions to sustain Elev8 services through leveraged funding and partnerships, because those entities were also affected by the economic downturn. Throughout this report, we refer to this post-service funding period as Elev8’s sustainability phase. Figure 2 summarizes Elev8’s implementation timeline.

Figure 2. Phases of Elev8 Implementation



During the sustainability phase, service provision at the Elev8 schools was contingent upon securing funds from alternate sources or finding new funded partnerships. In some cases, Elev8 grantees were able to secure funding for and maintain aspects of their original programming. For instance, Elev8 Oakland has continued its intensive academic supports for students who are at risk of failing academically. In other cases, Elev8 re-envisioned its programming based on other funded efforts in the school, such as existing OST programming provided by the school (e.g., OST supported by the Department of Education’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century stream, Freedom Schools, etc.). Family support services became encompassed by the schools and Elev8, and consisted primarily of food and clothing banks, as well as some parent support and involvement groups; other services, like benefits banks, legal assistance, and employment supports were lost. Finally, the sustainability of school-based health services has been inconsistent; in some cases, centers scaled back hours and/or services due to reduced funding. Other regions were more successful in maintaining services because they were able to secure government funding and developed more sophisticated insurance billing systems. Finally, many schools retained their school coordinator through their discretionary budget. All in

***During the sustainability phase, service provision at the Elev8 schools was contingent upon securing funds from alternate sources or finding new funded partnerships. In some cases, Elev8 grantees were able to secure funding for and maintain aspects of their original programming ... [and] many schools retained their school coordinator through their discretionary budget.***

all, the sustainability phase resulted in more limited services across all four regions, either in terms of the number of students and families served, the quality of services, and/or the types of services offered.<sup>30</sup>

## Service Providers

Atlantic initially envisioned that Elev8 schools would use a combination of local service providers and national providers with a proven track record of producing positive results for students and families. As such, in the early years of the initiative, select Elev8 regions partnered with Citizen Schools, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, The Center for Working Families and other national providers, as well as local OST providers (such as YMCAs), health care providers, and family supports providers. Most typically, family and community engagement was led by Elev8 staff. However as the initiative progressed, regions increasingly relied on local partners with stakes in the well-being of the community. The reasons for this shift are mixed. In some cases, local providers and solutions were better able to meet local needs. In other cases, local providers were perceived as having a larger investment in the well-being of the community; this commitment positively influenced their ability and desire to provide services in Elev8's sustainability phase.

## Summary

Elev8 implemented its four pillars—school-based health care, OST/or EDL, family supports, and family/community engagement activities—in varied ways that were intended to meet the needs of the local communities. The effort was directed by a lead agency in each location with roots in the region, and the schools in which it operated were those that served a more diverse and disadvantaged population than the districts and states in which they were located. There were changes across the life of the initiative. Importantly, Elev8 began as a ten-year initiative, but after changes in the foundation's strategy, its full funding from Atlantic lasted only four years. Similarly, Elev8 started with a mix of service providers—national and local whose impacts were proven—and moved to a more locally-driven model later in the initiative.

## III. WHAT DID ELEV8 ACCOMPLISH?

Elev8, an ambitious and complex initiative with many stakeholders, was housed within a wide range of schools, each of which had its own set of priorities, culture, standards, and processes. Its goal of helping to assure that participating students thrive academically in middle school and beyond is one that, given the complexity of the effort, takes sustained investment over time to achieve. In this section we turn to Elev8's accomplishments, both in terms of the scope of services, and evidence of its efficacy. Because of all of its "moving parts," evaluating complex initiatives like Elev8 should be done in phases. This is the approach Atlantic adopted, and throughout the initiative, evaluation efforts have focused on generating information to help create and sustain the strongest initiative possible. Elev8's evaluation was not primarily designed to assess if the model was instrumental in producing students who were better prepared for and more successful in high school. Nonetheless, Elev8's evaluation teams, recognizing that sustainability is, in part, predicated upon the demonstration of student outcomes, directed some of their resources toward assessing school and student outcomes. In this section, we report what we know about Elev8's achievements, both in terms of its outputs—the use of Elev8's services and engagement of students,

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<sup>30</sup> This information is based on qualitative data collected during site visits in the 2014-15 school year. Unfortunately, quantitative data presented in Chapter 3 on the number served annually by Elev8 does not reflect these service reduction trends. This is due to the fact that in the implementation phase of Elev8 data was collected only on users of services funded by Atlantic Philanthropies—services that were considered "Elev8 services"—whereas the sustainability phase of Elev8 was focused on institutionalization and therefore all services in the school were included in user statistics.

families, and communities in Elev8 and Elev8 schools—and its outcomes (based on ad-hoc studies that the evaluation teams conducted in more recent years of the initiative).

### Engagement in Elev8<sup>31</sup>

Community school efforts like Elev8 are intended to have influence at two levels: students who participate in services are expected to have more positive outcomes, including stronger academic outcomes, and the school as a whole is expected to benefit due to improved school climate. Earlier in this report, we shared information about the characteristics of students in Elev8 schools; here we share information about the characteristics of students<sup>32</sup> and their families who participated in Elev8’s services. In order to preserve the anonymity of the Elev8 regions, schools, and study participants, we use an identifier (Region 1,2,3,4) for each site in place of its name.

### Out-of-School Time/Extended Day Learning Programs

The four Elev8 regions adopted different OST models. Some schools provided intensive one-on-one supports to select students who were at the highest risk of failing academically. Some schools provided before and after school programming, summer programming and weekend programming, and other schools provided more traditional place-based after school programming.

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED.** As can be seen in Table 5, Elev8 regions served varying numbers of students in their OST or EDL activities, and the numbers served by each region also changed from year to year, reflecting changes in what was considered an Elev8 OST program<sup>33</sup>, the involvement of fewer schools, and/or reductions in service. The total annual number of students served across the four sites ranged from 2,056 to 3,333.

Table 5. Number of Students Using Elev8’s OST/EDL Services Annually

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	TOTAL
2010-11	261	1,169	937	410	2,877
2011-12	378	1,153	500	549	2,580
2012-13	436	1,146	298	176	2,056
2013-14	420	1,191	688	580	2,879
2014-15	629	1,268	386	1,050	3,333

**DOSAGE.** While the total number of students using Elev8’s OST/EDL services demonstrates the scope of the program, dosage is a key factor in determining if those services will be effective. A report published in 2013 looked closely at participation in Elev8 branded OST programs while it was still receiving full funding

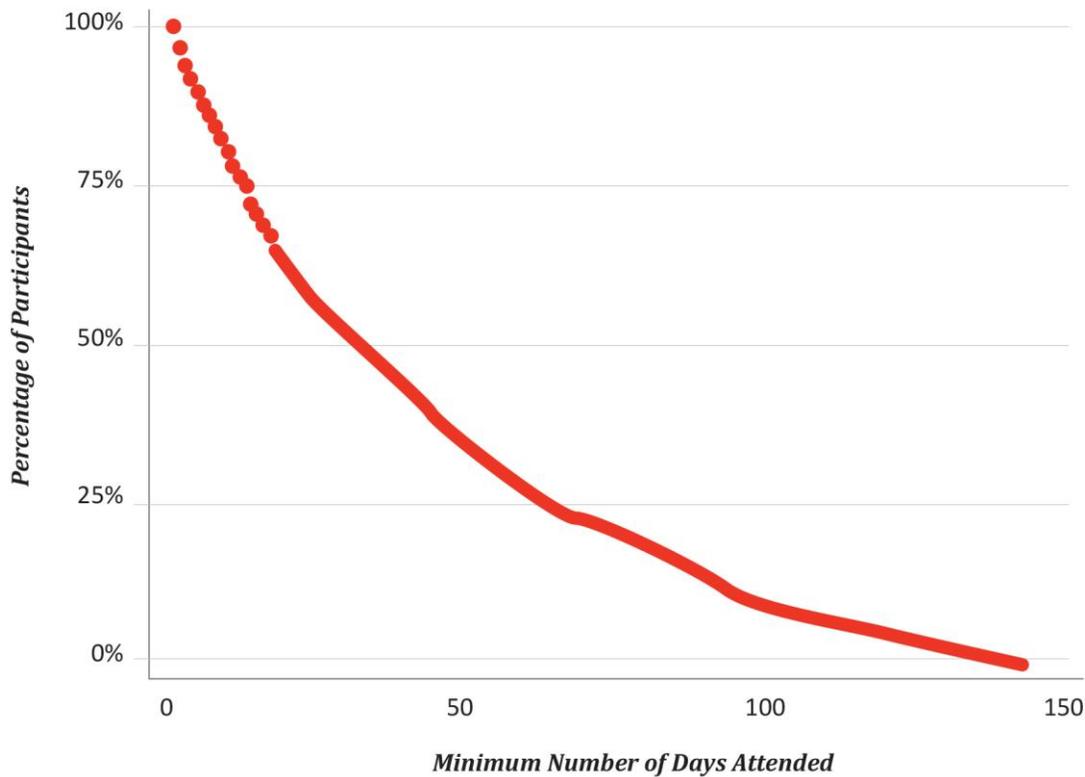
<sup>31</sup> Data in this section are from 2010-11 through the 2014-15 school year, and does not include the earliest years of the initiative, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>32</sup> A previous report on Elev8 suggests that there is variation in the percent of middle school students in Elev8 schools who took advantage of the Elev8 services available to them, but overall about 75% of students took advantage of OST programming or the school-based health center’s services, or both. We don’t know what percent of students had parents who also received services.

<sup>33</sup> Early in the initiative only Elev8 funded programs were reported on and later in the initiative schools were more inclusive, including more programs in their definition of Elev8 OST.

