Becoming a Community School:
A Study of Oakland Unified School District
Community School Implementation, 2015-2016

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INTRODUCTION

Given the pernicious role of poverty in students' life and learning outcomes, educators continue to explore strategies for improving student achievement that address the needs of the whole child, beyond academic instruction alone. To this end, the full service community school (FSCS) model represents an expanded vision of what schools are, who they include, and what they are responsible for. Community schools may be viewed as one strategy among many school reform efforts nationwide, from pushes for smaller schools to more centralized (or de-centralized) authority to many other reforms. Since 2012, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has been engaged in the process of becoming a "full service community schools district" and transforming its schools into community schools. With the support of numerous partners—including the City of Oakland, the County of Alameda, health providers, myriad community groups, and community-based organizations serving Oakland's children and youth—and substantive philanthropic and public investment, OUSD community schools have expanded their reach. Currently, in school year 2016-17, the majority of OUSD high schools are considered community schools, and the district continues to expand the number of elementary and middle school community schools. In all, approximately one-third of OUSD students attend community schools.[1]

Since 2014, OUSD has partnered with the Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University (Gardner Center) to support OUSD's efforts to assess, enhance, and scale their community schools work. We began by working with the district to develop a System Strategy Map to articulate the district's goals, desired outcomes, and key elements of the community school initiative.[2] Our first year of research tested this theory of action by identifying key programmatic and organizational elements of community schools at mature sites, as well as initial trends in student outcomes.[3] This report presents findings from the second year of our research collaboration (SY2015-16) which focused on three primary areas: 1) the role of the district in supporting community school implementation; 2) the experience of newer community school sites, as well as district staff, to better understand the process by which schools become community schools; and 3) understanding the expanding reach of community school implementation in OUSD as well as the relationship between community school participation and student outcomes through analysis of available administrative data.

KEY FINDINGS

- District staff put multiple strategies into practice to facilitate quality community school implementation and adaptation to local school context. These strategies included engaging with community school managers, principals, and partners to set standards of practice, offer tools and resources, foster professional learning communities, and provide coaching or supervisory support.

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[1] Based on 2014-15 administrative data.
[2] Throughout this text, we often refer to "the district"; in most cases, this means the Department of Community Services and Student Supports, which oversees most student support services, community partnerships, and the community schools initiative. When discussing interactions between CSSS and other district departments and offices, we note this distinction.
[3] For full report and knowledge briefs, see https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/oakland-unified-school-district-community-schools-understanding-implementation-efforts

- School and partner staff are laying the groundwork for a collaborative culture by cultivating trusting relationships, sharing leadership, and implementing new structures and practices.

- By developing a shared vision, aligning partner resources to mutual goals, and continually assessing progress, school leaders are facilitating the organizational transformation needed to sustain the community schools initiative.

- OUSD community schools are demonstrating desirable trends in student outcomes including attendance, chronic absence, suspensions, and high school readiness.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS MODEL

Inequalities in educational outcomes and opportunities are of paramount concern to policymakers, educators, and researchers (Rothstein, 2004; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Reardon, 2011, Carter & Welner, 2013). In recent years, community schools have gained traction nationwide as a strategy for addressing persistent inequalities.[4] A growing body of research suggests that community schools, or elements of community schools, can play a role in supporting improved student outcomes (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Anderson-Moore, & Emig, 2014; Biag & Castrechini, 2014; Durham & Connolly, 2016). At the same time, there is relatively limited research examining what makes for effective community school implementation.[5] This study, in addition to illuminating community school efforts in Oakland, aims to contribute to discussions in the broader field about the organizational capacities that a community school must develop in order to facilitate the successful execution of its new role and responsibilities.

The community school model in Oakland has, at its core, an emphasis on redressing inequality in the district, as well as a commitment to removing barriers to learning and enhancing and expanding opportunities for learning so that all students can graduate college-, career-, and community-ready. Oakland is home to one of the most demographically diverse populations in the country, yet its children face considerable disparities in life opportunities and outcomes. Those born in some neighborhoods are, for example, much more likely to suffer from poor nutrition, be subject to violence, and lack adequate healthcare throughout their life.[6] The community schools initiative in Oakland emerged as a district strategy to redress this systemic inequality. Through partnerships across the district, OUSD community schools provide coordinated services and programs for students and their families, ranging from health and wellness (including mental and behavioral health), expanded learning (including summer, afterschool, and academic supports), and family engagement (including family resources). In addition to offering these programmatic elements, the district encourages community schools to develop new structures, practices, and strategies meant to integrate and align services and supports with each school's academic mission. The district offers standards of practice in strategic partnerships, collaborative leadership, and coordination of student services teams (COST). Additionally, they are working

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[4] See, for example, efforts in New York City and Philadelphia to adopt the community schools approach.
[5] Notable exceptions include Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Richardson, 2009; Rao, 2013; and Sanders, 2015.
[6] Compared to a white child of the affluent Oakland Hills, an African-American child born in West Oakland is 7 times more likely to be born into poverty, 4 times less likely to read at grade level by grade 4, and 5.6 times more likely to drop out of school. Additionally, as an adult that same African-American child will be at least twice as likely to die of heart disease, stroke, or cancer (Alameda, 2008).

with school sites to support use of data for continuous improvement. The enclosed System Strategy Map (Appendix A) illustrates the key elements of OUSD community schools implementation along with desired outcomes and long-term goals.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

The research findings presented below, from this second year of our research partnership, aim to improve our understanding of how district-wide community school implementation supports (or hinders) school capacity to bolster student learning. Specifically, we are interested in how schools navigate the organizational transformation that occurs as they grapple with the increased functions and responsibilities of serving the whole child, while keeping a keen focus on academics. The findings presented in this report correspond to research questions developed jointly with OUSD. This study sought to understand:

> (1) How do district-level practices and policies support and align with site-level implementation?

> (2) What are the experiences of new community school sites in implementing key organizational structures of the community school model (e.g., collaborative leadership, partnerships)?

> (3) How are student- and school-level outcomes associated with the implementation of key FSCS design elements (e.g., programs, services, and supports)?

In order to answer these questions, we designed a mixed methods study, including both qualitative interviews with school and district staff, and quantitative analysis of student administrative data. In March and April of 2016, we conducted a total of 16 interviews: 12 with principals and community school managers at six sample sites, as well as four with district personnel involved in district community schools operations. The six sample sites included both middle and elementary schools, and represented a range of new and mature community schools. In addition, we analyzed student-level quantitative administrative data. For a full explanation of research methods, please see Appendix B.

In presenting our findings below, we draw upon the Four Capacities of Community Schools (4C's) framework, developed by Children's Aid Society (Lubell, 2011). The 4Cs—comprehensiveness, coherence, collaboration, and commitment—refer to four organizational capacities community schools develop that are critical to implementation. We believe these concepts both encompass the key elements of OUSD's FSCS model described above, and further our understanding of successful and adaptive community school implementation. In the sections below, we describe each of these concepts, drawing from the Children's Aid Society definitions, and bolstering them with additional literature as relevant. Furthermore, we discuss how each capacity manifests at the district, school setting, and, where relevant, individual student levels. This tri-level framework is helpful as we aim to better understand not just community school implementation at school sites, but the importance of being a community schools district, and what it all means for students.[7] By

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[7] The Gardner Center often employs a "tri-level lens," based in a long-standing systems view of education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These three levels- district (system), school site (setting), and student (individual) are interdependent and dynamic. Changes that occur at one level can have effects in another.

organizing our findings this way, we hope to highlight the interconnectedness of these capacities, as well as their interaction between and across distinct levels.

FINDINGS

In the sections below, we outline the numerous strategies the district and community school sites are engaging to implement and sustain the community schools work. We frame these strategies in terms of their contributions to building critical community school capacities: comprehensiveness, collaboration, coherence, and commitment (Lubell, 2011). While each of the community schools in this study fell along various points of the spectrum—ranging from "emerging" to "mature"—all were involved in using promising practices to build critical capacities in becoming community schools and, ultimately, leveraging partnerships and the broader school community to support better outcomes for students. While the community schools initiative is still in its early stages, at the end of the section we present emerging student-level trends based on analysis of available administrative data.

Comprehensively Addressing Student Barriers to Learning

The Children's Aid Society defines comprehensiveness as "a whole child developmental approach that includes conducting needs assessments and resource inventories, and implementing responsive, high quality programs" (Lubell, 2011). Full service community schools develop the capacity to offer programs that comprehensively address the needs of the whole child (e.g., health and mental health), and are also responsive to the student's family and community context. The evidence base for the effect of student supports on student achievement, while still emerging, is promising. A foundational study by Child Trends shows that integrated student supports—services offered in partnership with community-based organizations in response to student needs—can contribute to student academic progress, such as decreases in grade retention and drop-out, and increases in attendance, math achievement, and overall GPA.[8] Additional evidence showing positive correlations between academic achievement and participation in specific services (e.g., school-based health clinics) suggests that providing an array of academic and non-academic services in a coordinated way can be an effective strategy for school and student outcomes. In sum, the ability to comprehensively address student needs is a core organizational capacity of community schools, with the anticipated results of removing barriers to learning and positively affecting student achievement.

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[8] See http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-05ISSWhitePaper1.pdf

> District Strategies for Comprehensiveness
>
> - Addressing unequal opportunities for students
> - Engaging partners at a district level to expand supports for students and families
>
> School-Site Strategies for Comprehensiveness
>
> - Assessing community strengths and needs to guide program implementation
> - Expanding high quality programs and services for students and families

District Strategies for Comprehensiveness

In this section, we outline how OUSD staff build the district's capacity to comprehensively address student barriers to success through recognizing the acute and divergent needs of students across the district, and working with community partners to expand student support services. These efforts set the foundation for school-site efforts to strengthen school-community relationships and offer high quality programs to students and families.

Addressing unequal opportunities for students.

To staff in the Department of Community Services and Student Supports (CSSS), being a community school district means recognizing the vast inequalities in students' life and learning outcomes, and working to ensure that all children have the opportunity to graduate college-, career-, and community-ready. As one district staff stated:

> *We know that our students and families are achieving inequitably…. So it's really thinking about not just equality, providing the same thing to everyone, but really meeting students and families where they're at when they come through the door. What does this particular student or family need, or what does the school community need given that they're located in this particular neighborhood that has, you know, X, Y and Z going on.*

District staff also noted that while some neighborhoods may have a multitude of needs, they also have strengths (for example, caring families, strong cultural identities) that are sometimes invisible to traditional school staff. One of the tasks of the community school work, then, is to leverage community assets as well as respond to community needs.

Engaging partners at a district level to expand supports for students and families.

