ELEV8 and Sustain:
LESSONS ON FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY FROM ELEV8 OAKLAND

BRIGHT
RESEARCH GROUP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is increasing recognition in the field of educational reform that in order to close the achievement gap in low-income communities of color, schools must develop strategies to address academic and non-academic barriers to learning. As schools transform into service-rich community hubs, they are faced with the challenge of finding new ways to build, finance, and sustain the resources that are necessary to meet student and family needs. A review of the literature revealed a shortage of information on how to sustain core components of community schools following an initial investment by a foundation grant. This brief is meant to help fill that gap, illustrating both challenges as well as strategies for success based on Oakland's story. Through the lens of Elev8 Oakland, a community schools initiative funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, this policy brief describes common issues and effective practices in sustainability of community schools. This brief is intended for school districts, lead agencies, and other practitioners invested in the success of community schools and aims to help inform sustainability planning for other schools and districts considering an investment in community schools.

Elev8 Oakland is part of The Atlantic Philanthropies' national Elev8 investment to transform struggling middle schools into thriving places of learning and wellness. Elev8 grants were made in four locations around the United States, including Oakland; each site built their programs around four common pillars:

1) Expanded/extended learning during the school year and summers;
2) School-based health centers (SBHCs) to address students' physical and emotional needs;
3) Family supports; and
4) Family advocacy and engagement.

Elev8 Oakland is a collaborative effort of Safe Passages, the lead agency, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), the County of Alameda, and community partners operating in five of the highest-need middle schools. Elev8 Oakland has just completed its fifth year of implementation and is currently in a sustainability development phase.

Implications for Policy and Practice

1) *Invest Early in Infrastructure:* Elev8 Oakland has persisted, in part, because of the initial investment into the development of infrastructure. The investment paved the way for the construction of School Based Health Center facilities equipped for the delivery of high-quality care – spaces that the schools would not readily abandon. At some sites similar investments were made into building family resource centers that would prove popular with families. These facilities have helped shift the community's perception of what a school site can offer, which in turn has fostered support for full service community schools.

2) *Leverage Public and Private Funding Streams:* None of the Elev8 Oakland community school models have operated solely on The Atlantic Philanthropies investment. Elev8 partners have accessed multiple funding streams and other resources from the beginning to support individual program components and staff positions. Those resources are being relied upon even more as Elev8 schools seek to maintain the robust set of resources, services and supports made available to families and students. State mental health, affordable health care coverage, and after school funding streams, as well as local and private dollars have been used to sustain Elev8's core programming offerings.

3) *The Family Support and Project Coordination Financing Challenge:* While academic support and School-Based Health Center components of the Elev8 Oakland community schools model benefit from a local financing structure that promotes long-term sustainability, the lack of dedicated or easily accessed funding streams to support family support and advocacy and project coordination is a sustainability challenge. The School District is promoting the integration of project coordination into the school site administrative structure by providing schools with the option to include a community schools program manager in their site level budget. While there will always be gaps in funding to support needed services for low-income families and students, the lack of a dedicated and sustainable financing mechanism for family support and project coordination puts these core elements of the Elev8 community schools model at risk.

4) *Identify Opportunities to Institutionalize at School Sites and at the District Levels:* The Elev8 Oakland experience demonstrates that bringing together public system and non-profit partners that share a common commitment to the community schools model, or even pieces of a model, is a key ingredient to sustainability. Public system partners have not only served as a sustainable funding stream for components of the model, but have also played the role of a thought partner. That the District has a full-time administrator focused on full service community school's implementation, and that the strategic plan explicitly articulates the District's commitment to community schools bode well for sustainability. While the community school elements that last in the District may not always be called Elev8, the Initiative's lessons are helping to inform practice district-wide.

5) *Acknowledge the Tension between Fidelity and Sustainability:* In order to sustain community schools, it is necessary to bring in multiple funding streams and braid them into a supportive structure. But when different funding streams emphasize dissimilar philosophies or program components, there is a risk that some of the coherence and observed outcomes of the original model may be lost. The lead agency has a role in ensuring that as programming adapts to new funding requirements and that partners are operating under shared assumptions and a common theory of change. However, some shift from the original programming is to be expected as new funding streams are accessed.

6) *Identify Community Schools Accountability Drivers:* Interviews with Elev8 Oakland partners revealed that if a community school initiative is to last, there needs to be an entity advocating for adherence to the initiative's vision and funding to ensure that the vision is realized. Without a shared focus on outcomes related to the model as a whole, and each individual component of the model, the vision of an integrated and coordinated set up of supports and services is difficult to sustain over time.

INTRODUCTION

Using the Elev8 Oakland initiative as a case study, this policy brief explores challenges and opportunities for sustaining community schools and the services and supports they provide. This research focuses on best practices and challenges with sustainability in relation to the core components of the Elev8 model: 1) coordination of services; 2) academic supports; 3) school based health centers; 4) family support services; and 5) family engagement and advocacy.

Methods

Researchers conducted a review of the literature on community school sustainability. Researchers also conducted site visits at each of the five Elev8 schools, distributed a sustainability questionnaire among project coordinators, and conducted key informant interviews with project partner leaders. Site visits consisted of a tour of each school site, including the family resource centers and School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs), as well as in-person interviews with project coordinators, principals, family advocates, and SBHC directors and two focus groups with project coordinators and extended learning staff. At some sites, academic and student support volunteers and staff were also interviewed. At one site, a Coordination of Services Team (COST) meeting was observed. Project coordinators completed a questionnaire to provide information on programming and funding at each of their sites during the implementation and developing sustainability phases of funding. Key informant interviews were conducted with personnel from the lead agency, the County's health care services agency and the school district. The table below depicts the evaluation activities that were conducted to inform this brief.