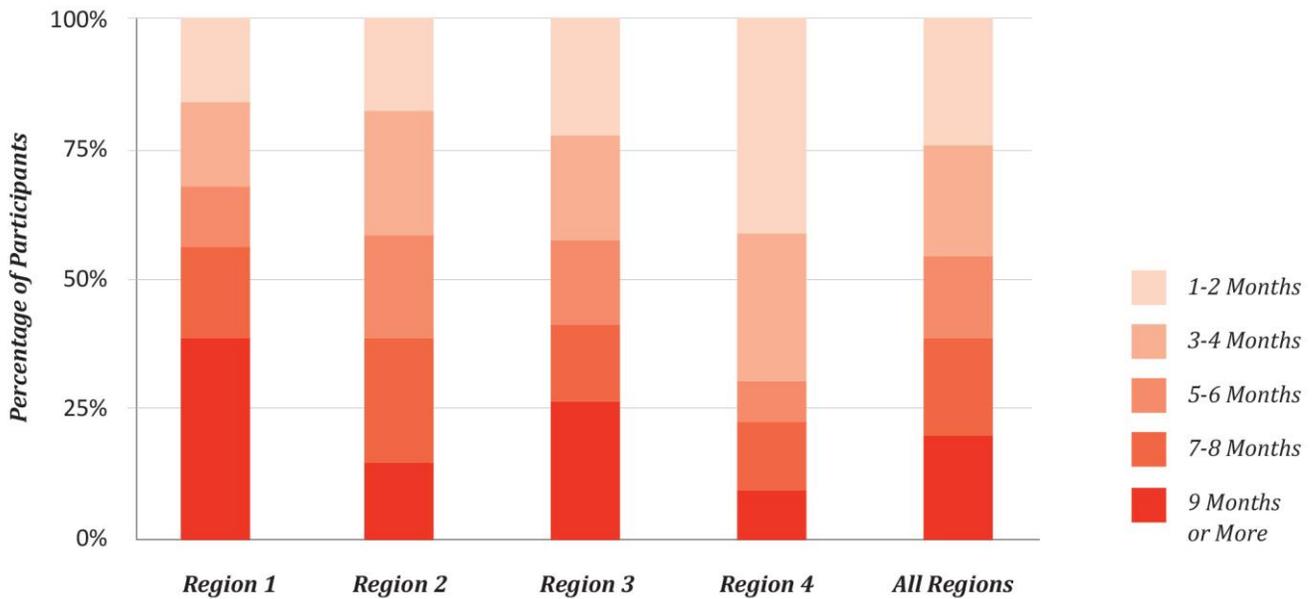
for program services and participating in a comprehensive tracking system in the 2010-11 school year (McClanahan, et al., 2013).<sup>34</sup> According to that study, 40 percent of students in middle grades in Elev8 schools participated in Elev8 OST programs. On average, Elev8 students who took advantage of OST attended those programs 43 days on average (see Figure 3 for the distribution) over an average of 5.3 months in the school year (see Figure 4 for distribution by region). It is unknown if these figures are representative of the experiences of students across all years of Elev8.

Figure 3. Percentage of OST Participants who ever Attended Elev8 OST by the Number of Days they Attended, 2010-11



<sup>34</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students' experiences in school*. Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

Figure 4. Percentage of Students Participating in Elev8 OST Activities by Number of Months, 2010-11



But average days of participation in each region masked broad variation in attendance—while many students participated in Elev8 OST for just a few days, a meaningful number, particularly those from regions that provided targeted OST services, attended with high frequency. Furthermore, students participated in a variety of OST activities (2.3 activities, on average).

*...while many students participated in Elev8 OST for just a few days, a meaningful number, particularly those from regions that provided targeted OST services, attended with high frequency.*

**PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS.** Table 6 shows the characteristics of students who participated in Elev8 OST in 2013-14.<sup>35</sup> Students who opted to participate in Elev8 OST generally reflected the racial composition of the schools in which Elev8 were located. In two regions, a greater percentage of OST participants were female. Two regions served youth in grades K through 5 in addition to middle schoolers because they operated in K-8 schools. The vast majority of students were low income.

<sup>35</sup> Due to funding and program leadership changes, after the first four years of the initiative sites were not required to provide identified data to RFA; therefore it is not possible to link student data from year to year to generate a whole initiative sample. We present data on just one year of implementation that is generally reflective of all years.

Table 6. Profile of Youth Elev8 OST Participants, 2013-14

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4
<b>Youth Race/Ethnicity Distributions</b>				
% Asian/PI	0%	0%	2%	9%
% Black, non-Hispanic	96%	37%	8%	27%
% Hispanic	2%	61%	29%	63%
% White, non-Hispanic	1%	1%	34%	0%
% Other*	0%	1%	27%	1%
<b>Youth Gender Distributions</b>				
Male	47%	45%	50%	55%
Female	53%	55%	50%	45%
<b>Grade Level Distributions</b>				
Grades K-4	7%	19%	0%	0%
Grade 5	21%	6%	0%	0%
Grade 6	26%	16%	37%	26%
Grade 7	27%	30%	34%	29%
Grade 8	18%	29%	29%	45%
<b>FRL Status</b>				
Yes	100%	99%	76%	94%
No	0%	1%	24%	6%

## Family Supports and Family and Community Engagement

Elev8’s family supports and family/community engagement work took various forms over the years of the initiative’s implementation and were customized to the needs of the local community. Unfortunately, while separate pillars of Elev8, these two components were often intertwined and cannot be separated in the data. Family supports ranged from benefits maximization, to legal services, to family events, to parent resource rooms at schools. While substantively different, they commonly aimed to help parents achieve greater economic stability and become involved in their child’s schooling. Family/Community engagement also consisted of a broad variety of activities, ranging from parents’ nights and school open houses to parent and community involvement in school governance bodies.

**NUMBER OF ADULTS SERVED.** From year to year there has been broad variation in the number of adults who participate in Elev8’s family supports and engagement activities. As can be seen in Table 7, overall, across regions the greatest number of adults were served through Elev8 during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years, likely due to an increased emphasis among Elev8 schools on family engagement in the sustainability phase of the initiative.

Table 7. Number of Adults Who Received Family Individual Support Services or Participated in Engagement Activities

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	TOTAL
2010-11	101	389	107	121	718
2011-12	187	258	252	371	1,068
2012-13	80	112	33	78	303
2013-14	156	1,042	242	700	2,140
2014-15	200	956	210	701	2,067

**PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS.** Generally, Elev8’s family supports and engagement activities served adults whose racial/ethnic background reflected the majority group of the school. As seen in Table 8,<sup>36</sup> adults who participated in Elev8 were most likely Hispanic (three regions) or African American (one region). Participants were most commonly female; Elev8 reached far fewer adult males than females.

Table 8. Profile of Adult Family Support and Engagement Activities Participants, 2013-14

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4
<b>Adult Race/Ethnicity Distributions</b>				
% Asian/PI	0%	0%	0%	8%
% Black, non-Hispanic	100%	20%	3%	23%
% Hispanic	0%	77%	87%	67%
% White, non-Hispanic	0%	2%	4%	0%
% Other	0%	0%	7%	1%
<b>Youth Gender Distributions</b>				
Male	10%	19%	18%	26%
Female	90%	81%	82%	74%

## School-Based Health Centers

SBHCs’ scope of services also varied from region to region; in some schools SBHCs were open to the community, and in others only students were served.

<sup>36</sup> Due to funding and program leadership changes, after the first four years of the initiative sites were not required to provide identified data to RFA; therefore it is not possible to link student data from year to year to generate a whole initiative sample. Therefore, we present data on just one year of implementation that is generally reflective of all years.

**TOTAL VISITS.** Between 2008-09 and 2014-15, there were approximately 141,703 SBHC visits across the four Elev8 regions, ranging from 5,844 in the first year during which only one Elev8 SBHC was in operation, to a high of 24,631 in 2013-14 when Elev8 schools operated 15 SBHCs.

Table 9. School Based Health Center Visits

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	TOTAL
2008-09	N/A	N/A	5,844	N/A	5,844
2009-10	N/A	5,706	6,015	5,847	17,569
2010-11	3,859	5,459	5,323	13,121	27,762
2011-12	4,193	5,781	3,555	8,482	22,011
2012-13	3,324	5,709	2,654	10,753	22,440
2013-14	2,909	9,779	937	11,006	24,631
2014-15	3,770	4,821	724	12,132	21,447

*Note: N/A = not available*

**NUMBER OF UNIQUE USERS.** Data on the annual number of unique school-based health center users was more difficult to obtain. The data that were available (see Table 10) revealed that the number of individuals Elev8’s school-based health centers served varied greatly from year to year, reflecting the arc of center start-up, when not all centers were open, through sustainability when centers either maintained services, cut back the number of days they were operational or expanded their services to community members.

Table 10. Unduplicated Count of School-based Health Center Users by Region

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	TOTAL
2009-10	N/A	N/A	1,567	708	2,275
2010-11	N/A	507	1,225	1,372	3,104
2011-12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2012-13	1,727	4,515	592	2,071	8,905
2013-14	418	1,904	313	2,146	2,405
2014-15	411	N/A	297	2,405	3,113

*Note: N/A = not available*

The average number of SBHC visits per user ranged from one to nine over an academic year, suggesting that some students used the center sporadically (such as for immunizations or school or sports medical check-ups) and others used it for ongoing medical care.

## Service Integration

To this point we have shared information about the number of individuals accessing each Elev8 service; however, Elev8 strived to integrate services for students, aiming to create school environments where school, Elev8 and service partner staff all work together to provide students and their families with a seamless comprehensive set of services. While the exact process for service integration differed from school to school, ideally, students would participate both in school based health and OST programs, and their parents would also benefit from offered family support services. It was challenging to assess the extent to which students in Elev8 schools received or participated in multiple services. First, family members who participated in services were not easily linked to particular students due to name differences or because identifiable information was not recorded. Secondly, because of health care confidentiality regulations, the evaluation teams were unable to collect identified information on SBHC users.

The clearest picture available of student experience focuses on 2012-2013. Using a sample created by matching students in Elev8 schools who completed a survey to Elev8’s participation data, McClanahan and colleagues (2013<sup>37</sup>) measured the extent to which students in Elev8 schools participated in OST and/or SBHC. As shown in Table 11, about a quarter of students in Elev8 schools did not participate in either the SBHC or Elev8 OST; about one half participated in only one of the two Elev8 services, either Elev8 OST or the SBHC; and a quarter of students utilized both services. The extent to which this pattern of use holds over time is unclear.

Table 11. Distribution of Student Participation in Elev8 Services: SBHC and OST, 2010-11

Number of Services	0	1 <i>(either OST or SBHC)</i>	2 <i>(both OST and SBHC)</i>
% of Sample	25.8%	50.9%	23.2%

## Elev8’s Outcomes

As a data-driven initiative, Elev8 schools collect data on an annual basis to understand the extent to which key Elev8 goals are being achieved. Additionally, Elev8 evaluators have conducted a handful of ad-hoc studies investigating various Elev8 outcomes at the student and school levels. In this section we share select findings from these sources. We start with student’s academic, health, and socio-emotional outcomes and then turn to what we know about outcomes for Elev8 schools. Importantly, no study to date has rigorously explored if Elev8 has *caused* changes in students’ health, socio-emotional, or academic outcomes (see page 30 for upcoming reports on Elev8); what we do know is whether Elev8 students are getting health care and whether they are experiencing socio-emotional and academic outcomes. This data comprises the bulk of our discussion in this section.