OUSD students and their families are offered an expansive array of programs, services, and supports, ranging from health and mental health services to expanded learning opportunities such as afterschool and summer programs. Community partners play a critical role in delivering these services and supports. Alameda County Health Department, Kaiser Permanente, and local health agencies such as La Clinica run many of the district's school-based health centers. Numerous agencies provide counselors to school sites, and even more support behavioral health and wellness programming, including the district itself, through its restorative justice circles, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and African American Male Achievement initiative.

Community-based agencies offer extended-day programming and in-school academic resources (such as mentorships, literacy coaching, and assistant teaching) at many school sites.[9] Other partners support early childhood education, sponsor family resource centers, and offer resources like professional development for district youth workers. And finally, important partnerships with local funders, including Kaiser Permanente, The San Francisco Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, provide financing for much of this work.[10]

School-Site Strategies for Comprehensiveness

In this section, we describe how site-level staff are working to engage with families and community partners to guide and expand comprehensive school-based programs and services.

Assessing community strengths and needs to guide program implementation.
Staff at many of our sample sites described the multitude of support programs and services as, ultimately, a response to community need. For example, new community school managers (CSMs) are coached to conduct a community needs assessment within their first months on site. This needs assessment helps identify gaps in programs, as well as school and community capacity and assets. This process is particularly important to help inform new CSMs or school staff who may be unfamiliar with the school's neighborhood context. As one principal stated:

> *I think that [to be a good community school principal] you have to have a clear understanding of what community needs might be. You also have to know what you don't know, right? So I have a vision but I don't live here… In order for me to really speak to what the community needs, I have to have community voices…*

Most school staff we spoke with described the critical role of families and partner agencies in the school community. Mature community schools in our sample in particular described the important role of parents and key community partner agencies in contributing to the school's visioning and planning.

Expanding high quality programs and services for students and families.
Through leveraging partnerships and district resources, community schools were actively engaged in providing high quality programs and services for students and their families. Students at community schools have access to an array of supports and programs—most of which were mentioned above—meant to expand and enhance opportunities for learning, as well as remove barriers to learning. Additionally, most community schools have Family Resource Centers (FRCs) to provide parents a dedicated and welcoming space on campus, and host a variety of programs ranging from food assistance and literacy training to college applications and FAFSA support. Programming with and for families helps build positive school-community relationships, as well

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[9] While some community-based agencies partner with individual schools, many of the larger, far-reaching agencies also have partnerships with the district; increasingly, the district is encouraging partner agencies to participate in district-led partners' onboarding, registration, and orientation.
[10] This list is certainly not exhaustive, but rather, reflects some of the primary funders for the community schools initiative.

as support student achievement by engaging families in their children's learning and development.[11]

Collaborating Between Multiple Stakeholders to Support School Goals

The National Coalition for Community Schools defines collaboration as "the structured involvement of all stakeholders through outreach, relationship-building, and shared leadership" (Lubell, 2011). We see collaboration as the collective action of multiple stakeholders working to achieve shared goals that no one person or organization could tackle alone (Claiborne & Lawson, 2005). Collaboration requires trust, a relational capacity that, when present among the adults at a school (e.g., teachers, parents, and school leaders), has been shown to be a key ingredient of school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003). Additionally, working together toward shared goals often requires distributing leadership across a broader base of stakeholders, as well as embracing new practices to structure the shared work. In the sections below, we discuss how district staff set the conditions for collaboration by engaging community partners across the district and co-developing standards of practice which, in turn, allows staff at the school-site level to work to build trusting relationships, share leadership and decision-making, and integrate new practices to facilitate shared work.

District Strategies for Collaboration

In earlier work, we identified three components the district believes are critical to the community schools work: collaborative leadership, strategic partnerships, and coordination. These three elements, we believe, are fundamental components of a broader community school capacity of "collaboration." In the section below, we describe how the district's efforts to engage community partners and co-construct standards of practice at the district level set the foundation for collaborative work at the school-site level.

District Strategies for Collaboration

- Engaging district partners to shape shared work
- Providing standards of practice to guide partnerships at the school-site level

School-Site Strategies for Collaboration

- Building trusting relationships among school, partner, and community stakeholders
- Sharing leadership and distributing decision-making
- Coordinating and integrating structures and practices to facilitate collaboration

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[11] For a more detailed description of the programs and services that OUSD community schools provide, see 2014-15 full report and knowledge briefs: https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/oakland-unified-school-district-community-schools-understanding-implementation-efforts

Engaging district partners to shape shared work.
While most community schools throughout the country rely on partnerships with support agencies, OUSD is involved in collaborative engagement with many partners at a district (rather than individual school) level. Many of the school-site and district-wide partnerships emerged out of a year-long strategic planning process (2010-11) that included 13 thematic taskforces, and resulted in many recommendations, ultimately centering on the necessity of becoming a community school district.[12]

One of the concrete recommendations that came out of this process was a partnership workgroup that the district facilitated from 2012 to 2014. District staff convened partners from a variety of service areas and invited them to a monthly meeting where they could work closely together to think about what it means to partner with the school district, and what does the school district need to do to be a better partner with community organizations. The workgroup developed recommendations and the tools with which to support them. They also gave insight and input into an orientation process that the district now leads quarterly for new district partners. Partners also gave input into a district partner registration process, as well as thoughts and ideas about better communication and data-sharing practices between partners and the district.

After completing its mandate, the partnership workgroup no longer meets regularly; however, the district continues to engage partners in shaping its work. Recently, the district has held monthly orientation meetings for partners by topic (e.g., afterschool, mental health, literacy), at which they discuss the community schools initiative, what it means to be a district partner, and information about the contracting process. In order to facilitate the ongoing partnership work, the district hired a new partnerships coordinator who aims to ensure that school sites are connected with partners, and serves as a resource to the CSM in identifying partner organizations to fill particular school needs.

Providing standards of practice to guide partnerships at the school-site level.
In addition to the tools and practices discussed above, the district provides school sites with other resources, most implemented and administered through the CSM. These include standard MOU templates, rubrics to assess the status of a site's relationship with partner organizations, and a suggested set of practices to cultivate relationships with partners on site, such as convening monthly meetings with all school partners, and engaging with partners in cycles of inquiry about student data. According to district staff, these partnership meetings—at the district as well as site level—help get everyone on the same page. As one district staff stated, "[We're trying to model] not just at the district level how to collaborate, but we're supporting the sites in doing that too."

Essentially, these tools and practices help set a precedent—informed by school and partner stakeholders—of quality school-agency relationships. By setting these expectations, the district office establishes a norm for collaborative engagement between school and partners staff in which student support services are coordinated, leadership is shared across school and partner staff, and all adults at the school (including partners) align resources in support of concrete school goals.

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[12] A summary of strategic planning process and taskforce findings can be found here:
http://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/6/Strategic_Initiative_and_Taskforce_Overview_10.29.10.pdf

School-Site Strategies for Collaboration

The capacity to collaborate is necessary to successfully implement the work of being a community school. Across community school sites, we saw evidence of staff building a collaborative culture by cultivating trusting relationships, reconfiguring the way decisions are made and leadership is distributed, and developing new structures and practices to facilitate shared work. These elements are mutually reinforcing, and create the conditions needed for meaningful shared work toward common goals (See Diagram 1). We describe this process below.

Diagram 1
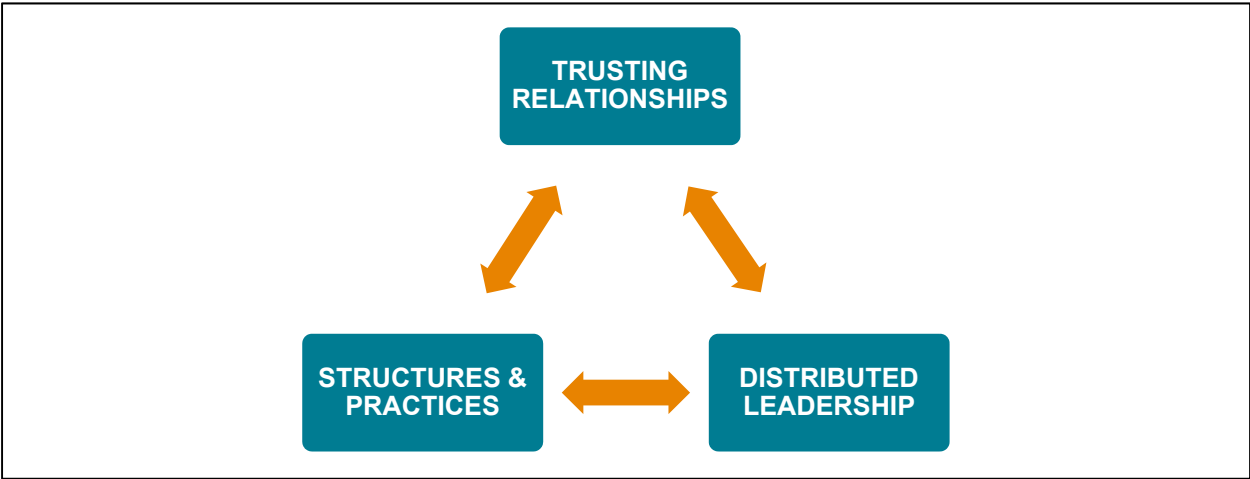
Building trusting relationships among school, partner, and community stakeholders.
Relational trust in a school context can be understood as "all parties understand one another's expectations and their own obligations, and the actions of all parties (e.g., principals, teachers, parents), validate those expectations" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Across school sites, we saw evidence of relational trust-building between community school stakeholders. At nearly every sample school, staff spoke about high levels of trust between the principal, the CSM, core partner agencies, and families. Often, staff said, it was a result of working together effectively over multiple years, understanding their respective roles, working towards common goals, communicating effectively, and being willing to adjust to accommodate each other. In the words of one principal:

> *For me, coming in and seeing that [the CSM] was working on something and being able to give her feedback and seeing her take that feedback, change what she was doing and that it improved something, I think that helped me feel like I can trust this person.*

Another administrator shared how her trust in a core partner agency was deepened when she saw the agency shift their practice to support school goals:

> *I think with [our partner], everything wasn't always as outcomes driven…. They would do community nights and I would ask them, what are the goals of this night? I need to know the outcome and the goal. And they were more like, but it just feels good, you know? And so I think they've shifted a little bit to being more outcomes driven and losing some things*

that 'feel good.' And for me, that built trust for me. Like you're willing to change your practice, you're not just here to say the school needs to do better.

Staff at multiple schools mentioned that partners and the CSM working in alignment with school goals helped generate trust. For example, staff at one school mentioned that school staff being willing to share relevant school and student data with partners as part of program assessment helped partners feel more included, and unleashed the potential of working together on one team. As one principal stated:

I felt like prior administrators just wanted to be, like you're [the partner agency], we're [the school]. And by unleashing that and just saying no, we're all here for [our school], whatever t-shirt you're wearing doesn't matter, and sharing some traditional school responsibilities with [the partner], we saw amazing things start to happen, in particular around our attendance work. Sharing data was really huge.