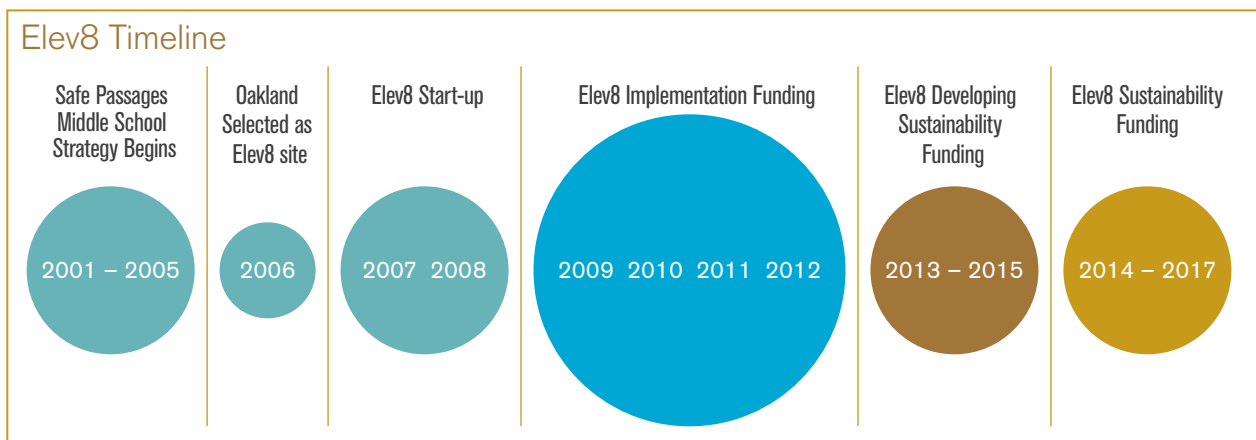| Methods	Number Conducted	Total Participants
Interviews	21	21
Focus Groups	2	8
Sustainability Questionnaire	5	5
Literature Review	N/A	

The Atlantic Philanthropies Investment in Elev8 Oakland

Prior to discussing the lessons learned from Elev8 Oakland in relation to the sustainability of community schools, it is helpful to understand its programmatic and funding history. This section provides a context for understanding the phases of investment into Elev8 Oakland.

Precursors to Elev8 Oakland: Oakland benefits from a rich network of public, private and community resources and was ready for a community schools demonstration project when the Elev8 opportunity came along. The District had a long history of partnering with community-based organizations and Alameda County to meet student and family needs, and the County had a preexisting commitment to supporting a network of school-based health centers through an annual base allocation. When the Elev8 funding opportunity arrived, Safe Passages was in its fifth year of providing coordinated support services at 15 District sites. This work in the middle schools included the core components of what would become Elev8 Oakland: project coordination; mental health services; Coordination of Services Teams (COSTs); family engagement; academic supports; and a focus on students with the highest needs.

Start Up and Implementation Funding: Beginning in the 2008-09 academic year, The Atlantic Philanthropies' investment supported the development of infrastructure and staffing to create a robust network of integrated services and supports, including:

- **School-Based Health Centers at Every Elev8 School:** Elev8 Oakland supported the start up and service costs of the SBHCs during the start up and implementation phases of funding. The District acessessed bond measure funding to support the construction of SBHCs, enabling the installation of fully equipped SBHCs, replete with medical equipment and private consultation rooms at every Elev8 middle school. Health care provider agencies were identified to deliver health care services, education, and supports. Through a separate grant to UCSF from The Atlantic Philanthropies, UCSF provided technical assistance and quality improvement at Elev8 schools.

Elev8 Timeline

Safe Passages Middle School Strategy Begins	Oakland Selected as Elev8 site	Elev8 Start-up	Elev8 Implementation Funding	Elev8 Developing Sustainability Funding	Elev8 Sustainability Funding
2001 – 2005	2006	2007 2008	2009 2010 2011 2012	2013 – 2015	2014 – 2017

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Implementation Funding Phase: Elev8 Services and Supports

School Based Health Centers
- Individual behavioral health services and supports
- Group behavioral health services
- Primary care
- Dental care
- Preventive care
- Health education

Family Advocacy
- Family Resource Center
- Housing assistance
- Legal and Tax services
- Food

- Educational services
- Case management
- Family Advocacy
- Family engagement and leadership development
- Peer support

Academic Supports
- After school activities
- Push-in/pull-out tutoring
- Summer transition services
- Saturday school

Service Coordination
- Coordination of Service Teams (COST)

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- **Family Advocate at Every Elev8 School:** Each Elev8 school was staffed with a full-time family advocate, charged with ensuring that families receive services and supports that promote greater family stability and self-sufficiency, and that families have a voice and are engaged in the school. Using an empowerment and relationship-based model, family advocates engaged families by responding to family needs and strengths and providing leadership development opportunities. This approach has moved families from recipients of service to active stakeholders in the life of the school.

- **Supports for Students with the Greatest Risk of Academic Failure:** Grant funds were allocated for after school, summer, and Saturday programming; academic supports during the regular school day and after school; and coordination of services directed to students who were at the greatest risk for academic failure based on early warning indicators.

- **School Site Project Coordinators:** Implementation funding supported project coordinators, whose role was to ensure that services and supports were integrated and coordinated. A key contribution of Elev8 Oakland is a transformed administrative structure for school leadership, which is more collaborative than hierarchical in nature. The project coordinator was integrated into the administrative team, responsible for managing partnerships and coordinating social, emotional, and academic supports. In addition, the project coordinator was responsible for convening Coordination of Services Teams (COST), which brokers services and supports for young people who are experiencing, personal, family, social or academic challenges. Throughout the District there are currently 21 schools utilizing Coordination of Services Teams (COST), including the five Elev8 schools.

- **Community Schools Coordinator at the District Level:** Implementation funding supported the placement of a district-level community schools coordinator who supported family advocates and ensured that lessons learned from Elev8 informed District planning.

Developing Sustainability (Phase 2 Funding): In 2012 the Initiative moved into a sustainability phase, where The Atlantic Philanthropies continued to support core operating and administrative expenses, but decreased its investment in direct services. This phase of funding will continue through 2015. During this period, Elev8 middle schools are developing and implementing strategies to sustain direct services and institutionalize the innovative community school programs that were developed during implementation.

Sustainability (Phase 3 Funding): The Atlantic Philanthropies and its Elev8 schools are in the process of defining a third stage of funding, which will include some funding for core operating expenses for a three year period, beginning in 2014 and continuing until 2017.

FINDINGS ON SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE LITERATURE

This section discusses best practices from a review of the literature on community schools sustainability.
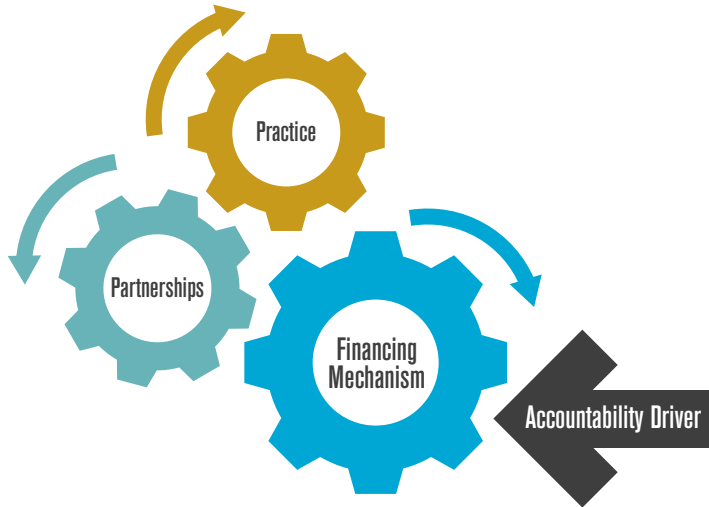
Key Findings:

- Sustainable community schools involve *partnership*s that ensure broad-based support, *practices* that lead to permanency, *financing* mechanisms that ensure long-term funding, and an accountability driver that pushes for all of the elements of sustainability.