<sup>37</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students’ experiences in school*. Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

## Student Outcomes

### Elev8's Health Outcomes

The majority of Elev8 students received annual health screenings or check-ups as well as dental care. In the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year for which data are available), across all four sites, 78% of Elev8 students reported receiving an annual check-up in the past year, and nearly 80% of students indicated they had dental care in the last year. Figures 5 and 6 present these findings by Elev8 region.

Figure 5. Percent of Students in Sample who received a Health Screening or Check Up in the Previous Year

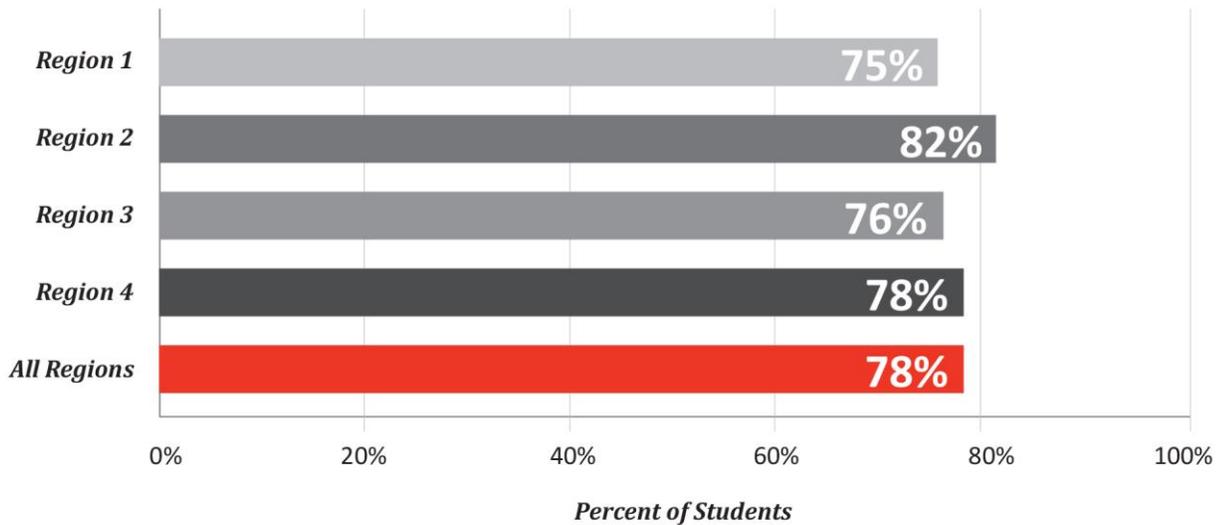
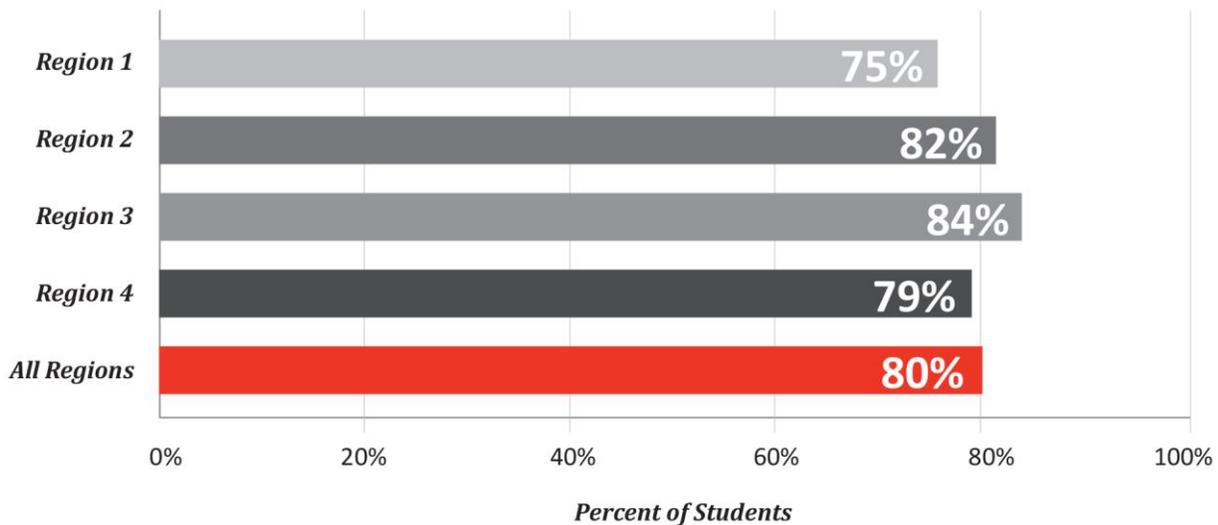


Figure 6. Percent of Students in Sample who received Any Dental Care in the Previous Year



A 2013 study of one Elev8 region (DeNike et al., 2013<sup>38</sup>) lends support to the finding that students were benefitting from school-based health services. While generally Elev8 students were less likely to discuss the physical or mental health services they received in Elev8 with the researchers, some of their family members spoke of the benefits that these services afforded their children and families.

*The dental services are very good for my daughters. I have used the clinic here; the clinic is perfect; my daughters didn't miss school when they had to go to the dentist. They did it all in a day. Now they have their period, they get help and have their questions [answered]. (p.7)*

Another parent in that study shared,

*[My daughter] needed a lot of mental health services; there were some things that occurred with her before she attended this school-that wavered over with her. When she started here they connected me with the services here. She was very out of control. I see her growth, her maturity. She was dealing with self-esteem issues she is not dealing with it anymore. Between 12 and 14 is a very critical time in her life; trying to find who you are. She is different; she wants to go places without me, she is more independent. Have the support from the school is critical (p.7)*

### Elev8’s Socio-Emotional Outcomes

**CARING RELATIONSHIPS.** As displayed in Table 12, a majority (85%) of Elev8 students<sup>39</sup> indicated that they have caring adults to whom they can go for personal advice or to talk about how they are doing in school in the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year data are available). Just over three quarters of Elev8 students<sup>40</sup> report having positive relationships with their peers. These indicators show that Elev8 students have good adult and peer networks, a key indicator of positive youth development.

Table 12. Percent of Elev8 Students who Report Having a Caring Adult in Their Life and who Have Positive Relationships with Peers

	REGION 1 (2013-14)	REGION 2 (2013-14)	REGION 3 (2013-14)	REGION 4 (2013-14)	ALL REGIONS
Percent Who Have a Caring Adult in Life	89%	82%	80%	91%	85%
Percent Who Have Positive Relationships With Peers	76%	88%	74%	76%	78%

<sup>38</sup> DeNike, M. & Ohlson, B. (2013). *Elev8: Oakland community school costs and benefits: Making dollars and cents of the research (Policy Brief, 1)*. Oakland: Bright Research Group.

<sup>39</sup> This question was asked across a sample of Elev8 students—all OST participants in three Elev8 regions, plus two other region-selected targeted populations of Elev8 students and all students in Elev8 schools in the fourth region.

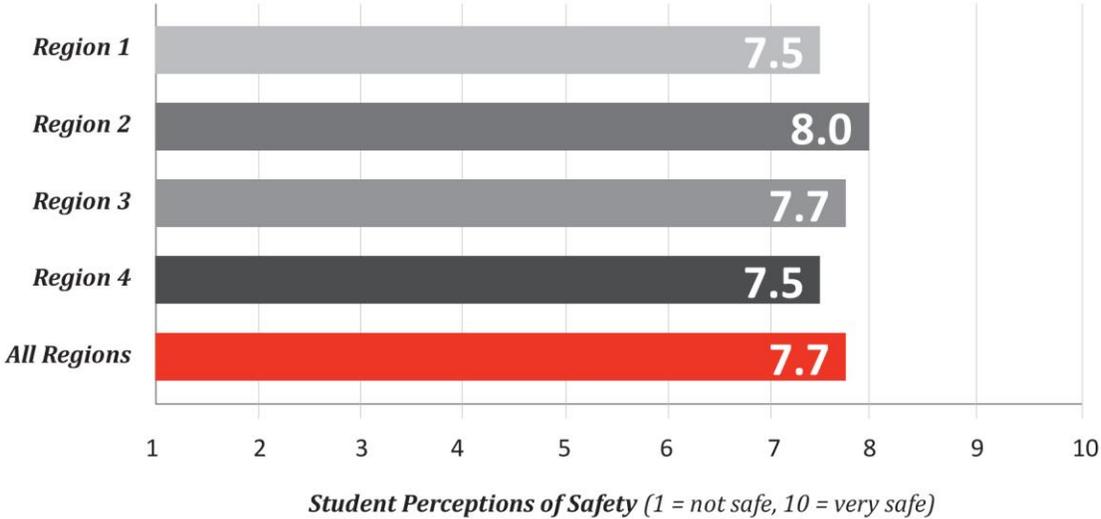
<sup>40</sup> This question was asked across a sample of Elev8 students—all OST participants in three Elev8 regions, plus two other region-selected targeted populations of Elev8 students and all students in Elev8 schools in the fourth region.

**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT.** In the same 2013 study (DeNike et al., 2013<sup>41</sup>), Elev8 students who were interviewed said that they are benefitting from Elev8 services, particularly social-emotional supports. Several noted the impact of Elev8 on their ability to cope with family problems, feelings of isolation, and personal losses. One Elev8 student in that study who participated in the Elev8 OST program shared,

*I like the afterschool [program], and I talk to [Elev8 staff members] if I am having a problem. I've been through a lot in my life. My dad died when I was two years old; my stepbrother died two months ago, and a couple years ago my grandfather died. It was so tough. When other kids are talking about their dad – they have the best dad – I feel so sad and want to cry. Or when my brother died, I was crying a lot. My family is busy; I try not to bother them. So [Elev8 staff member] helped me; she gave me someone to talk about [it with]. If not, I would be walking around the hallway crying. (p.5)*

**FEELING SAFE.** Feeling safe in school is another key factor in student success both academically and developmentally. As seen in Figure 7, Elev8 students feel relatively safe in school, on average. On a scale from 1 (not at all safe) to 10 (very safe) students provided, on average, a daytime school safety rating of between 7.5 and 8 in the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year for which data are available).

Figure 7. Average Rating of School Safety among Elev8 Students<sup>42</sup>



### Elev8’s Academic Outcomes

One of Elev8’s core goals, perhaps the hardest to achieve, has been to *improve* the academic performance of Elev8 students. While this question has not been answered,<sup>43</sup> Elev8 regions, in more recent years, provided data on a subset of academic measures that research has shown are correlated with academic success in high school to understand what percent of students are “on track” academically.