Additionally, at sites across the spectrum, principals were intentional about building trust with families.[13] Principals at mature sites spoke positively about the role of families as key assets for school improvement and as advocates for their children. However, at some emerging sites, building trust with families was more of a challenge—especially if there was a history of contentious relationships. In this case, school staff focused attention on repairing these relationships.

Sharing leadership and distributing decision-making.
Distributed leadership can manifest in everyday practices of schools through the ways in which leadership is stretched over all aspects of school life (e.g., daily routines and structures, actions, activities, and interactions of school-level individuals) (Spillane, 2006). Across our sample schools, we saw evidence of leadership responding to the expanded role and increased functions of the school.

At most sites, community schools required including a wider berth of stakeholders involved in school leadership and decision-making than what one often finds in traditional schools. For example, one school shifted their leadership structure to include both an instructional leadership team as well as a culture-climate leadership team, which included partners, the CSM, and key instructional staff. Another school chose to incorporate the CSM and core partners into the existing instructional leadership team, in addition to establishing other thematic teams. In the words of one principal:

What's nice is over time, we've been able to … set up more distributive leadership. And so I feel like different parts of the school and different staff members are taking big chunks of the responsibility and making decisions… Having those multiple layers of decision making bodies has been very helpful and very efficient for us.

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[13] This was typically stronger at more mature community school sites, whereas new community school sites may have had to repair damage from previously contentious relationships, which can often take time.

Some principals made a point to include parents in school decision-making—usually supported by intentional processes such as parent action teams or through parent councils. In these schools, parents gave input into school visioning, engaged in cycles of inquiry around student data, sought solutions to persistent challenges on campus (e.g., adopting programs to boost student reading levels, creating a school-wide college-going culture, developing approaches to leverage parent-teacher conferences), and were even sometimes included in school hiring decisions.[14] As one principal stated:

> So …. what does it mean to be in partnership with parents around a change process and improvement in the school[?] … I don't think when I came in, I saw the value of that. And now we've set up systems and I'm seeing that everything that is dramatically improving at this school at a fast rate is not because it's just me and the teachers, it's usually because it's me and the parents setting the expectation that like this is now something that [our school] will do.

In mature sites, principals had developed multiple lanes of decision-making and responsibility. In contrast, most principals at newly emerging community schools were still grappling with how to manage the increased responsibility. Newer principals spoke about learning how to delegate, investing in building staff capacity, and leaning on the CSM and core partners to take on increased responsibility.

Coordinating and integrating structures and practices to facilitate collaboration.
In addition to decentralizing leadership and decision-making, school staff described other structures and practices that emerged to facilitate the shared work of being a community school. These included exchanging information about each others' goals, resources, and needs; participating in joint meetings; co-planning events and activities; and even shared planning time and professional development. One CSM describes her involvement in co-planning with Family Resource Center staff:

> Everything that is happening at the Family Resource Center, I'm part of it somehow, be that with planning, be that with outreach, with creating literature, with speaking to families and vice versa…So we work together with events, we work together with workshops and things that we bring on campus for families… I share out my goals for community schools and a lot of what they do there aligns with what we're… doing.

Another CSM discusses how her principal created shared planning time for afterschool program mentors and teachers to coordinate and align their curriculum. Already, afterschool program mentors were "pushing in" to the classrooms and supporting teachers as co-advisors during advisory.

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[14] These activities were often described under the umbrella of "family engagement," but it should be noted that family engagement activities within schools and across the district often span a spectrum of involvement, ranging from more surface-level participation—such as volunteering in classrooms, fundraising, attending parent-teacher conferences, receiving services—to deeper engagement, such as involvement in school decision-making and improvement efforts. Participants at mature community school sites highlighted a shift in the way their school engaged families, from more traditional involvement to deeper contributions toward school goals.
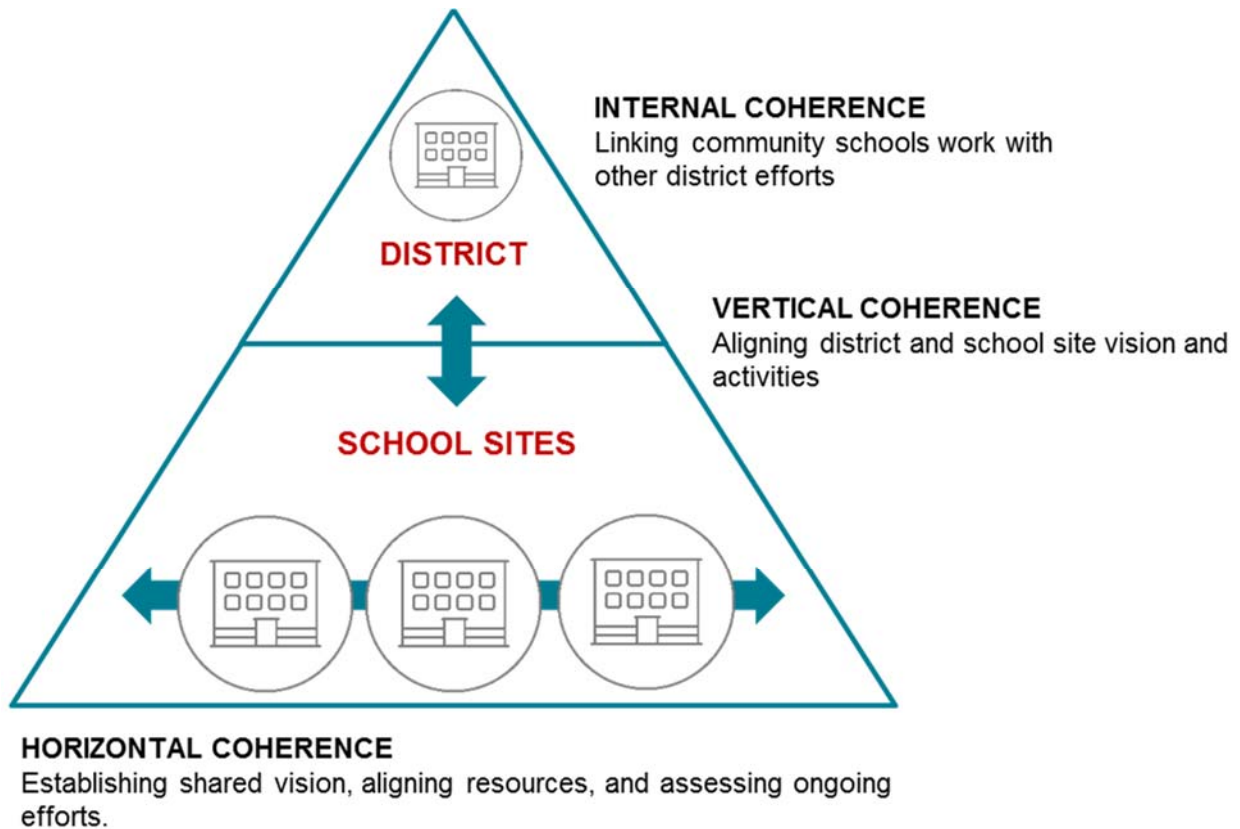
The CSM stated:

> *We heard from both the [afterschool] mentors and the teachers, that we need more common prep time and planning time, especially if we're going to be co-advisors for the advisory structure. So this year, [our principal] was really intentional about the entire school's PD calendar, holding out times for advisory and then holding times for actual mentor teacher collaboration. And then … we intentionally built in more time for mentors, especially who are pushing in during the day. They get here at 9:00am. So they're able to really have common prep with the teachers.*

Undergirding these activities is a clear understanding of common purpose and goals. Simply participating in meetings together or co-planning events are unlikely to promote meaningful collaboration. However, they provide opportunity for the types of daily interactions in which a shared agenda and understanding of the work may be forged. When taken in tandem with building trusting relationships and sharing leadership and decision-making, these structures and practices provide opportunity foster a culture of collaboration, and, ultimately, more effective work toward common goals.

Coherence of Efforts to Support Student Learning

Coherence of school and district policy is a critical capacity for successful school improvement. Coherence is achieved when partners have logically aligned and integrated their resources, activities and skills to a set of shared goals (Lubell, 2011). At the district level, coherence is imperative as competing and concurrent initiatives can deplete finite staff resources such as time, energy, and attention, interrupting successful implementation of programs and policies (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Hatch, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Malen et al., 2009). At the school-site-level, coherence is important because it helps promote collective action, clarifies roles, and promotes efficiency in the use of available skills, resources, and time. Coherence-building requires a process to develop shared goals, agreement on the standards and nature of the work, and ongoing assessment and alignment of efforts. In the section below, we discuss multiple facets of coherence-building in the OUSD community schools work, including: (1) how the district crafts internal coherence by linking the community schools work to other district efforts; (2) how the district supports vertical coherence between the district and school-site efforts by working with principals, the community school manager, and partners to provide clear standards of practice, offer coaching and/or supervisory support, and foster continuous improvement and professional learning; and (3) how school sites craft internal coherence by developing shared vision among school and community partners, and working to align and assess partner resources to support mutual goals. (See Diagram 2 below).

Diagram 2.

INTERNAL COHERENCE
Linking community schools work with other district efforts

DISTRICT

VERTICAL COHERENCE
Aligning district and school site vision and activities

SCHOOL SITES

HORIZONTAL COHERENCE
Establishing shared vision, aligning resources, and assessing ongoing efforts.

District Strategies for Coherence

- Linking community schools work with other district efforts
- Building coherence between district vision and school-site implementation by leveraging the role of the CSM
    o Supporting Community School Principals in hiring and managing CSMs
    o Supervisory Support of CSMs
    o A District-Led Professional Learning Community for CSMs

School-Site Strategies for Coherence

- Developing a shared vision, inclusive of multiple stakeholders
- Aligning partner resources toward concrete and mutual goals
- Assessing partnerships in terms of coherence with school goals

District Strategies for Coherence

In the sections below, we describe how district staff worked to align, elevate, and integrate the community schools initiative with broader district goals, as well as how they are crafting vertical

coherence between the district's community school vision and school-based implementation efforts.

Linking community schools work with other district efforts.
At any given time, large urban districts such as OUSD are juggling a range of priorities and initiatives. OUSD has put into place an organizational foundation for the community schools work within the district that allows for shared leadership of the various student and family support services, as well as more opportunities for alignment and collaboration at the district level. Early in the history of the FSCS initiative the district merged two departments—the Family and Community Office and Complementary Learning—into one. The district also created a senior-level leadership position to head the FSCS work and facilitate its coherence with the district's broader vision.