- Community school partnerships should include a diverse range of public and private organizational leaders.

- Health and social services and supports should be integrated seamlessly into school structures and involve students, teachers, and parents.

- Resource development should target a diversity of private foundations, and local, state, and federal granting sources.

A fair amount has been written in the literature about what schools, districts and lead agencies can do to build sustainable community schools. The Finance Project (2005) provides a commonly used framework for sustainability (Hemmerich, 2012; National Center for Community Schools, 2008), which includes the following elements: 1) vision; 2) results orientation; 3) strategic financing orientation; 4) adaptability to changing conditions; 5) broad base of community support; 6) key champions; 7) strong internal systems; and 8) sustainability plan. This brief utilizes a similar but simplified frame-

work for understanding sustainability, adapted from a model used by the County health care services agency. The framework posits that for a community school approach to be sustained there must be partnerships to ensure broad-based support, practices that lead to permanency, and a *financing mechanism* to ensure long-term funding. Furthermore, an *accountability driver* must be in place to push for all of the elements of sustainability.

Partnership: The literature on sustaining successful community schools emphasizes building effective partnerships, including produc-

tive relationships among individuals in leadership positions who have the authority to make informed decisions about resources and programming (Blank, et al., 2012; Blank, et al., 2009; Harris & Wilkes, 2013). Unfortunately, the schools that most need the supports that community school models offer are also those most vulnerable to instability and leadership turnover (Béteille, et al., 2011). A Harvard Family Research Project found that Elev8 schools around the country have attempted to forestall the instability brought about with turnover in leadership by emphasizing strong relationships among diverse organizational partners (Harris & Wilkes, 2013, p.4). The literature recommends forging strong alliances with a broad range of institutions who are invested in the health of the community, including city offices, county departments, school districts, other community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations, and local businesses (Blank & Langford, 2000; Blank, et.al. 2012). The literature highlights the importance of building the capacity of local school districts to provide ongoing support for community schools, given that many policy and budgetary decisions that can determine the success of a community schools initiative are made by the school district (Blank, et.al. 2012).

Practice: The literature on sustaining community schools focuses on building partnerships and developing funding strategies, but does

not generally detail practices that promote sustainability. It is recognized, however, that to build sustainable programming, community schools should integrate services into the school structure; services should align closely with the classroom approaches; and community organizations should coordinate with teachers, parents, and students (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). Adapting programming that responds to the unique needs, culture, and goals of the individual school is essential to building ongoing support for the services and supports offered by a community school, particularly when funding streams change or disappear.

Financing: Financing community schools is a critical, but challenging component of sustainability. While a diversity of funding streams exist to fund individual services and supports offered by a community school, such as health services and academic supports, there is no dedicated funding stream partners can access to fund coordination and family engagement components. Despite these challenges, the literature on financing of community schools offers some best practices. The literature indicates that funding community schools long-term requires multiple and diverse partners, and that financing should tap both local government and federal funding streams (Blank, et al, 2009; Blank et al., 2010; Reder, 2000). A study conducted in 2010 by the Coalition for Community Schools, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, found that among 49 community schools distributed throughout the United States, on average about 75% of funding came from public sources, with approximately 26% from school districts, 20% from federal sources, 14% from state governments, 12% from city government programs, and 3% from counties. The remainder was patched together from other community and foundation supports (Blank, et al., 2010).

It is difficult for school sites to sustain community school programming after an initial infusion of funding is exhausted, because often the same people responsible for running programs are expected to develop partnerships and identify additional funding streams – tasks that tend to take lower priority and draw on divergent skill sets (Dynarski, et al., 2003). Other challenges related to sustaining community programs after initial funding ends include: fluctuations in key staff; waning enthusiasm; vagueness about what specifically needs to be sustained (e.g., the organization, the services, or the ideas behind the program); and lack of clarity on initiative ownership (Cornerstone, 2002). Even when programs are sustained, issues of fidelity to the original program design and associated outcomes can arise (McHugo, 1999). As new funding streams are identified, programming must align with new requirements and respond to the preferences, needs and constraints of the operating agency.

The literature points to a number of public funding streams that can

be accessed to pay for specific areas of service. These include 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) for out-of-school time programming, AmeriCorps for tutoring, affordable government health care coverage programs for primary health care, and mental health funding streams for behavioral health care (Blank, et al, 2009; Blank et al., 2010; Reder, 2000). Finding dedicated funding streams, however, to support the coordination of these services into a cohesive, well-functioning, seamless full service community school proves more difficult. A 2010 Coalition for Community Schools study states: "As our findings show, coordinators are the fulcrum of a community school and they have proven their value as a resource to principals, allowing school administrators to focus on instructional improvement. They have demonstrated their capacity to leverage, align, and coordinate funding streams. *Currently, there are few existing strategies that fund this key function*" (emphasis added) (Blank, et al., 2010, p. 22). Similarly, funds for family advocacy and engagement are also scarce, and there is little in the literature providing any sort of prescriptive for financing these supports. For instance, a Coalition for Community Schools resource guide dedicated to the subject of family engagement at community schools provides detailed strategies for every aspect of the work, except how to pay for it (Berg, et al., 2006).

The table below depicts some of the funding mechanisms available to sustain the core components of Elev8 community schools.[1]

	Public Grants or Reimbursements	Foundations	School Site Budget	District	County
Project Coordination			X	X	
Academic Support	X	X		X	
School-Based Health Center	X	X			X
Family Support and Advocacy		X			

1 Funding sources were identified by Elev8 staff at each of the 5 Elev8 schools. Sources are currently being accessed to sustain core Elev8 services.

FINDINGS ON SUSTAINABILITY FROM A STUDY OF THE ELEV8 INITIATIVE.