Generally, there is substantial variation in academic outcomes by region, in part due to baseline differences in the schools (e.g., some Elev8 schools face more challenges in student outcomes than others) and differences in how each region defines Elev8 students (e.g., in one region Elev8 students are those who

<sup>41</sup> DeNike, M. & Ohlson, B. (2013). *Elev8: Oakland community school costs and benefits: Making dollars and cents of the research (Policy Brief, 1)*. Oakland: Bright Research Group.

<sup>42</sup> This question was asked across a sample of Elev8 students—all OST participants in three Elev8 regions, plus two other region-selected targeted populations of Elev8 students and all students in Elev8 schools in the fourth region.

<sup>43</sup> Two regional studies of Elev8’s impacts on students are currently underway.

receive intensive academic supports from Elev8; in others they represent youth who attend OST programs). With these variations and limitations in mind, we provide below an overview of students’ academic outcomes. For brevity, we present only the most recently available data in our tables and figures; however, unless otherwise noted, the patterns are similar over the time period the data were collected.

**KEY ACADEMIC INDICATORS.** Elev8 focuses on three academic indicators: the percent of Elev8 students with 10 or fewer absences, the percent who have a GPA of C or better, and the percent who pass their core courses. Each of these indicators has been shown to be associated with long-term academic success (see, for example, Balfanz et al., 2007).<sup>44</sup> Table 13 summarizes the most recently available data on these academic indicators. Across regions the percent of Elev8 students with 10 or fewer absences varied substantially, ranging from 45% to 80%.<sup>45</sup> Between 54% and 81% of Elev8 students achieved a GPA of C or better, and between 79% and 90% passed all of their core courses. Importantly, Elev8 students’ grades have been constant or climbing in three of the four Elev8 regions over time.

Table 13. Percent of Elev8 Students Achieving Key Academic Benchmarks (most recent year available)

	REGION 1 (2013-14)	REGION 2 (2014-15)	REGION 3 (2014-15)	REGION 4 (2014-15)
Percent missing 10 days or less of school	52%	80%	45%	75%
Percent of Elev8 Students with a C or Better GPA	54%	81%	65%	69%
Percent of Elev8 Students Passing All Core Courses	87%	91%	79%	88%

Table 14. Percent of Elev8 Students Scoring a GPA of “C” or Better

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4
2012-13	70%	77%	62%	51%
2013-14	54%	81%	64%	50%
2014-15	N/A	81%	65%	69%

One local evaluation team explored the relationship between attending an Elev8 school and the following outcomes: grade promotion, passing English, passing Math, and school attendance. As shown in Table 15, they discovered that attending an Elev8 school was associated with significantly higher odds of all of these outcomes in at least some years of Elev8’s implementation (Carson Research Associates, 2015).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D.J. (2007). Presenting student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist* 42(4), 1-13.

<sup>45</sup> These figures are for the subset of youth who participated in Elev8 OST or academic services.

<sup>46</sup> Carson Research Associates, (2015). *Elev8 Baltimore: Outcome evaluation report*. Baltimore: Carson Research Associates.

Table 15. Relationship between Elev8 School Attendance and Academic Outcomes (an example from one region)

	ODDS RATIO			BETA COEFFICIENT
	Grade Promotion	Pass English	Pass Math	School Attendance
2009-10	<b>17.9</b>	<b>5.3</b>	1.3	<b>1.7</b>
2010-11	<b>4.9</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>5.0</b>	-1.1
2011-12	<b>5.1</b>	0.2	3.0	<b>8.5</b>
2012-13	<b>7.5</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>13.4</b>

*Note:* Numbers that are bolded are statistically significant

This same study showed that students who attend Elev8 schools for longer experience more positive academic outcomes than those who attended fewer years. Students who attended an Elev8 school for four years had the highest rates of school attendance (91%), had the highest rates of grade promotion (81%), were the most likely to pass their grade level math and English classes (74% and 76% respectively; Carson Research Associates, 2015)<sup>47</sup>.

**PARTICIPATION IN ELEV8 OST AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT.** As noted previously, one study of Elev8<sup>48</sup> investigated the extent to which participation in Elev8’s OST component was related to Elev8 students’ school engagement. Although the study was not able to determine definitively if participation in OST is beneficial to students’ performance in school, it did show that, on average, all students enrolled in Elev8 schools (including both OST participants and non-participants) reported high levels of efficacy, liked the schools they attended, and valued school highly.

**PARTICIPATION IN ELEV8 OST AND HIGH SCHOOL PLANNING.** This same study also explored the extent to which participation in Elev8 was associated with students’ engaging in high school planning activities—activities that would lead to their attending high quality high schools. A majority of the 8th-grade students in Elev8 schools (including OST participants and non-participants) participated in high school planning activities and reported having clear high school plans. However, after taking into account pre-existing differences in student race/ethnicity, gender, student socioeconomic status, and schools students attended, the study found that among those who participated in Elev8 OST, higher levels of participation were associated with more positive high school planning outcomes (McClanahan, et al., 2013<sup>49</sup>). In particular, students who attended more days in Elev8 OST were more likely to participate in a wider range of high school planning activities, which, in turn was associated with a greater likelihood of having a plan for high school. Also, students who attended more days of Elev8 OST were more likely to report planning to apply for a competitive college preparatory high school (defined as a selective enrollment—public or private—or charter high school).

**PARTICIPATION IN ELEV8 OST AND GRADES IN SCHOOL.** A separate study (Gao et al., 2015<sup>50</sup>) investigated the relationship between student OST participation levels and grades in school. Overall, after controlling for differences in student demographics such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and grade levels, the analyses found positive relationships between Elev8 students’ OST participation levels and their

<sup>47</sup> Carson Research Associates, (2015). *Elev8 Baltimore: Outcome evaluation report*. Baltimore: Carson Research Associates.

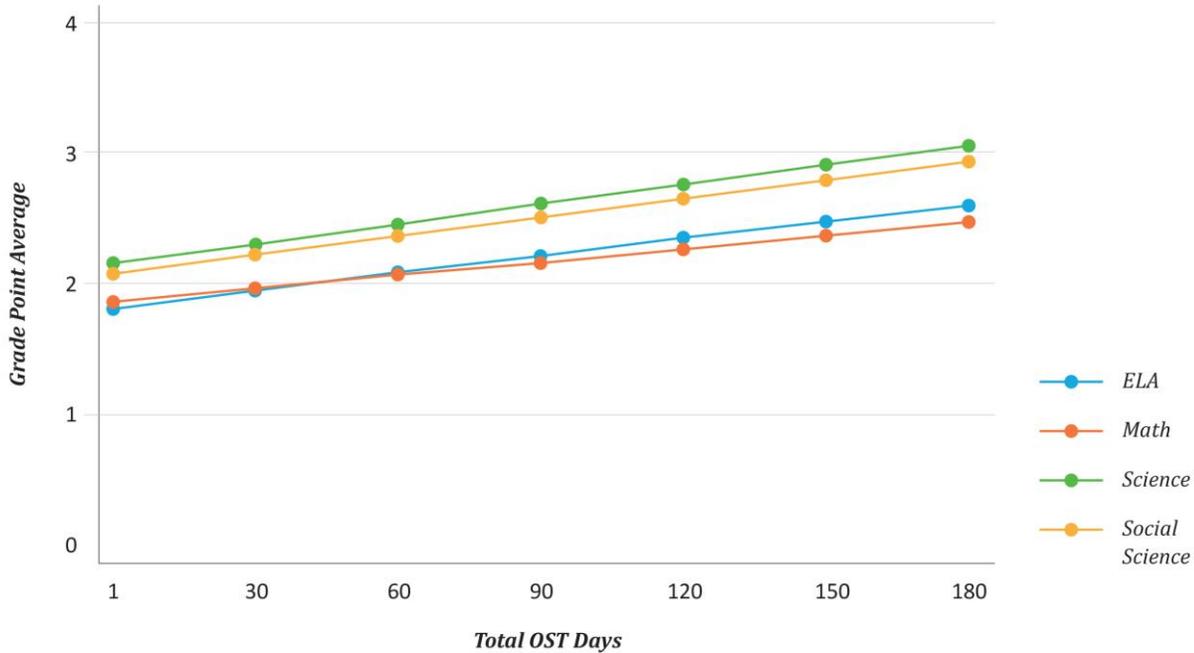
<sup>48</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students’ experiences in school*. Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

<sup>49</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students’ experiences in school*. Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

<sup>50</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: Research For Action.

academic performance and school attendance. Figure 8 shows the relationship between OST participation levels and student outcomes in reported core subjects in 2013-14. After controlling for differences in students, on average, high GPAs in reading, math, science, and social science were associated with higher OST participation levels.

Figure 8. Relationship between Student Grade Point Average and OST Participation Levels <sup>51</sup>



**Note:** Three regions provided data for ELA/reading and math, and two regions provided data for science and social science. One region was not included in the analyses since OST participation levels could not be linked to deidentified school outcomes data and student demographic data was not available.

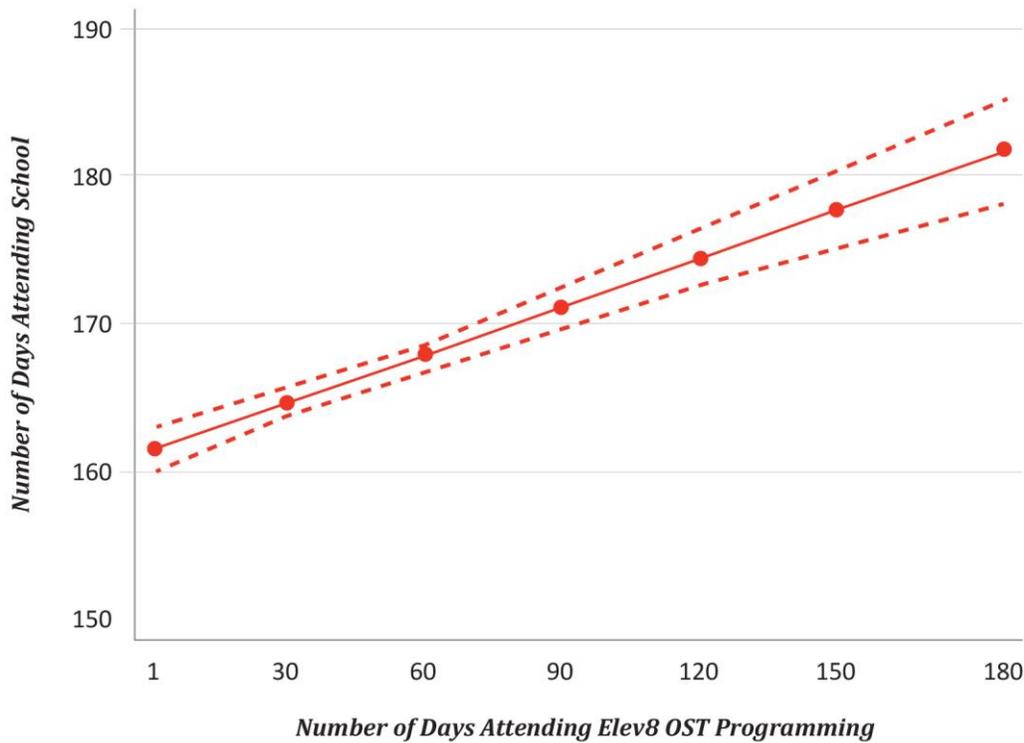
**OST PARTICIPATION AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.** Gao et al. (2015<sup>52</sup>) also investigated whether there was an association between participation in OST and students’ school attendance. Figure 9 shows the relationship between OST participation levels and school attendance among Elev8 OST participants in 2013-14. The solid line represents the predicted change in school attendance as OST program participation increased. The area within the two dashed lines defines the range within which the predicted values will fall. After controlling for student demographic differences, on average, students who participated more days in OST programs also attended more days of school.