For example, the Department of Community Schools and Student Services (CSSS) has worked to integrate the Social Emotional Learning program into the academic school day through professional development collaborations with the Teaching and Learning Department. Another district staff member described efforts to frame Linked Learning and family engagement as key elements of the community schools work, rather than new and separate initiatives. Another staff member described working to promote the new district accountability system as "part of every school's journey to become a full service community school." In the words of one administrator, "We haven't sat in a silo in the community schools, but it actually has integrated and aligned other bodies of work."

That said, district administrators also described the ongoing challenge of communicating about community schools in a busy urban district. As one administrator stated:

> *There's always competing priorities and there's competing messaging, so we've gotten better about messaging for the community schools work but I think we're always continuing to work on that, so why is it important and how does it connect to—to the ultimate goal of strong academics for young people amidst 20 other initiatives and priorities and things happening.*

To these ends, the district has invested in communications work to help them describe community schools to a variety of audiences, including school principals, OUSD families, and even other district staff members.

Building coherence between district vision and school-site implementation by leveraging the role of the CSM.
District staff view their ongoing engagement with school-based CSMs as their primary link to school sites and, subsequently, a critical mechanism for cultivating coherence across sites. In OUSD, all official community school sites have a CSM.[15] According to the district, CSMs are

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[15] The CSSS Department is currently working to create a CSM position on all school sites. Some of the currently existing positions are funded by partner agencies; many are funded by the district. Regardless of funding source and organizational supervision, all CSMs are invited to participate in the CSSS's professional learning community (PLC) for CSMs, as well as take advantage of other supports offered to district-funded CSMs (e.g. coaching, technical assistance, etc).

responsible for introducing the community schools model to the school community; identifying gaps in programs, services, capacity, and assets; managing and maintaining quality of school-site partnerships; supporting students and families through coordinating services and other programs; and supporting youth, family, and staff leadership and engagement. This positions the CSM as an ambassador for the district's vision as well as a coherence-builder between the many people, programs, and practices that constitute the community schools work at the site level. Through working with principals and the CSMs themselves, the district has developed a common set of practices, as well as mechanisms for connecting the CSM to broader district initiatives. This positions the CSMs as key coherence builders, both vertically, between the district and school sites, as well as horizontally, within school sites themselves. We describe three primary ways the district engages the CSMs as coherence-builders below:

Supporting Community School Principals in Hiring and Managing CSMs
Over the last year (SY2015-16) the district began more extensive work with community school principals, including an orientation for new principals and working with them to help hire a CSM and define the CSM's work and role at their site. The district also supported these sites by screening candidates through a pre-interview, and referring successful candidates to school sites for selection. This appears to be helpful to principals not only from a logistical and/or time perspective, but also because the district staff have knowledge and experience with what to look for in a CSM. As one principal described:

> *It's really, really hard to run a school and also recruit for external positions and do the initial screening. So I think one of the benefits of having [the district] do it was [they are] holding the community school model in mind and then creating job descriptions and screening for people that are going to be well fit with their prior experience and just their kind of attitude.*

District staff mentioned sitting with principals to think about how they may distribute work and think about the role of CSMs. While the district has made a point to inform school principals and CSMs that the CSM role should be adapted based on school needs, there remain certain core responsibilities for which a CSM should be responsible. In fact, some principals at newer schools reported that they would benefit from increased conversations with district staff and additional communication around district level priorities for community schools.

Supervisory Support of CSMs
Staff from the district office engaged with CSMs themselves to provide ongoing support around the scope and nature of the work. This often included ongoing conversations between CSMs and district staff, as well as providing resources and tools used by CSMs across sites. For example, new CSMs are given a checklist to help structure their initial tasks, tools and guidelines to scaffold a school community needs assessment, rubrics to use to assess the quality of existing and prospective partnerships, and a workplan template to help identify priorities for the first year. CSMs described their regular check-ins with Community Schools Office[16] staff as an opportunity

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[16] Operating within the Community Schools and Student Services Department, the Community Schools Office supports school staff (CSMs, principals, etc.) to implement the structures and strategies of being a community school.

to receive guidance in work plan development, troubleshoot challenges, connect to district and community resources, and talk to someone who "just listened."

The specifics of the district supervision looked different at different schools, often relating to how long the CSM had been in the role. For example, one CSM who transitioned from a different role at the school described receiving support from his district supervisor in clarifying and negotiating his new role with the principal. More experienced CSMs underscored both the importance of having someone to listen and support them generally, as well as more explicit efforts at aligning partners and resources towards school and district goals. For instance, one CSM reported that monthly check-ins with her district supervisor helped her develop a systematic and inclusive process to assess whether partners were meeting school needs. Another CSM reported her supervisor has been especially good at connecting her with other district initiatives. After the CSM shared about extremely low reading proficiency levels among African American boys at her school, she learned about the district's African American Male Achievement (AAMA) initiative, with aims that include (among other things) increasing reading proficiency for African American youth in the district. Additionally, after reaching success with the AAMA initiative on campus, parents expressed an interest in supporting African American girls, so the CSM reached out to learn about a number of different initiatives and programs to support African American girls. As the CSM stated, it was "really helpful to give us the district-level view of things and help get us connected to resources."

A District-led Professional Learning Community for CSMs
Since the first cohort of community schools established in 2012, the CSSS has been holding a monthly professional learning community (PLC) for all CSMs.[17] The monthly PLC, convened and facilitated by district staff, provides another important mechanism of building a shared understanding of the scope and nature of the community schools work, as well as articulating that work within a broader district framework.

Recently, these PLCs have focused especially on connecting CSMs with broader district initiatives and priorities. Community Schools Office staff described an intentional effort to bring in other department leads from across the CSSS Department—for example, restorative justice, family engagement, health and wellness—so that CSMs have the most up-to-date information, content, and resources to inform their work. For example, one CSM reported that in a session on summer learning, CSSS staff systematically explained the district's goals regarding summer learning, provided CSMs with relevant data (e.g., participation rates, academic need) for their individual schools, and conveyed information about the district's processes, timeline, and access points for summer school participation. The organizers implemented similar professional development sessions around utilizing the COST framework, family engagement practices, and other key elements of the CSM's work.

Additionally, the PLCs provide an opportunity for CSMs to learn from each other about the scope and nature of the work, including sharing strategies for troubleshooting challenges. The PLCs usually contain some small group work, with constantly rotating groups, allowing CSMs to be

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[17] The PLC is encouraged for all CSMs in the district, including those who are funded by the district (the majority), as well as those who are funded by a partner agency.

exposed to the experience of a wide range of other school sites. Newer CSMs were especially appreciative of the opportunity to learn from each other, including more experienced CSMs. Occasionally, these exchanges resulted in site visits between CSMs.

School-Site Strategies for Coherence

Above we examined the critical role of the CSM in facilitating vertical coherence between district and school-site vision and activities. In this section, we discuss the mechanisms through which school leadership, the CSM, and partners craft horizontal coherence through establishing a shared vision, aligning resources to support that vision, and assessing ongoing efforts.

Developing a shared vision, inclusive of multiple stakeholders.
Across community school sites, principals discussed their process of establishing a shared vision across the school community. At mature community school sites, principals described engaging in a collaborative visioning process with others—usually new stakeholders, such as families or a core partner. This often took the form of regular meetings and consultations with key leaders or organizers, followed by broader engagement with the school community. One principal described hiring a community organizer as a consultant to scaffold the community visioning process. The principal, the CSM, another core partner, and the consultant met weekly to strategize and plan steps forward. At the heart of this work was a commitment to "listening to the community and having this be an inclusive process." The principal continues, "I think that resulted in the biggest… and the most effective shift in our school culture and how we engage our families." The CSM at another mature community school site describes how the principal always viewed the school as a hub for the community:

> *It wasn't just a school, but it should be a place of community where the community felt like this is ours, it's not just a school…This is the community's spot. And I think because [the principal] came in with that vision and goal, it definitely helped us grow as a school into a community school.*

In each of these sites, the inclusive vision helped cultivate a shared sense of mission and vision at the school. Additionally, by holding their school's vision against the reality of school and student data, the process helped set priorities for the work ahead.

Leaders at newer community school sites described their own process of grappling to establish a clear vision and priorities, involve school and partner staff into that vision, and/or communicate that vision to the school community. For example, one school held a meeting with partners, reviewed the district's vision for community schools, and asked partners to identify how they saw themselves contributing to the school's vision. Another site held a beginning-of-the-year retreat with partners and invited the school principal to share about the school's vision, needs, and priorities, including reviewing relevant school data. The principal reflected that this new experience helped make sure "all the partners knew where we're going as a school site and how their work aligns within our strategic plan, which was huge."

Other staff at newer community schools pointed to what they perceived as a lack of awareness around the school's vision (including what it means to be a community school). For example, one CSM stated:

> *I always ask my principal, how many of our parents would say we're a community school?... I don't know if the messaging is packaged well for kids and families to know what resources they should be able to get from a school that's a community school. I don't think the communication is very clear.*

Similar challenges can occur with partner agencies. As one CSM states:

> *I don't know that they know what that bigger goal is. …I think our partners do really hard work just because they know it's important, without knowing the bigger why behind it. But I do believe it's time for them to start knowing the bigger why.*

Aligning partner resources toward concrete and mutual goals.
Coming to a shared vision and purpose is one of the most critical aspects of policy implementation. Developing a shared understanding of the purpose and nature of the work allows staff across the school to align practices and resources (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). As these community schools aimed to develop a clear vision, priorities, and goals, staff worked to align partner and community resources in support of these goals which ranged from academic (e.g., meeting certain grade reading levels, improving math scores) to culture/climate (e.g., reducing chronic absence, decreasing suspensions).

Most schools had numerous examples of how they were working with partners towards concrete and specific goals in these areas. For example, one school chose a literacy partner that was willing to work with the school on one of that year's specific goal of improving reading scores. The program, supported in part through AmeriCorps volunteers, provided tutors in the classroom to teach reading interventions throughout the day, including pulling out students who need specialized support. Although the program required the school to do additional fundraising to cover costs, they worked with the partner to raise the money. Another school leveraged their family resource center staff (financed by a core partner agency) to help meet their attendance goal of reducing chronic absence by 10%. Through establishing an "attendance team" that included core partner staff, engaging with families, the school decreased its chronic absence rate. The attendance team diligently reviewied the district-provided data, grade by grade, week after week, and provided targeted interventions.

The CSM often played a critical role in these efforts, facilitating inclusive meetings, communicating with school staff and partners, and building relationships. Indeed, this is a clear illustration of the CSM's work as a connector at the site level, helping adults at the school see their part in the big picture and ensuring that all are working towards concrete common goals.