This section of the report summarizes key findings on sustainability based on lessons learned from Elev8 Oakland. Findings are organized by key Elev8 Component: Coordination; Academic Support; School Based Health; and, Family Support and Family Advocacy.
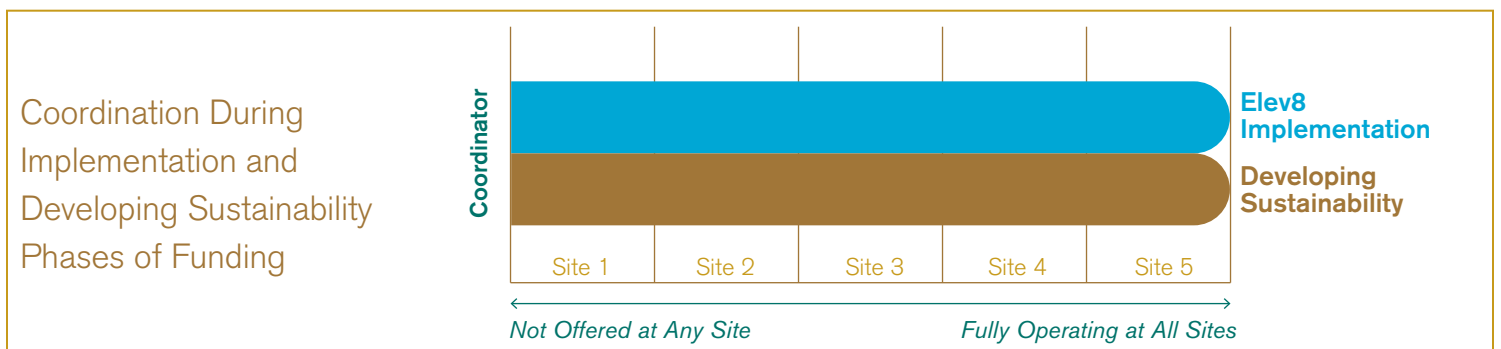
Coordination

Key Findings Related to Coordination:

■ Project coordination is an important pillar of community school success, and helps sustain each of the other components of effective community schools.

■ Successful coordination involves partnerships between the lead agency (i.e., accountability driver), the school district, and each school site principal.

■ The role of project coordinator within each school site should be to promote accountability and adherence to the community school model.

Coordination during the Sustainability Phase

While coordination is not one of the four pillars of Elev8, it is an underlying principal of the Elev8 model of full service community schools. An important school-level contribution of Elev8 is a transformed organizational structure, where the Project Coordinator works alongside the principal to manage and coordinate student and family support services. In addition, the Coordination of Services Teams (COST), convened by the Project Coordinator, have created a stranding process and structure to refer, triage, and broker services and supports to students who are experiencing challenges.

> "In COST meetings we literally are able to see how we can work with these kids and support. And we track the progress – we can say, these kids are doing good, and then here's the new kid. Every kid doesn't need counseling; not every kid needs medication. COST allows us to see what is needed to support each kid differently. COST referrals come from anywhere. All the teachers know about it and refer kids."
> – *School Principal*

Coordination During Implementation and Developing Sustainability Phases of Funding

Finally, coordination is crucial in developing and sustaining partnerships, integrating programming and practices, and identifying and acquiring long-term funding. While project coordinator positions have been funded through this year, it is unclear whether they will remain funded in the coming years.

Lessons Learned in Sustainability

Partnership

Partnering fully within the school: Community schools bring new resources, services and supports to struggling schools, which requires new systems, organizational structures, and definition of roles. A lesson learned through Elev8 Oakland is the importance of developing trusting relationships between the project coordinator and the onsite administration as well as the lead agency and the school district. Trust and mutual recognition of respective missions must develop as parties cultivate a common vision. At most Elev8 schools project staff described the relationship between the project coordinator and school principal as a trusting partnership. Principals came to rely upon the project coordinators to manage the non-instructional elements of school success, including meeting the social-emotional needs of the student body and school community. At these sites, coordinators were approaching an assistant principal role, but without the hierarchical dynamic that might exist in a traditional principal-assistant principal relationship. Through these relationships, principals and other school staff have deepened their support for community schools as an effective approach to promoting student success.

> "[You] need to make yourself a part of the school – the teachers see you invested… People needed to believe in me as a trustworthy person."
>
> *– Project Coordinator*

Practice

Coordinating services: Project coordinators are recognized as a critical staffing investment to ensure the success of community schools. In the Elev8 Oakland model, project coordinators are responsible for managing partnerships, identifying and securing additional services and supports to meet identified needs, and coordinating services and supports for students experiencing the greatest risk for academic failure. At the five Elev8 schools, coordinators work with school staff to operationalize communication systems, including the Coordination of Services Team (COST), an essential component of the Elev8 Oakland model. At COST meetings, academic and non-academic staff members come together to identify, assess, and coordinate services, and refer students in need of extra attention and support. At most sites, COST meetings convene every week or every two weeks and involve behavioral health, SBHC, the family advocate, and the principal or someone else who represents the academic needs of the student body. At some sites, extended learning staff members

participate as well. In general, the project coordinator convenes and facilitates the meeting. At several of the schools, COST has now become institutionalized, providing a structure for identifying and responding to the academic and non-academic barriers to learning.

The principals have come to rely on the project coordinators to develop and manage outside resources and leverage funding. Project coordinators' roles, consequently, have expanded and grown. Oakland stakeholders underscore the value of the funding that Elev8 has successfully leveraged.[2] At some sites, where non-Elev8 resources fund the project coordinator position, the principal has greater authority over the coordinator's role and their specific functions and duties have shifted as a result. For example, at one site, about 10-20% of the project coordinator's time is now dedicated to addressing school discipline issues. Principals confirmed that when the school site budget is funding the position, they have more authority in determining the role of the project coordinator. They also recognized the value of having an outside lead agency hiring and managing the project coordinator, noting that lead agencies have a more trusted relationship with families and communities than school sites and can select coordinators that reflect community needs. Principals also highlighted that lead agencies tend to have more time to supervise the coordinator and school leadership can benefit from the perspective of an outsider, which coordinators are likely to provide if they are not being directly supervised by the principal. Elev8 schools have demonstrated what a successful collaborative leadership structure can look like, where project partners shared in decision-making and accountability for student success.

> "Our district community school managers are overseeing a breadth of services, whereas when it was just Elev8 [dollars] the project coordinators were more narrowly managing [only] Elev8-funded services and supports; now, their roles are getting larger."
>
> *– School District Director of Community-School Partnerships*

Financing the Coordinator Position

Funding project coordination: A key challenge with the community schools model is finding dedicated funding to support the coordinator position (Blank, et al., 2010). The Elev8 schools benefit from strong relationships between project coordinators and school site principals, and a corresponding commitment to maintain the positions beyond the length of current investments. Though sites are using diverse financing mechanisms to sustain positions, most are only able to make commitments for the upcoming school year and worry that they will not be able to sustain the positions much longer. In Oakland,

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2 Please see Bright Research Group brief: Elev8: Oakland Community School Costs and Benefits: Making Dollars and Cents of the Research for a detailed discussion of leveraged funds.