**On average, students who participated more days in OST programs also attended more days of school.**

<sup>51</sup> See Table B1 in the Appendix of the Elev8 School-Level Outcomes Report (Gao et al., 2015) for more details on the regression results.

<sup>52</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: Research For Action.

Figure 9. Relationship between Student School Attendance and OST Participation Levels<sup>53</sup>



**Note:** One region was not included in the analysis since OST participation levels could not be linked to de-identified school data and student demographics were not available.

**FAMILY PERSPECTIVES.** A 2013 study conducted by Ohlson et al. found that Elev8 parents and students in one region did associate participation in Elev8 with academic benefits. Many families they interviewed felt that Elev8 academic supports had improved their children’s performance in school.<sup>54</sup>

*Several parents/caregivers mentioned homework help as a service their children had received to prepare them for high school. Similarly, youth talked about improvements in study habits and grades. One youth respondent mentioned that Elev8 had helped her start doing her homework and “taking things more seriously.” Some LEP parents/caregivers remarked on their limitations in being able to help their children in school, including low literacy and language barriers. For these families, Elev8 academic supports play an especially important role in filling these more immediate gaps. Several mentioned that they appreciated having a place where their children could get help with homework. (p.4)*

## School Outcomes

The previous section of this report focused on outcomes among Elev8 students—that is, students in Elev8 schools who have participated in Elev8 services. However, Elev8 is a whole-school initiative, and all students attending Elev8 schools are expected to benefit from improvements in school climate and performance that result from Elev8 activities and programs.

<sup>53</sup> See Table B1 in the Appendix of the Elev8 School-Level Outcomes Report (Gao et al., 2015) for more details on the regression results.

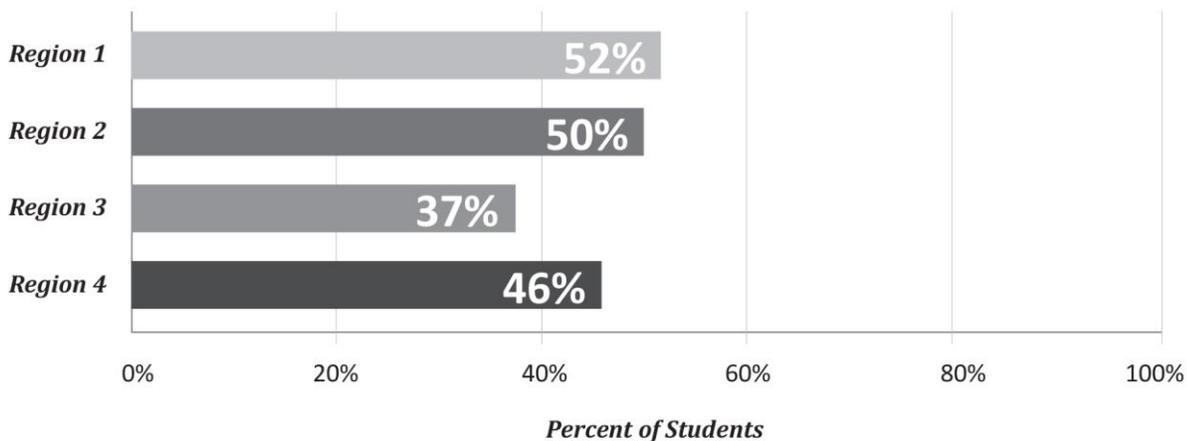
<sup>54</sup> DeNike, M., Ohlson, B., & Leechor, M. (2013). *Elev8: youth and family perspectives on community schools (Issue Brief, 2)*. Oakland: Bright Research Group.

## School Climate

**RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SCHOOL STAFF.** One indicator of positive school climate is the degree to which positive and respectful relationships exist among Elev8 partners, school leadership, Elev8 staff and school faculty at each Elev8 school. To assess the extent to which these relationships exist, data was gathered from an annual survey of Elev8 school coordinators about the fidelity of implementation of Elev8. In 2014-15, the most recent year for which data were available, staff at all Elev8 schools in three of the four regions reported positive and respectful relationships existed; in the fourth region, positive relationships were reported at three of the four schools.

**SCHOOL BELONGING.** Similarly, Elev8 endeavors to create school environments in which students feel that they belong. Elev8 students were asked a series of six questions designed to measure the extent to which they felt part of the school community. As can be seen in Figure 10, between 37% and 52% of students by region “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they felt part of the school community in the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year in which data were available).

Figure 10. Percent of Elev8 Students who Agree (on average) that They Feel Part of the School Community



**SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.** A 2015 study of one Elev8 region assessed the extent to which Elev8 schools experienced improvements in school climate from 2012 to 2014. All of the region’s Elev8 schools displayed stable school climate over the three-year period, and schools improved on ratings of their physical environment (e.g., cleanliness; Carson Research Associates, 2015<sup>55</sup>).

*Elev8 schools displayed stable school climate over the three-year period.*

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.** Using publicly available data about school performance, Elev8 researchers explored how Elev8’s implementation was associated with school outcomes such as school attendance rate, school truancy rate, and the percent of students proficient or better<sup>56</sup> on standardized tests (Gao et al., 2015<sup>57</sup>). The evaluators collected this data, where it was available,<sup>58</sup> annually from before the start of Elev8

<sup>55</sup> This is a composite index comprised of 5 questions such as “the school building is clean and well maintained” & “students have satisfying food options at this school.”; Carson Research Associates, (2015). *Elev8 Baltimore: Outcome evaluation report*. Baltimore: Carson Research Associates.

<sup>56</sup> For Baltimore, percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on MSA; for New Mexico, percent of students scoring proficient or above on SBA; and for Chicago, percent of student met or exceeded standards on ISAT.

<sup>57</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: Research For Action.

<sup>58</sup> Not all states report on all three of these outcomes.

in each of the regions, and tracked trends in the outcomes for several years following.<sup>59</sup> The analysis explored the changes in measured school-level outcomes before and after implementation of the Elev8 programs, and the difference between the district or state average and the average Elev8 performance in the years after its implementation.<sup>60</sup> Given the limitations of the design and data, the analysis is descriptive rather than causal—factors other than Elev8 may influence school performance, both in Elev8 and non-Elev8 schools, and were not considered in this study.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, there were no large changes in school performance. Given the fact that school performance is affected by many factors and is very difficult to change, it is notable that some Elev8 regions did show some small improvements that might be associated with the implementation of Elev8.

**REGION 1.** School attendance, truancy, and test scores were available for this region. Attendance rates at Elev8 schools after the implementation of Elev8 rose slightly, reducing the gap with the state. In comparison, after a peak high in 2011-12 school year, the district as a whole was experiencing declines in student attendance. This region's Elev8 schools saw no improvement in other areas.

**REGION 2.** While this region had data on all three school performance indicators, Elev8 schools did not experience improvements in any of the areas.

**REGION 3.** This region only had test score data available. Elev8 schools experienced an improvement in science, reading and math test scores during the early years of Elev8's implementation relative to pre-Elev8 levels and the trends experienced by the district and state as a whole. While the state stopped reporting science test scores in 2009-10, the data indicate that the gap between Elev8 schools and the district and state as a whole began to widen again in the sustainability phase of the initiative.

**REGION 4.** This region only had truancy data available. While rates in this region varied widely, generally, after the implementation of Elev8, truancy rates at Elev8 schools improved, both relative to pre-Elev8 rates and the district and state as a whole.