Assessing partnerships in terms of coherence with school goals.
Across all school sites, new and mature, staff spoke about the importance of assessing partnerships in terms of their alignment with and contribution to school goals. This is significant because it demonstrates an expectation across schools that the partner's role is to contribute to

the core goals of the school, rather than to simply provide stand-alone services. For example, one principal described working closely with a new partnership to "figure out how it aligns to our school values, what they're going to be able to put into place." Another principal explained assessing prospective partnerships:

> We made it really clear what our objectives were, like our school wide site plan, our three big rocks are literacy, safe and secure school climate, teacher effectiveness. If you're not partnering with us on these three, then this is not going to work.

Several CSMs mentioned using the quality partnerships rubric developed by the district CSSS for reference. One new CSM stated that she planned to sit down with each partner to prompt them to evaluate themselves on the rubric, asking "where do you think you are, where I or the school thinks you are, and where do we want to be?" Often, the CSM was the key person responsible for communicating expectations, including evaluation expectations, with partners.

Another CSM described her own reflections on assessing several existing, long-term partnerships as to their ability to contribute to school goals. She recalls asking herself:

> Is it making a difference? You're pulling students out of class once a week, twice a week, but we're still seeing the student is having chronic absence problems or they're not doing well academically, behaviorally, they might not be improving… I think a lot of folks might have been partners for a long time but they're not able to provide us with the information that we want. So how do we re-assess the partnership [to determine] is it working, is it a good fit?

Several other staff reflected on a strong interest in evaluating the impact of specific partnership work. However, most were still exploring ways to do this systematically. As one school principal stated:

> We don't [currently] have a way to measure their impact and so I'm interested in creating something that would help them engage the work and also let us see who has the most impact and really analyzing the why behind that.

In some cases, schools let go of those partnerships that appeared not to support school goals. For example, one site describes the difficult process of letting go of a long-time afterschool program provider. The program staff, it seemed, did not share the school's expectations for behavior during the afterschool hours. School leadership felt this undermined the intentional work the site was doing to create consistent expectations with students during the school day. In the words of the principal:

> [I]f kids are just blowing out after school and doing whatever they want, it's really hard to reinforce with those same kids the next day that they can't do that in class. So that was our biggest issue was more of the behavior expectations, being consistent and just uniform.

Despite bringing the concern to partner staff multiple times, the partner was unable to create a change. Ultimately, the school's CSM worked to find another afterschool provider that was able to align its afterschool programs more tightly with the school's behavioral and academic goals. While most differences we heard of were resolved through productive communication and follow-up, occasionally, partnerships were dissolved and replaced with others.

Commitment to Sustaining Community Schools

Any enduring school improvement initiative requires commitment from educators, leaders, and the broader community.   Sustainability of the community schools initiative requires both human and financial resources along with buy-in from key stakeholders to make permanent changes in institutional practice and arrangements (Lubell, 2011). In the sections that follow, we discuss how OUSD has worked to maintain institutional and financial resources in support of community schools, as well as how school sites are navigating the challenge of cultivating an enduring commitment.

District Strategies for Commitment

- Maintaining political will and institutional support for community schools
- Obtaining and sustaining financial resources

School-Site Strategies for Commitment

- Cultivating enduring relationships with core partner institutions
- Maintaining financial resources to sustain the CSM role

District Strategies for Commitment

Maintaining political will and institutional support for community schools.
The community schools initiative was founded under the leadership of then-superintendent Tony Smith, shortly after OUSD regained control of the district from state receivership. Since the initiative began in 2012, the district has had three superintendents. Throughout these shifts, the community schools initiative has remained a priority for the district. This may be a result of the strong foundation set by the extensive community-wide strategic planning process that gave rise to the initiative; the efforts of the district leadership and staff to align and integrate the initiative with district goals; and/or a reflection of the enduring commitment of the many partner agencies, organizations, and grantmakers who have invested deeply in this work. In any case, OUSD has thus far maintained the political will and institutional support for community schools. To continue to do so will require ongoing investment.

Obtaining and sustaining financial resources.
Over the past several years, OUSD secured millions of dollars to financially support the community schools work, much of which has been by way of third-party grants, including significant philanthropic investments, or partner in-kind contributions. This funding finances much of the direct services community schools provide, as well as some of the organizational capacities,

such as the CSM role. Efforts to braid funding streams from multiple sources, some of which traditionally have not been easy for educational institutions to access (e.g., Medi-Cal funds for school-based health services), have been key to funding the community schools work. District staff noted that this alignment of public systems has enabled leveraging of multiple funding sources and the identification of flexible dollars to support the community schools work. District staff noted that while this alignment of funding streams, for instance across the education and health domains, is key to sustaining the community school initiative, it can involve "really challenging systems questions." While increased resources have allowed the district to expand the number of community schools, sustaining funding is an ongoing challenge. One of the strategies the district has undertaken to sustain financing is to ask community school sites to contribute. For example, while the district pays the majority of the CSM's salary at first, over the four years of their grant term new community school sites are responsible for an increasing proportion of the CSM's salary from their own budgets. District staff also help principals plan and identify budgetary strategies for covering costs of the CSM.

School-Site Strategies for Commitment

Cultivating enduring relationships with core partner institutions.
Community schools thrive with long-term commitments of institutions and individuals. Actively building trusting relationships, sharing responsibilities, and working toward shared goals—as discussed above—fosters a collaborative environment that motivates long-term commitment.
In mature sites, CSMs and principals, and often key partners, had been at their school for a number of years. In these cases, these staff (and/or institutions) had built trusting relationships and shared in school responsibilities for such a long time, that the distinction between "partner" and "school" staff was often intentionally blurred. This was cultivated through a process of embracing partners, and making them feel fully part of the school's work. One Principal explained why this is important in order to foster sustainability: "I want to build a place where people are happy at work and they want to come back and they want to be able to give their all."

Preserving long-term relationships is critical because the expanded work of a community school requires full commitment. At mature community school sites especially, partners with a history of long-term work on site were exemplars of this, signaled by consistency in staffing, investment of time and resources, and a willingness to help in whatever way they can.

However, just as in urban school districts across the country, staff turnover at schools and within partner agencies is a reality that challenges long-term sustainability. Therefore, structures are important for institutionalizing practices so that work and expectations are embodied throughout the school rather than held by a single person. Principals and CSMs discussed this in terms of efforts to enable relationships beyond their own tenure, through the establishment of clear roles and expectations, and an organization-wide understanding of a collective purpose.

Relationships are also cultivated at multiple levels of school and partner organizations to preserve partnerships in spite of staff and leadership turnover. Building trusting, committed relationships takes times, and highlights why building capacity and shifting culture are so important.

Maintaining financial resources to sustain the CSM role.
In addition to enduring relationships with core partner institutions, participants discussed commitment of financial resources to sustaining funding for the CSM role. Not only does the CSM play a critical role in the ongoing operations of a community school, the longevity of staff in that role is especially important for developing long-term trusting relationships, which are key to fostering collaboration and evolving the work.

While it is evident that the CSM role is critical, school staff recognizes that limited fiscal resources means they often need to make difficult decisions between competing priorities. For example, one highly committed community school principal stated appreciation for the grant resources currently provided to pay for the CSM at her school, and noted that without these funds she may be faced with choosing between additional instructional staff or a CSM. While previously, partner agencies or district staff funded most CSM positions, in an effort to build the sustainability of the community school work and to maximized available district resources, new school-site grantees are being asked over a multi-year period to assume an increasing proportion of the cost of the CSM's position. As schools assess whether or not to apply to become community schools, they are aware of this expected financial commitment.

Student and School Outcomes

The discussion above focuses on district and school-site level strategies for community school implementation in a sample of OUSD schools. Driving these efforts is a belief that quality community school implementation will promote equity of student opportunities and outcomes by addressing barriers to learning and ultimately fostering student success. In this section, we present quantitative analysis of available administrative data to inform our understanding of the students served by OUSD community schools and the relationship between community school implementation and student outcomes.

- OUSD has increased the number of community schools and students served by community schools.
- Community schools appear to be reaching many of the students who may benefit the most.
- OUSD middle school students in community schools participate in out-of-school time programming at high rates, and this participation is associated with higher school attendance.
- Over time, OUSD community schools as well as traditional schools demonstrated desirable trends in student outcomes including attendance, chronic absence, suspensions, and high school readiness.

Increasing the number of students served by community schools.
OUSD has continued to expand the number of community schools in the district. Currently the majority of district high schools are considered community schools, and the number of elementary and middle schools continues to increase.[18] As shown in Figure 1, prior to 2011-12 there were six community schools in OUSD (funded through the Elev8 initiative). This number increased to 29 community schools as of 2015-16. As the number of community schools has increased, the number of students served by community schools has grown by more than 10,000 since the beginning of the district-wide initiative, from less than 2,500 in 2010-11 to nearly 13,000 in 2014-15. At the same time, the number of students in schools not considered community schools (i.e., traditional schools) has decreased by about 12,000 students from 2010-11 to 2014-15 (see Figure 2).

Figure 1.

Number of OUSD Community Schools Over Time

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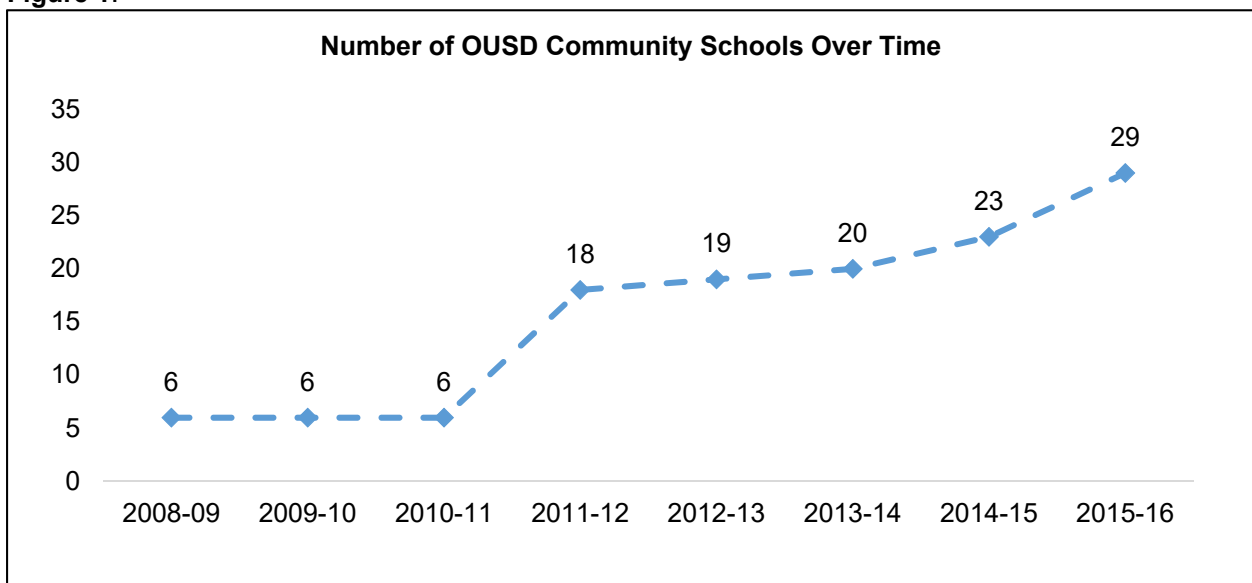
[18] Note that for the purposes of this discussion, a school is considered a community school when it has a CSM. We acknowledge that other schools that do not meet this definition may be implementing key elements of the community school model.