> "I think that the reality is that the school is starting to recognize the need for this but… they're asking schools to take money that they could give to teachers and put it into this, and that's just a hard sell for principals, even if they recognize the value of the work."
>
> – *Project Coordinator*

each school has a large amount of discretion over its budget, and the District has created a funding category for a community schools program manager, so it is possible for school sites to fund ongoing coordination. This means, however, that the principal and School Site Council have to make difficult decisions, foregoing a literacy specialist or increasing class size, for example, in order to retain the project coordinator. In those Elev8 schools where project coordinators have made themselves indispensable, their positions are being retained by principals' budgetary decisions. However, principal turnover is high at many of these schools, and the future of project coordinators at Elev8 schools is not guaranteed.

The accountability driver for Elev8 project coordination varies by site. At the sites where the principal has become a strong advocate for the project coordinator position, the principal is in the position to re-allocate resources to sustain the position. Where that is not the case, the lead agency has taken on the position of driving community school fidelity. The school district itself is an additional accountability driver for coordination. Having district support for the COST model and the full service community school concept in general can be key for sustainability and replication. In the case of Oakland, the District has supported the creation of full service community schools, including COST at 21 school sites, including the five Elev8 schools.

Academic Support

This section summarizes findings and lessons learned in relation the academic supports based on the Elev8 Oakland model of community schools.

Key Findings Related to Academic Support

- The most effective community schools integrate academic and non-academic supports.
- Academic supports should target students most at risk of school failure.
- There a number of grant funding streams available to finance and sustain the academic support pillar of Elev8.

Elev8 Academic Support Services During the Sustainability Phase

Elev8 Oakland's academic support strategy focuses on preventing academic failure by targeting young people who are at the highest risk of academic failure based on GPA, attendance, and suspension indicators. Support services in the implementation phase included after school, Saturday school, summer transition, and, toward the end of implementation funding, academic tutoring throughout the school day. Services have been sustained to varying degrees in the developing sustainability phase of funding, as shown below.

Lessons Learned in Sustainability

Partnership

For school site staff and principals, the value of the Elev8 academic supports was that they were coordinated with other academic programs and resources and were targeted to students with the greatest risk for academic failure. Full service community schools

Elev8 Oakland Academic Supports during Implementation and Developing Sustainability Phases
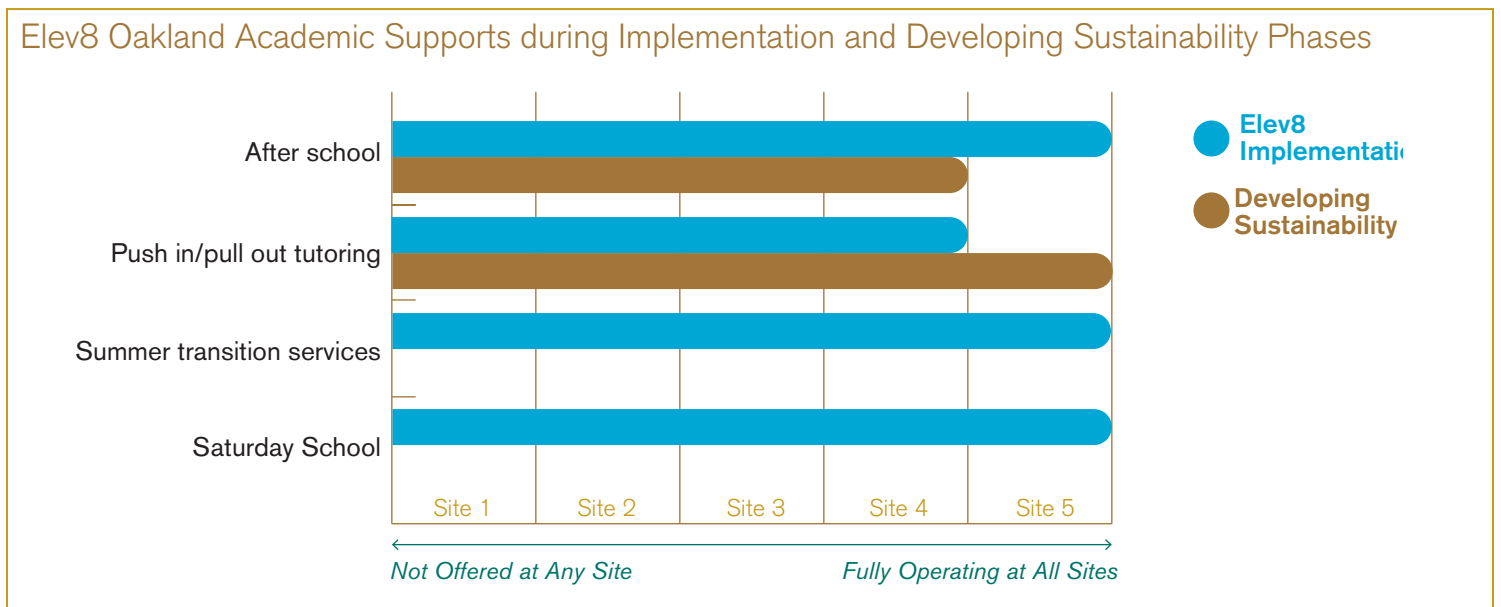
provide more than just enhanced academic supports. The most effective community schools coordinate academic and non-academic services, and academic personnel partner with health and social service providers to match individual student and family needs. For example, at some of the Elev8 Oakland sites, members of the extended-learning academic support team, including AmeriCorps members, participate in weekly COST meetings to review individual student needs, identify appropriate health and social services and supports, and coordinate referrals.

Practice

Targeting services to students at greatest risk: Interviews with principals, project coordinators and extended learning personnel revealed two key academic support practices that promote long-term sustainability. First, the Elev8 Oakland model of targeting supports to the highest need students responded to a gap in programming at many Elev8 schools. Studies of the impact of extended learning programs reveal that many serve predominantly students who are already academically engaged and recommend that extended learning programs target those students at risk of school failure (Gardner, et al., 2009). Programs that encourage the success of the most at-risk students are likely to receive ongoing funding support from both external and internal sources.

Financing

Elev8 Oakland sites are sustaining academic support services through a combination of local, state, federal, and private grant dollars. Academic support services benefit from dedicated funding streams and like school based health centers, are a core Elev8 pillar that have a strong chance of continuing beyond current investments. To continue to provide academic supports, the lead agency has garnered resources from state, federal and local sources, such as the Americorps National Service program and the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, successfully making the case to additional funders of the need for and value of academic supports that target the highest need students. An additional financing strategy observed at two Elev8

schools is transitioning academic support services to other community-based partners. At some of the sites, community partners who were operating at after school enrichment programs alongside Elev8 have sustained or expanded their offerings.