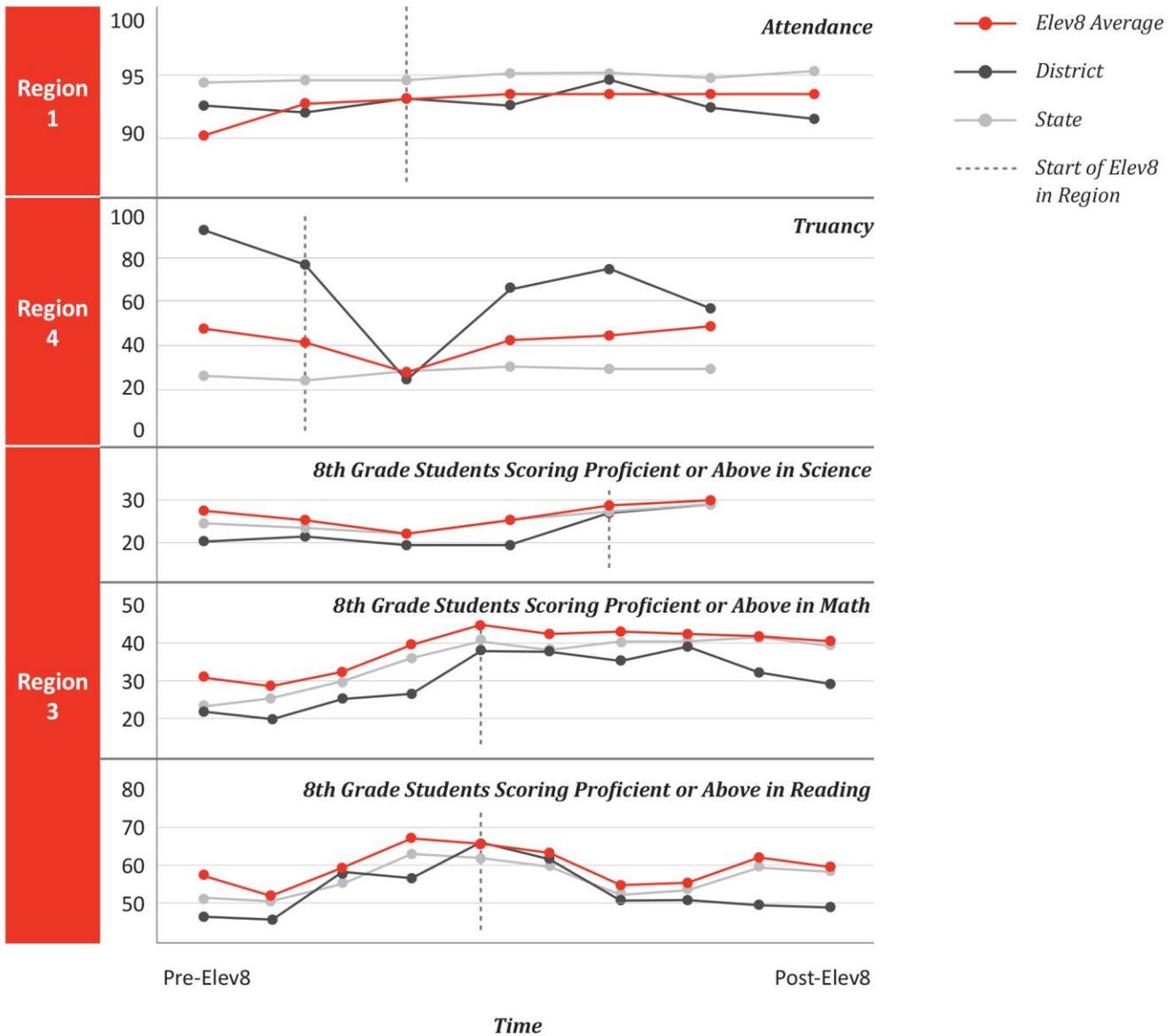
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<sup>59</sup> Data varied in terms of its availability. In some cases, data are available from as early as the 2004-05 school year, and in other cases, the earliest availability of the data was the 2008-09 school year. At the time this report was drafted, data were available as late as the 2012-13 or 2013-14 school year. Elev8 implementation began at different times for different regions within this range. In some cases, we also confirmed the accuracy of the data we received with local educational agencies.

<sup>60</sup> We calculated unweighted averages of all Elev8 schools that have data in each state and compare them with the district or state averages that are released by each state. For 8th grade standardized tests, all data is from 8th grade scores at the school, district, and state levels. Oakland was not included because testing varied by grade level.

<sup>61</sup> This approach was used for two reasons 1) Elev8 leadership felt strongly that there were no comparable schools in their districts and 2) the initiative was not designed to produce valid reference schools.

Figure 11. Select School Level Outcomes



In sum, while the implementation of Elev8 was not consistently associated with school performance improvements, some Elev8 regions did fare better after the implementation of the community school model. However, in some cases gains declined or were reversed during the later years of Elev8 implementation—coinciding with years in which regions began to rely more heavily on matching funds for services (years 3 and 4) or because Atlantic’s funding for direct services ended. The concurrent economic downturn rendered leveraging of state and local funds to bridge the service gap an elusive goal.

**SCHOOL STAFF PERSPECTIVES.** Gao and colleagues (2015<sup>62</sup>) asked Elev8 school principals and staff, both past and present, during interviews and focus groups, about their perceptions of Elev8’s benefits to schools and students. Most notably across all schools, both groups reported that Elev8 benefitted schools by

<sup>62</sup> Gao, J., McClanahan, W., Piccinino, K., & Rowland, J. (2015). *Elev8 school-level outcomes report*. Philadelphia: Research For Action.

providing for students’ physical well-being, in the form of school-based health care. Most principals and school staff across sites reported that Elev8 afforded benefits to schools in two additional ways: 1) by providing Elev8 staff who delivered additional resources and supports to the school; and 2) by bolstering opportunities for educational enrichment that students might not have had the chance to experience otherwise.

Beyond these three key concrete advantages, there were variations in perceptions of Elev8’s benefits to schools, both between principals and school staff and across Elev8 schools. Many suggested Elev8 programming resulted in increased parent engagement in school and emotional well-being among students (which in turn, may improve school climate). Others mentioned increased grades and/or test scores as a benefit of Elev8, and both principals and school staff in three of the four regions mentioned improved school attendance as a benefit of Elev8’s implementation; however, these benefits were not endorsed as frequently as those to students directly. Other benefits mentioned were improvements in the calmness/safety and welcoming feel of the school environment, increased positive attitudes towards school among students, and decreased disciplinary incidents. Finally, no principal or school staff member perceived any association between Elev8 and the school improving its achievement of its goals (i.e., Yearly Progress). Notably, principals and school staff shared that the benefits that Elev8 had afforded their schools and students waned as funding for the program, and therefore service levels, decreased.

### Summary

Elev8’s goals for students and schools are ambitious: to improve students’ health and well-being, as well as impact their academic success. Additionally, Elev8 aspires, over the long term, to reverse trends in underperforming schools that serve vulnerable children. The Elev8 initiative and evaluations were not designed to provide a comprehensive, uniform, and rigorous evaluation of its impacts. Yet as a data-driven initiative, Elev8 has measured and reported on the extent to which it reaches its goals annually, and Elev8 evaluators have answered questions about the extent to which these goals have been achieved with the data available to them.

Overall, some of Elev8’s outcomes are promising; students in Elev8 schools are getting routine healthcare, are experiencing positive socio-emotional outcomes, and many are on-track academically. Some Elev8 schools experienced small improvements in performance. In the future, evaluations in two of the four Elev8 regions will provide more information about whether Elev8 has impacted each regions’ schools and students.

But perhaps the most important take away is that there are no quick fixes—large and complex change efforts within established sectors, such as public education, require consistent, adequate resources over a long period of time (seven to ten years) to achieve and sustain. In the case of Elev8, the small improvements noted in school performance seemed to reverse as Elev8 received smaller resources from Atlantic. It is possible that Elev8 schools may have experienced ongoing improvement if the integrated and high quality implementation of the four pillars had been sustained at levels equal to its early years. In other schools an effort like Elev8, which is designed to

UPCOMING ELEV8 REPORTS
1) In late fall 2016 Chapin Hall will release a report that describes Elev8’s academic impacts on students.
2) In 2017 Chapin Hall will release a report on the academic impacts of Elev8 Baltimore.
3) In 2016 McClanahan Associates, Inc. will release a report on the implementation and adaption of Elev8.

address the myriad barriers students from deep poverty face when attempting to achieve their educational potential, may require an equally deep parallel investment in school reforms, such as continuity in leadership, curriculum improvements, and increased accountability.

In the next section, we turn to the lessons the Elev8 initiative illuminated about implementing a community school model in middle schools across the country.

## IV. CONDITIONS SUPPORTING ROBUST IMPLEMENTATION

We turn last to the conditions that appear to support Elev8’s implementation. Elev8 has been rolled out in a variety of contexts, and our analysis of Elev8’s evaluations suggests that regardless of the context, there are four key conditions essential for Elev8’s success. These four conditions—building a shared vision, clear and consistent communication, strong family and student engagement, and adequate, sustained resources—connect to provide the foundation of all strong community schools models. In this way, the lessons learned from Elev8 can serve as a roadmap for similar efforts.

Below, we describe in more detail each condition that supports successful implementation of the Elev8 model.



### Condition 1. Building a Shared Vision

By definition, Elev8 is built upon a foundation of relationships that exist both within schools, and across schools and supporting organizations. For this reason, robust implementation of the model requires a jointly-built shared vision of both the goals of Elev8, and the path towards meeting them. Although this vision can and should vary by school to account for differences in the needs of student populations and available resources, it is a first and ongoing key to collaboration in community school efforts like Elev8.

As is the case with all community school models, each of Elev8’s stakeholders came to the initiative with its own agenda, and early research on Elev8 showed that the success of Elev8’s efforts was partly a function of whether all stakeholders bought into the concept of Elev8 overall so that they were working collaboratively rather than against one another. Early research on the start-up of Elev8 points to how important shared vision is to the model’s implementation (Little et al., 2010<sup>63</sup>):

*Elev8 service providers recognized that they need to understand how their pieces fit into the larger initiative so that efforts can be coordinated to effectively support children and their families. Some sites were able to achieve this shared vision, which in turn helped them to achieve greater implementation success. (p. 23)*

The Little study points to a particularly important aspect of shared vision in this context—namely, there is a need for a *concrete* understanding of how multiple services and entities fit together as a whole for the Elev8 model. Knowing “how their pieces fit into the larger initiative” provides an essential vision that guides the implementation and identifies appropriate roles and responsibilities for all players.

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<sup>63</sup> Little, P., Harris, E., Deschenes, S., Rosenberg, H., & Liiv, K. (2010). *Elev8 Evaluation synthesis: Key lessons and challenges of integrated services*. Harvard Family Research Project.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPAL.** While Elev8 brings together many entities, the site of its implementation is schools. For this reason, principals are at the center of Elev8 implementation, and can greatly affect the degree to which the model takes hold. When Elev8 implementation is most successful, principals play a leadership role in developing the vision for Elev8, customizing it to the particular needs and culture of their students and schools. In some cases, Elev8 principals had little input into the development and implementation of Elev8 in their schools. These principals found it hard to embrace Elev8 at first, feeling that the initiative was, in some respects, at odds with the goals of the school or the school's operations (McClanahan et al., forthcoming<sup>64</sup>). In contrast, one school's principal, who initially had concerns over potential teacher burnout, grew quickly to see the potential benefits of teacher involvement in OST for linking the academic and extended day—and led the effort to incorporate the school's teachers into EDL at that school (Chapin Hall, 2010<sup>65</sup>). Since the success of a community school effort hinges on the principal's cooperation, at a minimum, and is perhaps most robust when the principal is fully engaged in the work and believes in the model, principals should be involved in the development of the model from the start.

**BUY IN AMONG SCHOOL STAFF.** Early research on Elev8 implementation illustrates why school staff should also participate in the construction of a concrete, shared vision. When teachers and school staff could make the link between how Elev8's goals would help them educate students, it was more likely that they would become full partners in the initiative—referring youth to Elev8's services and interfacing with Elev8 staff. For instance, schools with strong teacher buy in were able to use that buy in to develop programs to increase parent participation in their child's education. A handful of schools developed a teacher led home visitation outreach program which strived to open dialogue and support parents in finding ways to become actively involved. Other examples include teachers participating in OST activities, and letting students leave class for SBHC appointments.