Figure 2.

OUSD Student Enrollment Patterns

Legend: —▲— Overall —●— Traditional —◆— Community

Data labels:
- Overall: 40,906 (2009-10), 40,732 (2010-11), 39,956 (2011-12), 39,218 (2012-13), 40,007 (2013-14), 39,524 (2014-15)
- Traditional: 38,453 (2009-10), 38,296 (2010-11), 30,754 (2011-12), 28,157 (2012-13), 28,369 (2013-14), 26,557 (2014-15)
- Community: 2,453 (2009-10), 2,436 (2010-11), 9,202 (2011-12), 11,061 (2012-13), 11,638 (2013-14), 12,967 (2014-15)
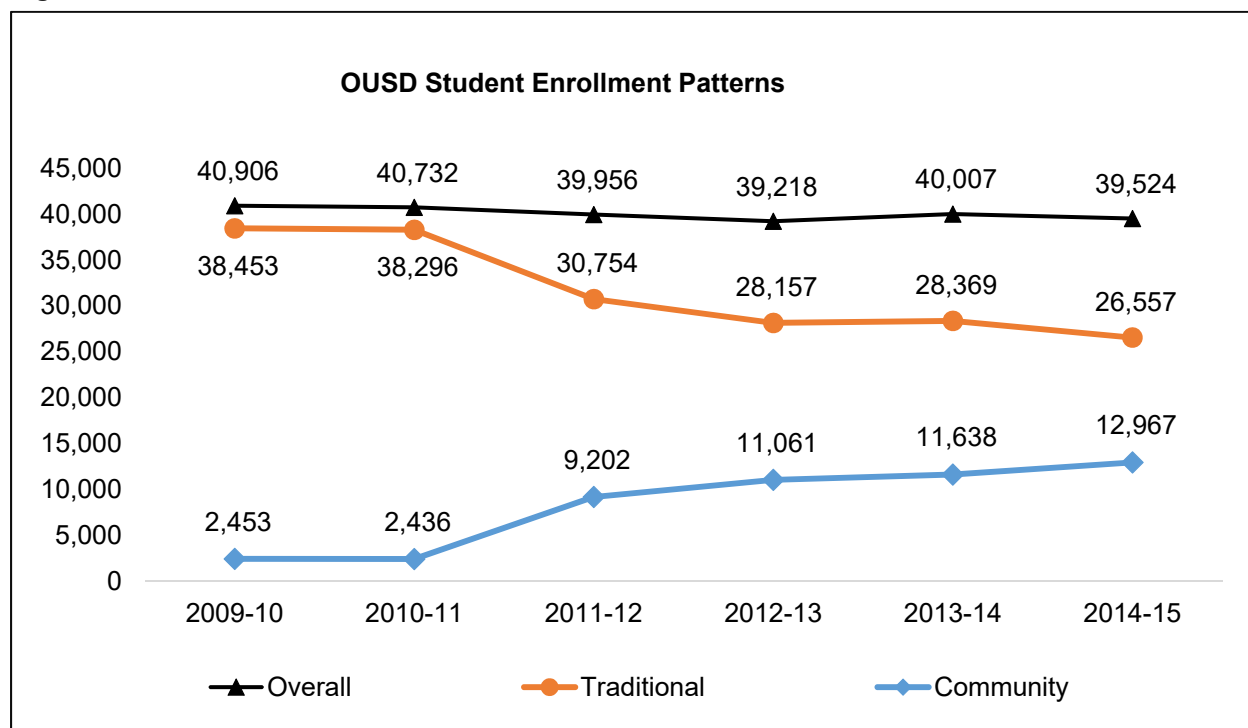
Serving students who may be likely to benefit from community schools.

Given that OUSD views community schools as a strategy for promoting equity of opportunities and outcomes, it is important to examine the extent to which these schools are serving students facing multiple barriers to learning and therefore likely to benefit from participation. As shown in Figure 3, in 2014-15 (the most recent year of data available) among OUSD middle school students: [19]

- The majority of English Language Learners (68%) attended a community school.
- The majority (57%) of those who were eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch attended a community school.
- The majority of students in foster care (54%) attended a community school.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of Latino students attended a community school.
- About 40% of African American and Asian students attended a community school.

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[19] We focus on middle school here because, as of 2014-15, nearly all high school students attended a community school while relatively few elementary school students did. Thus, neither provides enough data for a meaningful comparison of data between traditional and community schools. See Table A1 in Appendix B for a list of community schools.

Figure 3.

OUSD Middle Student Characterics by School Type, 2014-15
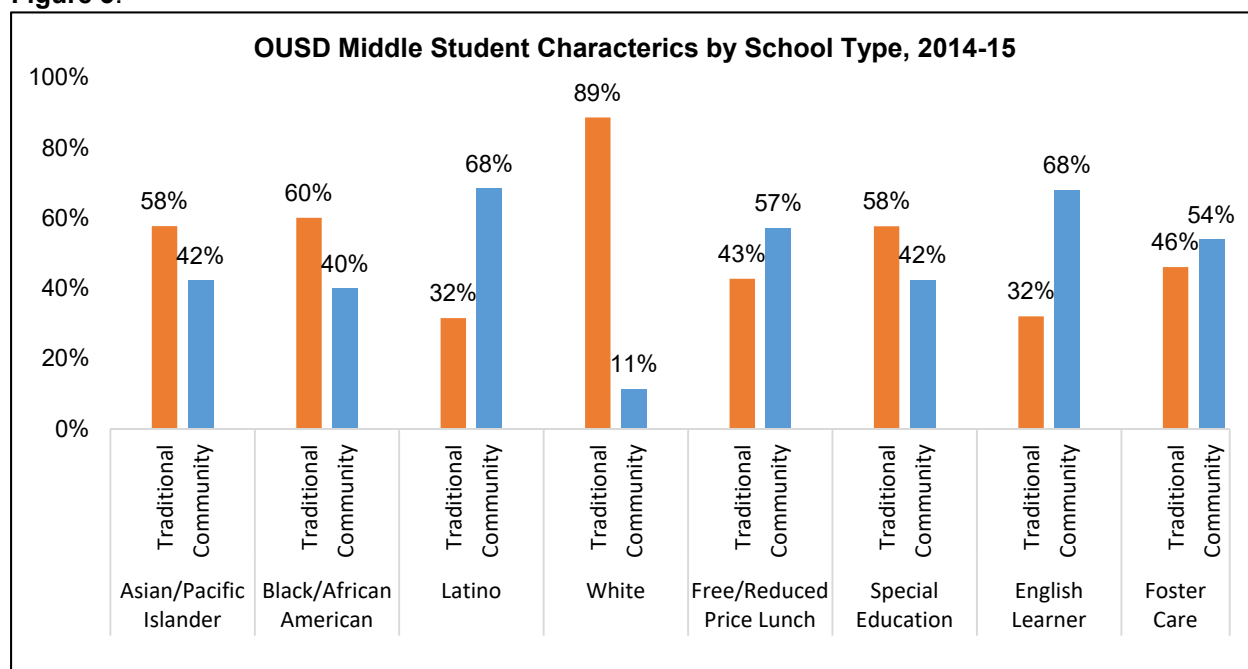
Students in community schools are more likely to participate in out-of-school time (OST) programs.

As discussed above in the sections regarding community school implementation, community schools offer comprehensive services to support students' learning, and make meaningful efforts to integrate services provided by partner organizations with other school activities. As such, we would expect student participation in programs and services to be higher in community schools than in other schools, and we may further expect the effectiveness of these services to be enhanced through more seamless integration.

Expanded learning programs are one primary strategy for providing additional academic support as well as opportunities for social emotional and physical development in community schools as well as other schools. As shown in Figure 4, nearly three-quarters (73%) of OUSD middle school students in community schools participated in OST programming in 2014-15, considerably higher than the participation rate in other schools.[20] In the section below, we explore the relationship between participation in OST and select outcomes for students in community schools.[21]

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[20]Note that over time the number of middle schools categorized as community schools has continued to increase, from 6 in 2009-10 to 13 in 2015-16, while the number of traditional middle schools has decreased from 14 to 8 over the same time span. See Appendix B for list of schools over time.

[21] We note that understanding student participation in programs and services, and the relationship between participation and student outcomes is dependent on available data. Student-level data documenting participation in out-of-school time programming is collected regularly across the district and was made available to the Gardner Center research team for this analysis. Future analyses could examine participation in health service, family engagement, restorative justice, or other services as well as patterns in participation across multiple types of services, given the availability of data.

Figure 4.

% OUSD Middle School Students Participating in OUSD Afterschool Programming
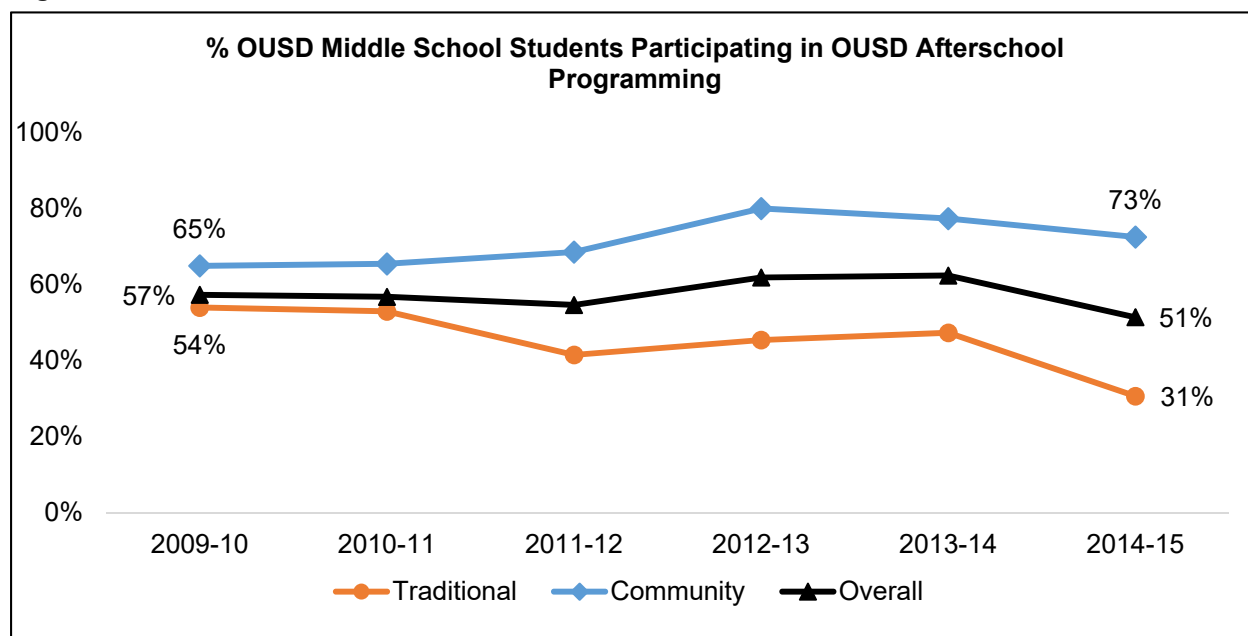
Positive associations between OST participation and school attendance.