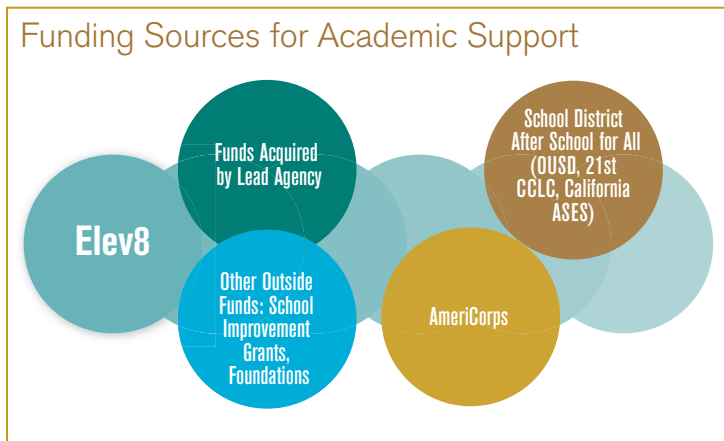## School Based Health Center (SBHC)

Key findings related to SBHCs

▌Building Elev8 SBHCs required an initial investment in infrastructure, secured by the school district, but has led to long term sustainability

▌Oakland SBHCs benefit from a sustainable financing mechanism that includes reimbursements from public programs and a County base allocation.

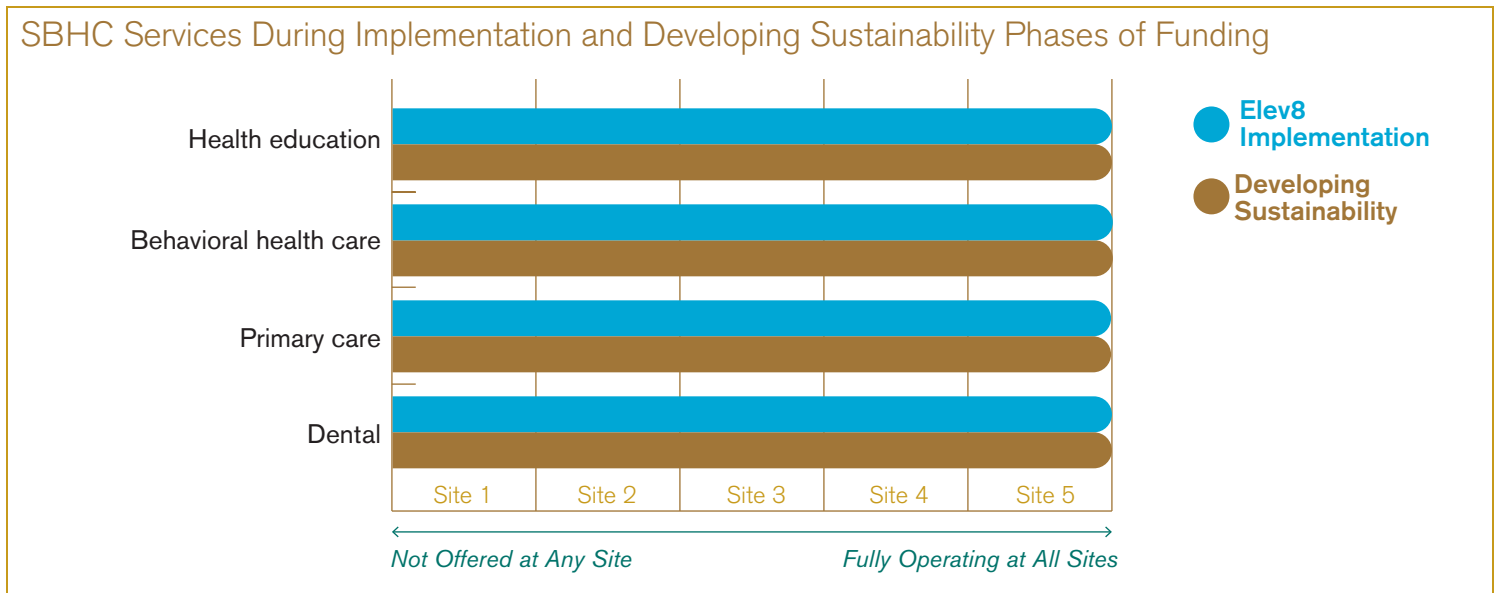▌Community-based service provision at the SBHCs ensures cultural competency and program flexibility.

SBHCs during the Sustainability Phase

The start-up phase of Elev8 resulted in the creation of full-service school-based health centers at each site. During this phase, facilities were identified and, in most cases, renovated before any services could be delivered. Developing SBHC infrastructure was capital-intensive, requiring considerable resources from multiple sources, including: the County health care services agency, which began developing SBHCs in some schools prior to Elev8 initiative; the Atlantic Philanthropies grant, which funded start up and programming costs up front; and the school district. The school district allocated over $6 million from a local bond (Measure B) and state modernization funding to support the development of SBHCs at Elev8 schools. For the most part, the physical and dental exam rooms at Elev8 SBHCs are indistinguishable from those one would see in a private sector pediatrician or dental office.

> "As we are talking about school reform, we are seeing that mental and physical health is now a part of that conversation. When kids are coming to school not ready to learn, sometimes it's because of a health issue that is not managed. We help ensure that they come into the classroom ready to learn."
>
> *– SBHC Coordinator*

Once built, the SBHCs became places for students to access first aid, preventative care, dental services, mental health, obesity prevention, and other primary care services. SBHC services have been sustained during the current phase of funding because: 1) the investment in construction infrastructure has already been made; 2) the health care provider agencies are qualified to draw down reimbursements from affordable health care and mental health care coverage programs; 3) Elev8 schools benefit from County and District support of SBHCs;

Funding Sources for Academic Support

Elev8

Funds Acquired by Lead Agency

Other Outside Funds: School Improvement Grants, Foundations

AmeriCorps

School District After School for All (OUSD, 21st CCLC, California ASES)

SBHC Services During Implementation and Developing Sustainability Phases of Funding

4) the County health care services agency supplements the cost of services for those who do not qualify for state health and mental health care affordable coverage programs and, 5) SBHCs in Alameda County are federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), enabling a higher reimbursement for services.

Lessons Learned in Sustainability

Partnership

Working with community-based agencies: Effective partnerships are essential to the administration of the SBHCs. The health provider lead agencies staff the SBHCs with nurse practitioners who can conduct examinations and physician assistants who can write prescriptions. These agencies are generally local agencies that also operate medical clinics in the neighborhoods where the Elev8 schools are located. This model, as opposed to a model where health services are delivered directly by the county health department or a district-led health division, has enabled a greater degree of cultural currency, as well as flexibility in meeting the needs of the school community. A local university has offered dental services at some Elev8 schools. Additional community partners provide behavioral health services at the SBHCs in coordination with the health provider lead agencies. Some of the sites have accommodated behavioral health providers from the County, as well.