In contrast, when teachers and other school staff members were skeptical of the model or did not fully understand its theory of action, problems arose. In such schools, Elev8's OST tutoring and educational enrichment efforts were not fully integrated into the school day. Where guidance counselors weren't bought in, they hesitated to refer students to needed behavior or mental health supports provided by Elev8. Moreover, family support and health providers reported difficulty in getting to know students and their families (Little et al., 2010<sup>66</sup>). In these cases, many school staff demonstrated support for Elev8's services only after they began to see how the services benefitted students academically, enabled school staff to focus more of their time on academics, and persuaded some parents to become more involved in their children's education. As a result, opportunities for very early success were lost.

Involving school staff in the development of a shared vision can be a challenge. Elev8 schools quickly learned that planning meetings during the school day were challenging for teachers, and some unions prohibited teachers' involvement during OST hours. As such, each district considering a community school effort needs to carefully plan for how to meaningfully involve teachers and other school staff in meetings where the vision is created and plans are operationalized.

**SHARED VISION AMONG PROVIDERS.** As social service organizations are often operating in a competitive environment, partners in an effort like Elev8 often lack effective ways of balancing their organizational interests with the interests of the collaboration. In Elev8, partners, along with the school, held planning meetings to discuss these potential challenges and concretely plan for how each provider could achieve its own mission while simultaneously delivering on their jointly developed shared vision. Educating each other on their culture and operations was critical, as was generating shared expectations as dictated by the

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<sup>64</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Greenfield, S., Piccinino, K. & Custis, K. (forthcoming). *Adaptations and innovations in Elev8*. Lansdale, PA: McClanahan Associates, Inc.

<sup>65</sup> Chapin Hall. (2010). Elev8 Implementation report: Cross-site 2010 report.

<sup>66</sup> Little, P., Harris, E., Deschenes, S., Rosenberg, H., & Liiv, K. (2010). *Elev8 Evaluation synthesis: Key lessons and challenges of integrated services*. Harvard Family Research Project.

vision for Elev8. These expectations were codified and operationalized through Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) with clearly defined roles guiding the initiative's relationships. These agreements were essential for setting the partnership's accountability structure and coordinating operating procedures across partners.

**AN EXAMPLE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED VISION.** The integration of SBHC provides a particularly important illustration of the need for a concrete, shared vision. A 2013 Chapin Hall discussion paper (Baker et al., 2013<sup>67</sup>) notes that SBHC may be the most challenging component of the Elev8 model to integrate into the school setting due to the differing goals and operations of the education and health care systems. According to the report:

*School staff may view health centers as guests within the school, assuming that they can and will align their work with the hosting school's rules and priorities. Naturally, however, health organizations have other priorities, legal requirements, and modes of working. For example, the priority of an SBHC to ensure that students feel as comfortable as possible coming to the health center may seem to conflict with a school's interest in maximizing student "time on task" and determining the movement of students through the building. Also, health center requirements for confidentiality may need to be explicitly explained and justified to school administrators. These different perspectives and lack of awareness of what each partner needs to be successful can also lead to missed opportunities. Schools, for example, may not use their existing outreach and orientation activities to proactively support obtaining parental permission for students to use the SBHC (Dryfoos, 1994; Jennings, Pearson, & Harris, 2000). In the absence of an effective mechanism that identifies a range of possible shared goals and supports their satisfactory implementation, conflicts and missed opportunities in the relationship between the SBHC and the school are to be expected. (p. 3)*



## Condition 2. Clear and Consistent Communication

Routine and strategic communication across Elev8 staff, school staff, and service providers and community members is another key condition of Elev8's successful implementation. At the most basic level, communication keeps stakeholders updated on programming, informed of events, and helps to recruit individuals for services. But the need to communicate effectively in Elev8 went deeper.

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND ELEV8 COORDINATORS.** Effective communication and strong trusting relationships between principals and Elev8 coordinators were a backbone of effective Elev8 implementation. Clear and consistent communication and mutual respect led to strong relationships between Elev8 coordinators and principals. Effective Elev8 coordinators provided clear and ongoing communication to the school principal about the day-to-day implementation of Elev8's services. An evaluation of one Elev8 region revealed that another key to building strong relationships with Elev8 principals, which in turn promoted effective communication, was by taking responsibilities off of them, instead of adding tasks to principals' already overflowing plates. Overall, careful communication led principals to believe strongly in the value of the Elev8 coordinator and in its sustainability phase, many Elev8 principals dedicated discretionary funding toward the coordinator's position.

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<sup>67</sup> Baker, S., Rich, L., Wojnarowski, M., & Meehan, P. (2013). *Implementing successful school-based health centers: Lessons from the Chicago Elev8 initiative*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ELEV8 SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SCHOOL STAFF.** Elev8 service providers and school staff had to effectively communicate to assure that services were integrated, to reinforce programming, and to guard against duplicative services. Routine meetings allowed for this integration and were held at all Elev8 schools. One particularly effective strategy was the COST approach:

*The Coordination of Services Team (COST) is a strategy for coordinating and brokering services to students who are particularly at risk for academic failure that is implemented at each school site. The COST was convened by [Elev8 region lead agency] and developed plans to meet the needs of students experiencing academic, attendance, behavior, mental health, family, or other types of challenges. Elev8 and OUSD staff, site-based clinical, case management, and mental health clinicians, student support personnel and after school providers attended COST meetings. (Bright Research Group, 2010<sup>68</sup>)*

Cross-partner meetings, cross-site meetings and committee structures all helped facilitate integration of Elev8 into the school and promote changes at the school level. When these meetings were held regularly and run effectively, cross-partner meetings helped Elev8 staff and service providers develop a basic understanding of each school's practices, culture, and rules. This was especially important for providers who were not familiar with school operations. In the early implementation phases, working within the boundaries of a school's culture was essential. As the initiative progressed, however, these meetings allowed partners, including the school, to problem-solve and continue growing the shared vision of the initiative.

According to a 2010 report by Little and colleagues, sites varied in the degree to which they regularly held planning groups; and also in the degree to which these meetings were attended by key stakeholders who were able to engage in productive discussions. Some governance groups met during the workday and, therefore, did not include teachers, whose absence served as a deterrent to full integration. But some schools intentionally included both Elev8 and school staff in standing meetings, which helped to integrate the regular school staff into Elev8 structures and vice versa. It was reported that this approach helped lay the groundwork to institutionalize Elev8 as a regular component of the school, instead of simply a program that takes place at the school (Little et al., 2010<sup>69</sup>).

**COMMUNICATION ABOUT SERVICES TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS.** For Elev8's services to be effective, school staff—including teachers, counselors, administrative, and facilities staff, parents, and students—all need to know about available services. Many Elev8 schools and providers struggled with communicating effectively with multiple audiences. Early in the initiative, parents did not know about Elev8's services—particularly family support services. And even in the later years of Elev8, teachers and school staff reported challenges with knowing what services were available to students and their families. Early efforts to communicate centered on written communications, but these often went unread, especially by busy teachers and when schools relied on “backpack express” to get to parents. One effective strategy that was used by schools were daily announcements reminding school staff and students about services and events on campus. Personal outreach to parents also proved effective in some schools.



### Condition 3. Strong Family and Student Engagement

Family and student engagement is at the heart of Elev8's success. Indeed, community school models are designed to break down traditional divides between schools and families, and replace them with strong, mutually supportive relationships that strengthen both families

<sup>68</sup> Bright Research Group. (2010). *Elev8 and sustain: How to build full-service community schools that last*. Oakland: Bright Research Group.

<sup>69</sup> Little, P., Harris, E., Deschenes, S., Rosenberg, H., & Liiv, K. (2010). *Elev8 Evaluation synthesis: Key lessons and challenges of integrated services*. Harvard Family Research Project.

and schools. At the most fundamental level, obtaining student, parent, and community input was vital to Elev8's development and implementation. One successful planning process was described as follows:

*Across the schools, leaders of the process were able to involve a highly diverse group of participants that included school leaders and administrators, teachers, parents, students, staff and leadership from partner organizations, and other community representatives. In addition, not only were these individuals involved in the initial stages of the process, but leaders were also able to keep them involved over a period of months. As a result, at the conclusion of planning, the initiative was able to commence with significant buy-in from both community members and school staff and leadership. (Chapin Hall, 2009<sup>70</sup>).*

**CREATING STRONG FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.** Despite the robust and inclusive planning processes that occurred in many schools, Elev8 still struggled with family engagement as the model rolled out. Leaders quickly learned that the “if you build it they will come” approach is a fallacy, particularly when the “it” is located in schools. Indeed, several Elev8 evaluations, as well as other research, document historic and long-standing parental distrust of schools that is notoriously difficult to overcome (see for instance, DeAngelo et al., 2013<sup>71</sup>). This distrust can be exacerbated by other factors, such as language and cultural barriers, and a lack of familiarity with school operations.

In order to ensure strong implementation of the Elev8 model, schools had to become welcoming environments for parents and community members. Space, cultural competency, and accessibility were keys to creating this environment. Schools that succeeded in implementing the model provide the following important take-aways:

- Parents desired private spaces within the schools to ensure confidentiality and a sense of belonging. In response, many Elev8 sites created family resource centers—places reserved for parents where they could socialize, access services, and meet with staff one-on-one. Other Elev8 schools utilized home visit models as an alternative or to augment welcoming spaces, which helped to ensure confidentiality in discussing financial, legal, or health issues.
- Providing basic family supports such as food and clothing also helped improve parents' trust of the schools and Elev8. Moreover, these supports bolstered families' engagement in Elev8 services.
- Elev8 regions worked to maximize cultural competency by hiring staff with shared backgrounds, holding meetings in parents' native language, and providing services in a way that was respectful and built on parents' unique cultural backgrounds. Some SBHCs responded to cultural stigmas associated with health services by changing the language of “mental health services,” to “social behavior services.” (Little et al., 2010<sup>72</sup>).
- Elev8 increased the accessibility of supports by making information about all services more visible and accessible to parents; providing flexible service hours; assuring an on-site continuum of supports; assisting with babysitting; and enhancing their focus on adult education and parent workshops.

Across Elev8, what began as a focus on providing family supports grew into a broader effort to create and sustain family and community engagement in Elev8 and schools over time. As the initiative matured, parents and other community members took on key leadership and governance roles and served as advocates for quality education. For instance, in one Elev8 school, the lead community partner agency helped get a group of parents elected to the local school council (Little et al., 2010<sup>73</sup>). In another school, the

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<sup>70</sup> Chapin Hall. (2009). *Elev8 implementation report: Cross-site 2009 report*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

<sup>71</sup> D'Angelo, A.V., Rich, L., & Kwiatt, J. (2013). Integrating family support services into schools: Lessons from the Elev8 initiative. *Chapin Hall Issue Brief*.