As an initial attempt to better understand the extent to which student participation in programs and services relates to outcomes for students in community schools, we conducted statistical analysis examining the relationship between participating in OST and student school attendance, as well as the likelihood of being suspended.[22]   In an analysis including 11 OUSD middle school community schools over 3 years, we found that student participation in OST was associated with increased attendance and decreased chronic absence (even when controlling for student's attendance in the prior school year). Specifically, participating in OST was associated with a 0.7% increase in a student's school attendance rate overall (about one day per year) and a 4% decrease in the likelihood of being chronically absent.[23]   Participating in OST was not associated with any difference in the likelihood of being suspended.   These findings regarding OST participation and school attendance are promising (and statistically significant), although we note that they are associations and we cannot conclude with certainty that participating in OST caused improvements in school attendance.

Promising trends in student outcomes in community schools (and other OUSD schools) over time.

The analysis presented above aimed to better understand the relationship between participation in one element of community schools (OST) and student outcomes. We are also interested in better understanding how students in community schools are faring overall and, to the extent

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[22] As noted above, OST is the one program domain for which student-level data are currently available to examine these relationships. This longitudinal data analysis included all students in middle school community schools in school years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15, and used regression analysis to statistically control for student characteristics. (See Appendix B for discussion of research methodology.)
[23] Among students who attended OST for at least 45 days during the year, participation was associated with a 1% increase in attendance and 5.5% decrease in chronic absence.

possible, understanding whether community school strategies are making a difference for students. We begin by examining trends in student outcomes over time in community schools. For comparison, we also are interested in patterns for OUSD students not in community schools. It is important to note that these trend lines provide a picture of overall student outcomes in these schools. They do not account for differences in the student populations that community schools and other schools serve (e.g., higher rates of FRPL utilization, ELL designation, etc.), nor do they tell us whether changes over time are related to community schools implementation or some other factors such as other district policy changes or school-level programming that could influence student outcomes.

The graphs below show desirable shifts over time for key student outcomes that we hypothesize would be influenced by community school implementation, including school attendance, chronic absence and suspensions. We note that overall trends also suggest desirable shifts for students in other OUSD schools that are not community schools. Each graph includes three lines, one for middle schools that are currently community schools, one for middle schools that are not currently community schools (for comparison), as well as a line for high school community schools.[24] Figure 5 shows increases in attendance over time for students in middle school and high school community schools, as well as for other middle schools. Similarly, Figure 6 shows considerable decreases in student chronic absence over time in all three types of schools. Figure 7 shows decreases in the percentage of students suspended for all types of schools, with the most drastic decrease in middle school community schools. Further analysis of trends in suspensions by race/ethnicity shows the greatest decreases in suspensions being for African American students, in particular those in middle school community schools (see Appendix C.)[25] Again, we note that many related OUSD district and school initiatives, for example restorative justice, may have played a role in the trends seen here.

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[24] Note that we do not include a comparison for high school because all regular high schools are considered community schools, not including alternative/continuation schools. The list of schools included in each category is provided in Appendix B.

[25] In addition, both community schools and traditional middle schools show slight improvements over time in the percentage of 8th graders who are ready for high school based on a measure used by all California CORE districts that takes into account a student's GPA, attendance, and suspensions in 8th grade. (See Appendix C.)

Figure 5.

Average Attendance by %

Community School Middle School Students

Other Middle School Students

Community School High School Students

Figure 6.

Average Suspensions

Community School Middle School Students

Other Middle School Students

Community School High School Students

Figure 7.

Chronic Absence

Legend:
- —▲— Community School Middle School Student
- —●— Other Middle School Student
- —■— Community School High School Student

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Across the country, decades of reform have not adequately addressed the opportunity and achievement gap for the nation's poorest and most vulnerable students. Education reform efforts are often short-lived and one often cedes to the next (Cuban, 1990).[26] Lessons from research in the field have shown that efforts at school improvement often fail due to poor implementation, policy fragmentation and incoherence, and/or lack of broader, systemic approaches (O'Day & Smith, 2016). In Oakland, the Full Service Community Schools initiative is still early in its trajectory. At four years since the initiative's inception, the district has sustained its commitment to community schools through multiple changes in leadership, as well as expanded the number of schools to include nearly a third of all schools in the district. This collaborative research effort between OUSD and the Gardner Center offers an opportunity to follow the development of an equity-focused district reform strategy as it evolves and matures.

Educators know that meaningful reform must consist of more than simply piecemeal additions to existing practice in order to make a difference in the classroom and in students' lives (Bryk, 2010). In the case of community schools, prior research shows that services added on to school sites without intentional efforts to integrate them do not necessarily lead to high quality services and therefore, can be expected to have little effect on student outcomes (Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). Community schools must develop key organizational capacities,

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[26] Recent research on effective school and district improvement illustrates that classroom instruction is influenced by a number of mediating forces, including professional capacity of school staff, school learning climate, parent-school-community ties, and school leadership (Bryk 2010). Indeed, meaningful reform must take into consideration the implementation context, including educational histories, human and organizational capacities, and the quality of relationships of real people and places (O'Day & Smith 2016).

including the ability of partners, school leadership, and staff to work together towards shared goals (Rao, 2013; Sanders, 2015).

This current study illuminates how district and school-site leaders are navigating the challenge of developing their organizational capacities to incorporate community partners and sustain school change. Key to the full realization of the community school model—once the services, partners, and structures are in place—is a shared understanding of how the pieces fit together and the role of each in working towards the shared goals related to student success.   Among the schools we studied, we observed a spectrum on which some newly adopting community schools were working through the process of clarifying roles and expectations, and understanding how community partners could best contribute to shared goals. In other schools, principals, community school managers, and partner and school staff appeared to be further along in cultivating trust, shared goals, and understanding of their respective roles. Still others appeared to be somewhere in between.

This variability in community schools' organizational capacity underscores the pivotal role the district plays in facilitating site-level implementation. By engaging with community school managers, partners, and principals to co-construct standards of practice; offer tools, resources, and support; and cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, the district offers site-level staff needed scaffolding to navigate the shifts in roles, structures, practices, and culture as their workplaces become community schools. Subsequently, schools are better able to coordinate, integrate, and align resources in support of student learning goals. These are just a few of the salient examples of how district and school leadership approached the challenge of bringing coherence to this multi-faceted effort. As the Full Service Community Schools initiative in OUSD continues to develop, maintaining and/or expanding district supports will be critical to its success.

CONCLUSION

The first year of the OUSD-Gardner Center research partnership (2014-15) focused largely on understanding the key elements of the community school model and how they are implemented in Oakland community schools—from health services to family engagement to the community school manager and COST. This year's research (2015-16), reflected in this report, highlights not just what community school implementation in Oakland consists of, but how school-site and district leaders grapple with the challenge of developing critical human and organizational capacities needed to sustain school change and, ultimately, effect the desired student outcomes. Evidence from this study indicates that OUSD community school staff are expanding programs, services, and supports for students and families, and responding to the deep inequalities in the community. School staff are building trusting relationships and sharing leadership across a broader range of stakeholders, and fostering human and organizational capacities needed for meaningful collaboration. Furthermore, we saw evidence of school leadership working to develop a shared vision for the school and engaging with partners to ensure resources are aligned with concrete mutual goals. And finally, we also detailed the various mechanisms through which the district actively fosters collaboration and coherence-building among the many stakeholders and components involved in this work. As the district continues to scale the community school model, maintaining and expanding these efforts will be critical to effecting meaningful change for schools and students.

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Appendix A: System Strategy Map

Oakland Full Service Community Schools System Strategy Map
DRAFT

LONG TERM OUTCOMES

GOALS: To ensure that every student in Oakland: (1) comes to school ready to learn, (2) attends a school with a healthy and supportive environment, (3) receives effective instruction, and (4) graduates college, career, and community-ready.

- Every student graduates college, career, and community ready.
- Communities are healthy, safe, hopeful, and supportive.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES & STRATEGIES

STUDENT SERVICES & SUPPORTS: The school site (via school, partners, and district) offers all students access to integrated supports and services to help them learn and thrive, including health and wellness, behavioral health, expanded learning, and family engagement and support.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: Schools develop strategic partnerships that leverage resources to provide site-level supports and services to address student and school needs. Central office provides tools and resources (e.g., central training, TA, partnership rubrics) to help partners align with school goals at each site.

COORDINATION: CS Managers, Coordination of Services Teams (COST), and other school and partner staff coordinate to ensure integrated supports and services for all students. Central office provides support (e.g., PLC) for CS Managers.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP: School leadership and staff, partners, the district, students and families are engaged to support student outcomes and school improvement.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: School staff, partners, and the district use data to track student outcomes, inform planning and school goals, drive improvement, and ensure accountability. Central office provides frequent, relevant data and supports for results-oriented decisions.

CENTRAL FACTORS/CONDITIONS

New Superintendent, CORE and Common Core implementation, Community School Leadership Council, LCFF and LCAP

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

DISTRCT LEVEL
- Schools supported by district via centralized resources and systems (e.g., central onboarding for partners, PLC for CS Managers, data system).

SCHOOL LEVEL
- Improved school culture and climate.
- Resources are aligned to meet comprehensive student needs.
- Improved conditions for teaching and learning, including common core.
- Adults at the school working together.

YOUTH & FAMILY LEVEL
- Students access services and supports to help them learn.
- Students' behavior, attendance, and reading improves.
- Parents are engaged in their students' learning and the school community.
- Families access needed

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

DISTRCT LEVEL
- District resources are aligned to provide students with what they need in order to learn and thrive.