Practice

The Elev8 Oakland SBHCs have been effective at connecting SBHC services and supports and the value of healthy families and communities to the goals and priorities of the schools. One strategy has been to expand the types of services and supports offered beyond traditional health care services. For example, at one site, the SBHC has created a support group for African American girls to foster positive peer relations.

SBHC benefit from strong principal support because they are making the case for the connection between meeting the primary care and behavioral health needs of students and families and academic success. In a conventional school setting, health can be an afterthought. But through the community school lens, health is recognized as a critical factor in getting kids to school and ensuring that they are able to learn when they are there. Fully functional SBHCs at the Elev8 schools have driven a shift at these schools from conventional to holistic educational institutions. One principal explained, "If you can keep kids healthy, it's critical. If you have a health center you don't need a nurse… It's instant access."

Financing Mechanism

Drawing down public funding: SBHCs are one of the most sustainable components of the Elev8 model in Oakland as maintaining services does not rely on the school site budget. Engaging the local health department as a partner means that SBHCs benefit from a County allocation of $100,000 annually. This base allocation has ensured that SBHCs can serve all students regardless of insurance status. There are various external financing sources that can be leveraged, including reimbursed services. Because the populations served at these sites are overwhelmingly low-income, each site has drawn down reimbursements through billing public healthcare funding streams. Not all of the children and families receiving services qualify for these reimbursements, however, due to immigration status or other obstacles. In these cases, County health care services agency funds have been accessed to cover the cost of

> "My role is to help parents have a voice and be active in the school…it comes from a place of helping people find *their own power*; they make a difference; parents can run the parent center; my role is building leadership…I don't want people to feel like they need me to make things happen. I feel like it's an empowerment model."
>
> *— Elev8 Family Advocate*

serving those patients. Finally, the health provider lead agencies match County funds and have been resourceful in obtaining additional outside grants to help ensure ongoing delivery of care at the Elev8 campuses. The financing mechanisms for SBHCs are strong and represent effective collaboration among multiple public and private parties locally. Elev8 Oakland has benefitted from the commitment of the County, which has served to drive accountability and ongoing support. As a result, SBHCs in Alameda County are in the strongest position of all the Elev8 pillars to be sustained beyond The Atlantic Philanthropies' Elev8 investments.

Family Support and Family Advocacy

This section describes the lessons learned in relation to sustainability for family support and family advocacy provided by Elev8. Under the Elev8 Oakland model, Family Support and Family Advocacy are two distinct pillars, though in practice they are implemented alongside each other.

Key Findings Related to Family Support and Family Advocacy

- Partnerships with community-based organizations help sustain family support services.

- Meeting families' basic needs sets the stage for advocacy and leadership development.

- Family advocacy is most sustainable when it develops the capacity of family members to self-advocate.

- Family members can become effective accountability drivers of the full service community school model.

- There are few sustainable sources of funds to support the family advocate position or the services that this position provides.

Elev8 Family Support during the Sustainability Phase

Part of the Elev8 Oakland model was the deployment of a full-time family advocate for each Elev8 site. Each school dedicated a physical location for the family resource center, which provides a welcoming space for families to drop in and connect with the school community, as well as a space for the family advocate to work. Responsibilities of the family advocate include relationship building with families in need, assessing the needs of the families and bringing in resources to meet those needs. During the implementation phase supports included free tax clinics, legal services, case management, food distribution, adult education, employment assistance, peer support, recreation, fitness, and benefits eligibility/enrollment.

Family Supports and Advocacy during Implementation and Developing Sustainability Phases of Funding
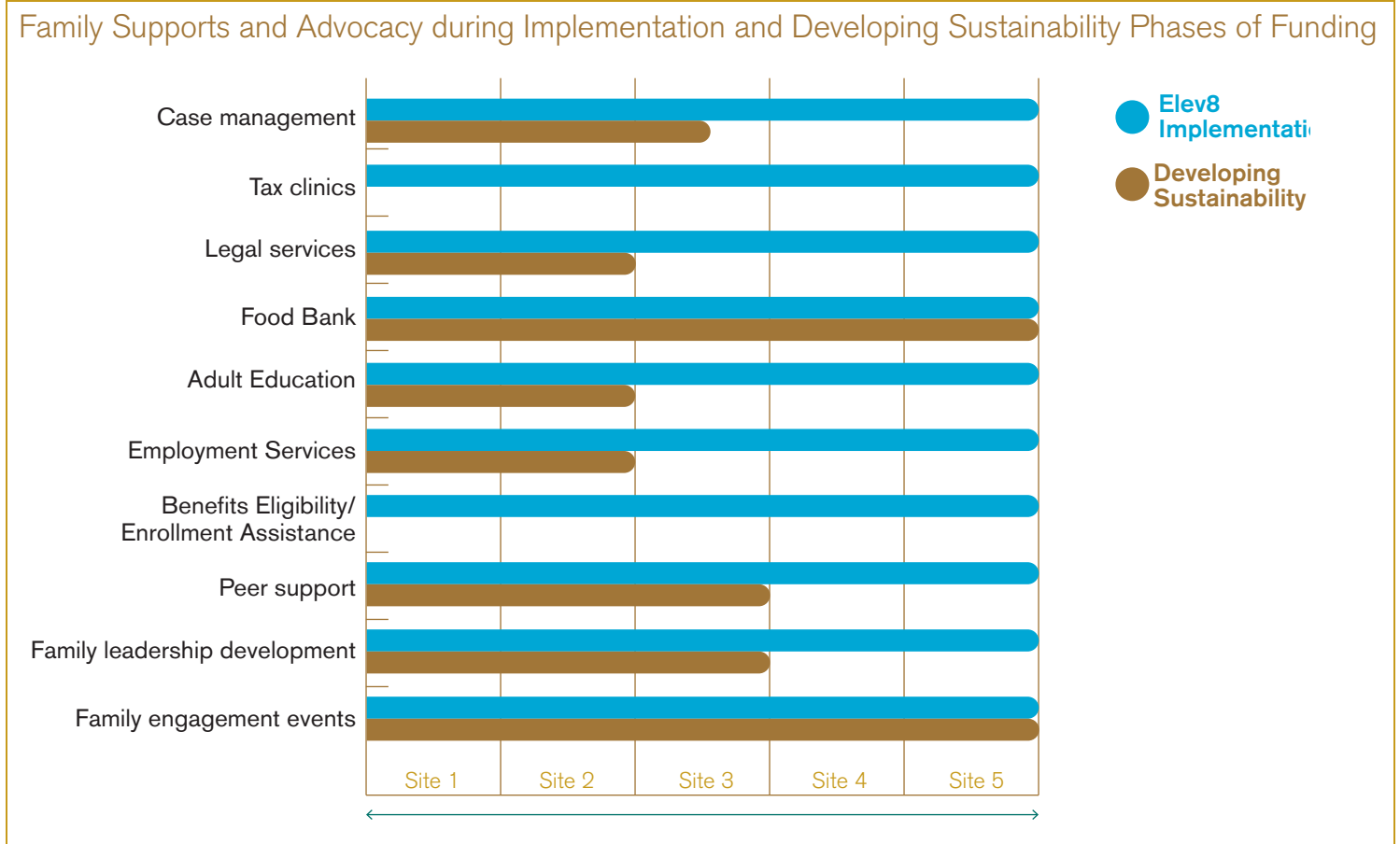
Lessons Learned in Sustainability