<sup>72</sup> Little, P., Harris, E., Deschenes, S., Rosenberg, H., & Liiv, K. (2010). Elev8 Evaluation synthesis: Key lessons and challenges of integrated services. *Harvard Family Research Project*.

<sup>39</sup> Little, P., Harris, E., Deschenes, S., Rosenberg, H., & Liiv, K. (2010). Elev8 Evaluation synthesis: Key lessons and challenges of integrated services. *Harvard Family Research Project*.

family advocate launched a Spanish-speaking parent council in the school. Importantly, these efforts must be carefully balanced; in one Elev8 school, staff reported that increased numbers of parents in leadership positions worked *against* coordinated integration efforts because the parent committees worked at odds with the school administration (Little et al., 2010<sup>74</sup>).

**ENGAGING STUDENTS.** Family participation in Elev8 also promotes the use of Elev8 services by students. For instance, parents must provide consent for their children to receive school-based health center services.

Parents also play a particularly important role in their children’s involvement in out of school time activities. While middle schoolers may make choices about which activities they engage in, parents can further facilitate participation by providing transportation and removing competing family obligations such as babysitting.

However, because participation was voluntary, it hinged on interest in the programming, trust of the service providers, and the accessibility of the services. In addition to communicating with parents, engaging programming was a key to securing student participation. Some schools offered innovative interest-based programming, such as bike repair, Native American drum making, and cooking classes that were exciting to students and made them want to attend programming. Homework help was another key to keeping youth engaged in OST programming; students and parents in all Elev8 regions reported the importance of this support. Similar to findings from other studies of OST programs, strong relationships between Elev8’s OST leaders and students also kept them engaged in programming. Lastly, Elev8’s school-based setting facilitated student participation, yet many schools realized that neighborhood safety was a key barrier for youth who had to get to and from school alone. Many of these schools implemented safe passage programs to permit students to get to school and home from school after programming confidently and safely. Several schools implemented student attendance tracking systems which would provide “early warning” to school and Elev8 staff when a student’s participation in OST declined.



#### **Condition 4. Adequate, Predictable and Coordinated Resources**

As is the case with all community school initiatives, Elev8 is based on the well-supported premise that success for disadvantaged students requires a holistic, comprehensive approach to address the needs of the child, family, and community. Such approaches involve multiple partners and, relatedly, multiple funding streams; and they require adequate management to ensure the coordinated and effective use of resources and related services. Robust implementation of Elev8 was achieved with significant support from Atlantic Philanthropies. In the first four years of Elev8, each region spent about one million dollars per school, plus additional in-kind supports provided through Elev8’s various partnerships, including the school. Sustainability budgets varied by region and school.

**START-UP COSTS.** These fiscal resources were utilized on the following:

- Planning
- Contracting
- Capital expenditures, including equipment and the build out of the SBHCs

**FISCAL RESOURCES.** Specific costs included the following:

- Service sub-contracts
- Personnel costs for coordination and program staffing
- Materials and supplies
- Initiative leadership (e.g., the lead agency),

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<sup>74</sup> Little, P., Harris, E., Deschenes, S., Rosenberg, H., & Liiv, K. (2010). Elev8 Evaluation synthesis: Key lessons and challenges of integrated services. *Harvard Family Research Project*.

- Marketing and development
- Training
- Research and evaluation

**IN-KIND COSTS.** Elev8 schools also provided significant in-kind resources. The most important of these costs were:

- **Facilities.** Participating schools were asked to dedicate or share space to accommodate Elev8 staff and services. In these schools, space is a precious commodity; yet it is essential to a community school effort, like Elev8. In kind facilities donations also encompass costs for utilities, security and maintenance.
- **Staff Time.** Elev8’s implementation required significant time from principals and school staff to participate in meetings, align Elev8’s programming with school objectives, and refer students to services.

**SUSTAINABILITY COSTS.** As highlighted previously in this report, Elev8 entered a sustainability phase after four years of Atlantic funding. During this phase, direct fiscal support from Atlantic Philanthropies unexpectedly dropped and the worst recession of the past 50 years hit; and as a result, many sites experienced a drop in service delivery as well.

Some Elev8 data show that early gains during the first four years of the initiative levelled off or reversed in later years as funding dwindled. These findings clearly suggest that that Elev8 requires more than four years to become “business as usual” in the schools in which it operates. If improvements made by Elev8 are to be sustained, the evidence suggests they will require consistent and adequate funding to keep schools trending upwards. Policy makers, funders, school districts and programs interested in implementing a model like Elev8 should be prepared to make a significant multi-year investment in the launch of a community schools effort in order to sustain and build upon early benefits. Philanthropy in particular should explicitly support efforts to identify and leverage alternative, sustainable funding sources early in a community school’s implementation.

Despite evidence that community schools and their component parts benefit students and schools in multiple ways, concerns about the costs of community schools abound. The first rigorous examination of a comprehensive community school model suggests impressive return on investment (ROI). Until recently, there was no rigorous study examining the value of the benefits to community schools students and how it compares to the cost of the model. In 2012, the first such study was published on Communities in Schools (CIS)—a community school initiative that surrounds students with supports, “empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.” Using data from CIS’s evaluation of benefits to students, the analysis juxtaposed it against data regarding the costs of implementing the model. The study revealed that the value of the benefits of CIS exceed the total investment costs by almost 2.6 billion dollars. For every one dollar invested in CIS at the high school level, \$11.60 in economic benefit is created.<sup>75</sup>

A less rigorous study of Elev8’s return on investment was conducted in one of the four Elev8 regions. The authors concluded that every dollar invested in Elev8 produced a benefit to society of \$4.39 by preventing long-term hardship and reliance on publicly-funded social support systems (DeNike et al., 2013).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. (2012). The economic impact of communities in schools. Retrieved from [http://www.communitiesinschools.org/media/uploads/attachments/CIS\\_2.pdf](http://www.communitiesinschools.org/media/uploads/attachments/CIS_2.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> In late 2016, MAI will be producing cost-benefit briefs for two of the four Elev8 regions.

**THE NEED FOR RESOURCE COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION.** Elev8’s initial Atlantic funding brought many partners to the table, including schools, service providers, and community leaders. Coordination of these diverse resource streams was critical to Elev8’s success. An early evaluation of one Elev8 region put it this way:

*Creating a comprehensive intervention such as Elev8 requires coordination not just at the level of providing services, but also the integration of funding. This is a very complex task, since funding streams have their own goals and those receiving dollars are accountable to funders for their own specific objectives. These separate funding streams can present obstacles to providers as they work to put in place comprehensive, coordinated services for individuals. To overcome these challenges, [Elev8 region lead agency] has facilitated the blending of funding from the community partners. This is a heroic feat of integration because it requires partners to relinquish sole control over the funding. To accomplish this, the lead agency must be trusted by each community partner to bring the funding together and use it to accomplish joint goals (LFA, 2009<sup>77</sup>).*

Like funding, the use of other program resources including staffing, space, materials and supplies also requires coordination to further the initiative’s goals.

## V. FINAL THOUGHTS

Elev8 was created to address the myriad of challenges middle school students in chronically underserved communities face when striving to reach their educational potential. Offering a multifaceted solution—including family supports and resources designed to promote economic stability, good health, and academic success—Elev8 offers an approach that considers the “whole” child, including the context within which the child is developing. Research indicates that the community school approach and the individual components of Elev8 can, if implemented well, help prevent a variety of negative outcomes for youth and their families—academic failure, behavior problems, health challenges, and others (for a brief review, see McClanahan, et al., 2013<sup>78</sup>).

Community schools require a long-term change effort that, at a minimum, requires building a shared vision for the initiative, strong and effective cross-stakeholder communication, ample resources, and authentic family and student engagement. Overall, Elev8 made great strides; it has served thousands of students and families. And while there is no definitive answer to the question, “Does Elev8 result in better schools and greater academic success among students?,” evaluations of Elev8 show promising outcomes, and more rigorous evaluations of other community school efforts suggest they can bolster students’ academic success and return significant savings on money invested. Even in its sustainability phase, Elev8 has experienced some successes. While decreased funding led to cuts in service levels at many schools, and turnover in leadership has resulted in a handful of schools opting out of Elev8, the crux of the community school approach lives on. And even more, in two regions, districts’ involvement in

***And even more, in two regions, districts’ involvement in Elev8 has spurred the growth of community schools district-wide.***

<sup>77</sup> Learning for Action Group (2009). *Local evaluation of The Atlantic Philanthropies’ Elev8 Oakland initiative: Cross-school evaluation report*. San Francisco, CA: LFA Group.

<sup>78</sup> McClanahan, W.S., Gao, J., & Sanders, F. (2013). *Out-of-school time in Elev8 community schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students’ experiences in school*. Philadelphia: Research for Action & McClanahan Associates, Inc.

Elev8 has spurred the growth of community schools district-wide.

Rather than invest in a comprehensive impact analysis, Atlantic Philanthropies instead chose to support a series of more targeted evaluation activities focused on providing formative feedback geared to the information needs of each site. The evaluation of the entire initiative was primarily focused on tracking implementation and participation rates. As a result, and by design, evaluation results do not provide the level of robust, systematic analysis that would be needed to arrive at definitive granular recommendations for program success.

Given the limitations, what is the main take-away for policy makers and program leaders? Community schools' efforts should not be entered into lightly; they are complex and expensive efforts, involving multiple partners collaborating in a well-established and highly-regulated school environment. The four conditions for success identified in this report were essential, and most Elev8 schools struggled with their implementation to varying degrees.

Community schools like Elev8 aim to address tremendous and persistent inequities that exist in low performing schools in struggling communities. If the challenges of providing students and their families with needed supports is not great enough, basic implementation challenges, such as integrating services, securing participation and engagement, and coordination are exacerbated by other factors, including inconsistent leadership at the school and district levels (e.g., key personnel departing, challenges in maintaining support among incoming leaders with less familiarity). And changes in the political and economic landscape can have even more profound impacts on community school implementation, continuity, and sustainability. Each change in leadership comes with new reform ideas and priorities.

Yet philanthropic support, if it is committed at adequate levels for multiple years, can serve as the building block of this a long term strategy, and provide community school implementers with the bandwidth needed to develop and mature a complex initiative so that it is institutionalized into the landscape and not subject to the whims of political change. This is where Elev8 stumbled; funding was not committed for long enough to reach stasis, and changes in leadership and economic conditions ultimately undermined the initiative's strong start. The success of community school efforts require a multi-year commitment to funding, strong and decisive school and district leadership, and patience in growing the initiative and achieving its full potential.