SCHOOL LEVEL
- Schools are supportive and welcoming hubs where students thrive (culture and climate for learning).
- Comprehensive student needs are met.
- Teachers are supported to provide high-quality instruction and learning opportunities.
- Adults (families, partners and school staff) lead development of safe and

YOUTH & FAMILY LEVEL
- All students access the support they need to thrive and come to school every day ready to learn.
- Continued behavior, attendance, and reading improvements, along with other academic and social-emotional indicators.
- Families and schools are partners in

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APPENDIX B: Research Methods

This report presents findings from the second year of a planned multi-year collaboration between OUSD and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, to study the district's community schools. The researchers engage in research-practice partnerships (Gutiérrez & Penuel 2014; Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013) with youth-serving organizations, school systems, and communities with the goal of conducting methodologically rigorous research that answers relevant questions posed by practitioners and policymakers. The partnership with OUSD is informed by the principles of Design-Based Implementation Research (DBIR) which aims to bring both the researcher and practitioner into collaborative and iterative cycles of inquiry about policy development and implementation (Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng, & Sabetti, 2013).[27] As such, this study was designed to support OUSD's ongoing efforts to scale full service community school implementation across the district, as well as improve policies and practices that will help all schools reach the initiative's goals.

Our first year of research consisted of co-constructing a system strategy map that captured OUSD's perception of its "theory in action" which we then tested through in-depth qualitative research at five early adopting community schools. The research identified key programmatic and organizational elements of OUSD's community school model, as well as site staffs' perceptions and experiences of how the community school model supports student, teacher, and school outcomes. Quantitative analysis of administrative data showed that school-level year-to-year student statistical trends were largely consistent with teacher and staff reports obtained during our first phase of interviews, although it is too early to conclude an association between community school interventions and aggregate student outcome trends.

This year's research has been guided by three research questions:
> (1) What are the experiences of new community school sites in implementing key organizational structures of the community school model (e.g. collaborative leadership, partnerships)?
> (2) How do district-level practices and policies support and align with site-level implementation?
> (3) How are student and school-level outcomes associated with the implementation of key FSCS design elements (e.g., programs, services, and supports)?

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[27] As Fishman and Penuel note in the 2013 Yearbook for the National Society for the Study of Education, DBIR challenges education researchers to break down barriers between sub-disciplines of educational research (e.g., sociology, anthropology, or political science) that tend to isolate those who design and study innovations within school districts or classrooms from those who study the impact and diffusion of innovations. It also aims to bring both the researcher and practitioner into collaborative and iterative cycles of inquiry about policy development and implementation "in ways that make it more likely that practitioners can adapt innovations productively to meet the needs of diverse students; and that durable research-practice partnerships can adapt and sustain innovations that make a difference."

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative Research Sample

The study draws on qualitative interviews from a sample of six newly designated OUSD community schools—three elementary schools and three middle schools. The elementary schools are largely considered "feeder schools" to each of the accompanying middle schools. Additionally, all six schools serve students who are primarily (over 95%) non-white and considered "socioeconomically disadvantaged" (94-97%). Other school and student characteristics are described below.

While all six were designated community schools at the same time, they began at various stages of maturity. That is, some schools had many of the elements of community schools prior to their official designation—for example, longstanding relationships with a key partner agency, a coordinator of student services, a robust afterschool program, a family resource center and family liaison—whereas others were fairly traditional schools prior to their designation. Thus, the sample represents a range of emerging and mature community school sites.

Table 1: OUSD Study Schools: School Profile, 2015-16

School	Level	Grade	Students Enrolled	Area	Latino	Asian[28]	African American/ Black	White	English Learners	Socio- economically Disadvantaged[29]
Alliance	Middle	6-8	371	Deep East Oakland	66%	7%	23%	2%	45%	94%
Elmhurst	Middle	6-8	371	Deep East Oakland	61%	7%	29%	1%	35%	96%
Garfield Elementary	Elementary	K-5	606	San Antonio	45%	33%	16%	2%	59%	95%
New Highland	Elementary	K-5	358	Deep East Oakland	82%	3%	13%	1%	71%	96%
RISE	Elementary	K-5	290	Deep East Oakland	65%	6%	26%	1%	53%	97%
Roosevelt Middle School	Middle	6-8	511	San Antonio	33%	44%	17%	3%	34%	97%

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[28] Includes students identifying as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Filipino.
[29] According to the definition adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE), the "socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroup" consists of students who meet either one of two criteria: 1) Neither of the student's parents has received a high school diploma; or 2) The student is eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Qualitative Research Data Collection and Analysis

In spring 2016, researchers conducted a total of 16 semi-structured interviews with district and school-site personnel, including 12 interviews with principals and the community school manager across all six sample schools, and four interviews with key district personnel. The interviews were designed to elicit participant perspectives on the process of becoming a community school, including their perspective on what it means to be a community school; the role of partners, school leadership, and the district; and challenges and successes with implementation.

Regarding analysis, we follow Patton's (2002) pragmatist paradigm of "choosing the right tool for the right job." In an effort to respond to the district's request to help them understand the experience of the new cohort of community schools, our first cycle of analysis and coding consisted of developing descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman 1994; Saldaña 2003) that corresponded to key areas of the OUSD community school model prioritized in year's research: partnerships, leadership, and coordination. Additionally, we coded for role-group—distinguishing between district staff, principals, and community school managers.

However, fairly early in the analysis we felt the necessity for a stronger theoretical framework to allow us to organize and characterize the practices we were hearing about from participants. We ultimately adopted the Children's Aid Society's 4C's, as it seemed to encapsulate many of the elements important to the district—strategic partnerships, collaborative leadership, coordination— and would allow these elements to be articulated within the broader field of community schools research. We crafted initial codes for each of these constructs—comprehensiveness, collaboration, coherence, and commitment—revising them through several rounds of coding the same transcripts as a team. After coding was complete, we engaged in multiple rounds of drafting memos about how these capacities were manifested across the data. Additional literature review and close engagement with the data informed our ultimate understanding of these constructs and their associated strategies (Saldaña 2013).

Quantitative Research Methods

Table A1. List of community schools by grade-level and start date

SCHOOL LEVEL	SCHOOL NAME	START DATE
ES	RISE Community School	Spring 2015
ES	Global Family School	Spring 2016
ES	Brookfield Village Elementary	Spring 2016
ES	Emerson Elementary	Spring 2016
ES	Garfield Elementary	Fall 2014
ES	New Highland Academy	Spring 2015
ES	Bridges At Melrose	Spring 2016
ES	Martin Luther King Jr Elementary	2012
ES	La Escuelita Elementary	Spring 2012
ES	Melrose Leadership Academy	Spring 2016
HS	MetWest High School	Spring 2012
HS	McClymonds High School	Spring 2012
HS	Coliseum College Prep Academy	2008 - elev8
HS	Oakland International High School	Fall 2012
HS	Castlemont High School	Spring 2012
HS	Fremont High School	Spring 2012
HS	Life Academy	Fall 2013
HS	Dewey Academy	Spring 2012
HS	Oakland High School	Spring 2012
HS	Oakland Technical High School	Spring 2012
HS	Madison Park Upper Campus	2008 - elev8
MS	United for Success Academy	2008-elev8
MS	Alliance Academy	Spring 2012
MS	Elmhurst Community Prep	Spring 2012
MS	Coliseum College Prep Academy	2008 - elev8
MS	Roots International Academy	2008 - elev8
MS	West Oakland Middle School	2008-elev8
MS	Life Academy	Fall 2013
MS	Claremont Middle School	Spring 2016
MS	Frick Middle School	Spring 2012
MS	Roosevelt Middle School	2008 - elev8
MS	Madison Park Upper Campus	2008 - elev8
MS	Melrose Leadership Academy	Spring 2016
MS	Urban Promise Academy	Spring 2012

Description of Regression Methodology

In the report above, we provide graphs depicting unadjusted descriptive trends in the number of community schools, number of students in community schools, and outcomes for students in

community schools and traditional schools over time. In addition, we conducted regression analysis to inform our understanding of two questions of interest to OUSD: 1) What is the relationship between service receipt and outcomes for students in community schools? 2) What is the relationship between being in a community school (i.e., community school implementation overall) and student outcomes? In this section we describe our approach to addressing these questions and discuss the methodological changes related to this analysis.

<u>Service receipt and student outcomes in community schools</u>

This analysis focused specifically on out-of-school time (OST) participation and student outcomes. We note that understanding student participation in programs and services, and the relationship between participation and student outcomes is dependent on available data. As noted above, OST is the one program domain for which student-level data are currently available to examine these relationships. Student-level data documenting participation in out-of-school time programming is collected regularly across the district and was made available to the Gardner Center research team for this analysis. Future analyses could examine participation in health service, family engagement, restorative justice, or other services as well as patterns in participation across multiple types of services, given the availability of data.

This longitudinal data analysis included all students in middle school community schools in school years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15, and used regression analysis to statistically control for student characteristics as well as relevant outcomes in the prior year (e.g., attendance rate, suspensions). The sample for this analysis does include schools that became community schools through the Elev8 program. This analysis did not include students in traditional schools.

We used the following linear regression model to examine the relationship between OST participation in community schools and students' school attendance, chronic absence, and suspensions:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\ OST_{it} + \alpha X_{ist} + \mu_{ts} + \varepsilon_{ist}$$

Where Y_{ist} represents each student (i)'s outcome (e.g., attendance rate, chronic absence and suspension) in school s and year t. OST is a dummy variable which takes a value of 1 if the student participated in the school's OST program and a value of 0 if they did not. (Note: in alternative specifications we explore the relationship between relatively sustained levels of participation—45 days or more—and student outcomes.) X is a vector of characteristic variables of students in each school and each year including grade, race/ethnicity, gender, and Free and Reduced Price Lunch status. In addition, full models include the outcomes of interest in the prior year as a key control variable. μ is a school fixed effect, which takes into account the unobserved school characteristics. ε is the error term. All models include clustered standard errors at the school level. In this model, $\beta 1$ is the coefficient of interest, representing the magnitude of the relationship between OST participation and the student outcome of interest.

APPENDIX C: Additional Analysis of Student Trends

% Students Suspended: Asian/Pacific Islander

% Students Suspended: Black/African American

% Students Suspended: Latino

Community High Schools · Community Middle Schools · Traditional Middle Schools

% Students Suspended: White

Community High Schools · Community Middle Schools · Traditional Middle Schools

Average Middle School High School Readiness

	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
CS	0.33	0.35	0.38	0.34	0.35	0.37
nonCS	0.40	0.44	0.45	0.44	0.50	0.46