Partnership:

Like project coordinators, family advocates have generated support for the family support and family advocacy Elev8 pillars by forming partnerships with school staff and families and bringing needed resources to low-income fami-

> "Our thinking and our model was meeting parents where they are; meet families' basic needs first. Then, a parent can move onto supporting their child's education."
>
> *– Executive Director, Safe Passages*

lies. During the implementation phase of funding, family advocates forged partnerships with community-based agencies that offer on-site services corresponding to community need. Some of these partnerships were built with Elev8 implementation funds, while others required no funding at all. Absent ongoing funding, Elev8 schools are sustaining many of the core supports that were garnered during the implementation phase on the strength of their relationships.

Practice:

Family Engagement and Support

A core contribution of the Elev8 model is a relationship-based approach to engaging families, which has resulted in strengthened partnerships with families and stronger connections between families. This approach focuses on engaging families one-on-one, helping to identify and meet their self-identified needs, and creating opportunities for families to get to know each other and provide each other with peer support. At Elev8 schools where the family advocate position has been maintained, family resource centers remain centers of community and support for families and this culturally competent approach to family engagement is being sustained. On any weekday morning at one Elev8 site, for example, African American and Latino mothers, fathers, family members and grandparents can be found sharing food, advice, resources and information.

The family advocate has a complex set of responsibilities, the most primary of which is to help families meet their basic needs, including securing food, housing, and employment. Other responsibilities entail building families' capacity as leaders in the school and community. This includes educating families about the school system, community resources, student support services, and their role as leaders in the school. Safe Passages uses an empowerment model to partnering with families. By focusing first on basic needs, parents can become more self-sufficient and stable, better positioning them to engage in their children's education. Meeting basic needs is an engagement strategy, but also positions parents for self-advocacy and leadership responsibilities.

Family Advocacy

Under the Elev8 Oakland model, family advocacy is a set of strategies designed to empower families, increase their comfort navigating school systems, and amplify their voice in school operations and decision-making. Many of the components of family engagement and advocacy have been sustained during the current phase of funding. What the interviews revealed, however, is that while partnering with organizations unaffiliated with the community school initiative to fund the family advocate position can support sustainability, there is a risk of losing fidelity to the Elev8 community school model. As one Project Coordinator explained about having a family advocate supported by a partner organization, "We didn't have that model of family engagement; it was charity, not empowerment. It had to do with who was the family advocate."

> "Our parents have been bringing other parents in as well…they will hold it…I believe there has been a cultural shift… from this being a ghost town for parents, to parents are here enriching themselves, being part of the garden, finding professional success."
>
> *– Elev8 Family Advocate*

Empowering families, in and of itself, helps to support sustainability, because strong, confident and skillful family members have greater capacity to support the schools and the school community, thereby helping to fulfill the mission of the Elev8 initiative. At some sites, families have organized to advocate for policy changes at the schools, or have developed parent-teacher organizations for the first time in the school's recent history. At most sites, families use the family resource centers as places to gather casually for coffee, and as a result, have formed peer support networks, which have become highly sustainable mechanisms for family engagement.[3]

Financing Mechanism

Unlike the diversities of funding for SBHC or academic support services, there are few funding streams to support the family advocate position or the services that this position provides. Because in the Elev8 model the family advocate holds up two of the four pillars, when there is no funding for this position it endangers not one but two aspects of the model. Elev8 schools are blending funding to sustain the family advocate position, though two Elev8 schools no longer have family advocate positions and the future of the current positions for the next school year is uncertain. Others have a part-time parent coordinator or family liaison paid for through school site budgets or outside funds, and their role is substantively smaller then that of the full time family advocate. So, while the Elev8 school communi-

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3 Please see Bright Research Group brief: Youth and Family Perspectives on Community Schools for a discussion of family views on peer support and advocacy resulting from Elev8 Oakland.

ties continue to value family support, sustaining the Elev8 approach to family engagement, support and advocacy has proven difficult. However, as families become empowered and active stakeholders in the life of the school, they are making the case for sustained investment in family engagement, support and advocacy services. It has become clear that to some extent families themselves have become the accountability drivers for family voice at their school sites.

DISCUSSION

In order to coordinate and sustain each of Elev8's four pillars, this research has demonstrated the importance of building lasting, trusting, and diverse partnerships, which can continue once an initial investment is exhausted. Furthermore, this study in Elev8 Oakland's sustainability suggests that while project coordinators and family advocates play critical roles in achieving the vision of community schools, the absence of dedicated and easily accessed funding streams poses a significant threat to the sustainability of the Elev8 model of community schools. Having "central-office capacity," as Blank (2012) suggests, is critical to the sustainability of a full service community school. One of the ways that long-term institutional support Elev8 Oakland has been reinforced is by funding a district-level staff person to work with the lead agencies at sites implementing a community school effort.

Multiple funding streams must be accessed for all of the elements of the model to be maintained. Furthermore, a key finding of this research is that there needs to be an accountability driver for every piece of the model. In other words, there should be someone who holds a sense of responsibility for adhering to the principles and practices of community schools and for achieving the outcomes associated with each pillar of the full service community school. The accountability driver will advocate for funding, staffing and coordination among partners and adherence to practices and partnerships that are at the center of the Elev8 vision of community schools.

Full service community schools have the opportunity to transform low-income schools so that they are more capable of addressing the academic and non-academic needs of students. In Oakland, Elev8 has transformed the organizational and leadership structure of the partic-

ipating schools by instituting the COST process, delivering health and social services to students and their caregivers, and empowering families through culturally responsive family engagement strategies. Efforts to continue the Elev8 model and other community schools models should build upon the lessons learned from Elev8 Oakland as partners work to sustain its core contributions.

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