

# snapshot

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## **THE LINKS BETWEEN PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND STUDENTS' OUTCOMES: THE REDWOOD CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PROJECT**

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### **Background**

The vision of Redwood City's community schools is to integrate academic, health, and social services; youth and community development; and community engagement. Community partners contribute resources to improve student and adult learning, strengthen families, and promote healthy communities. By coordinating and centralizing different services within the school setting, Redwood City community schools ease access to supports (e.g., mental health) and facilitate communication and collaboration among adults to more efficiently address the needs of children, youth, and families.

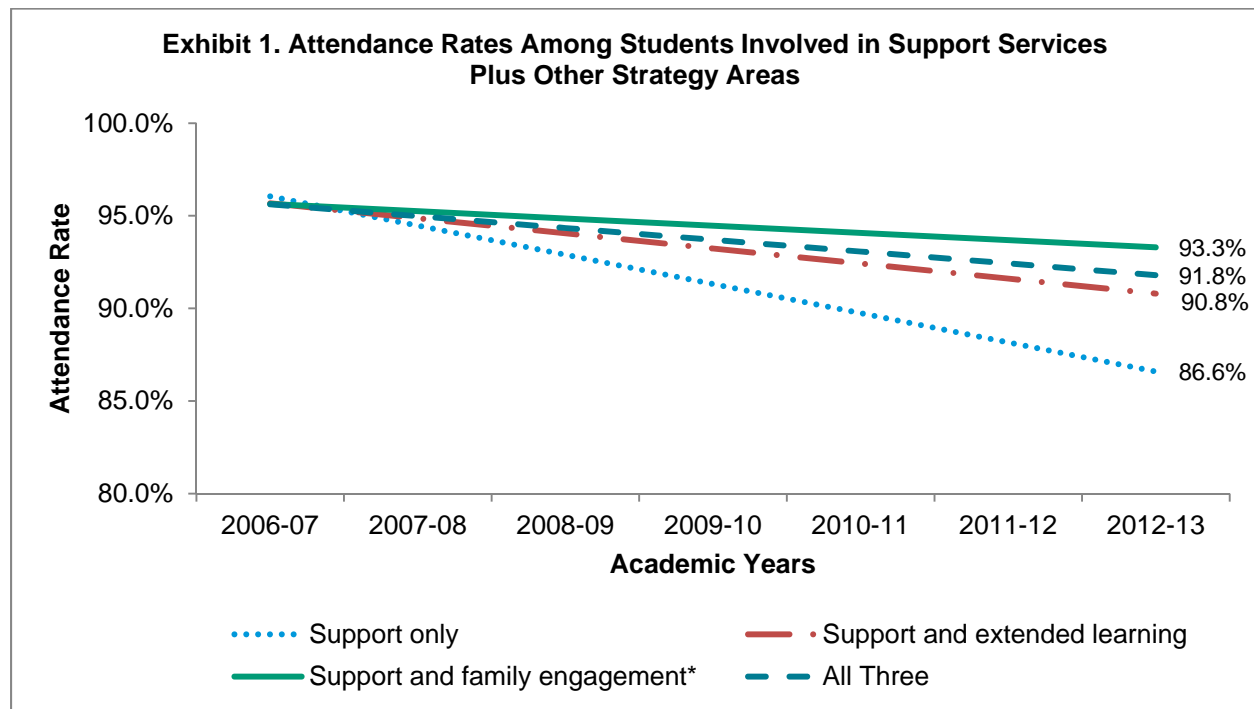
Since 2006, the Redwood City School District (RCSD) has partnered with the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (Gardner Center) to examine students' involvement in three key strategy areas: extended learning, family engagement, and support services. Each year, with guidance and support from community school officials, the Gardner Center investigates whether students' participation in programs within these areas influences their outcomes.

### **Key Findings**

Linking students' district administrative records, community school program attendance, and survey data, we found that:

- **A majority of students, especially those from low-income, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds, participated in community school programs.** Based on data from the 2012-13 academic year, 84% of students enrolled in community schools took part in at least one type of program. Participation rates in all key strategy areas increased, particularly family engagement.
- **Students whose families were consistently involved in family engagement opportunities demonstrated better outcomes.** Community school participants, whose families had consistent engagement across a number of years, attended approximately four more extra school days in the 2012-13 school year than their less-engaged counterparts. Among English learners, sustained participation in family engagement was also associated with greater gains in English language proficiency.
- **Participation in multiple strategy areas was linked to better attendance** (Exhibit 1). Students who accessed support services and whose families regularly took part in family engagement programs across a number of years showed greater attendance rates than those involved only in support services.

- **Middle school students' participation in community school programs improved their perceptions of school.** Youth who engaged in extended learning programs and accessed support services showed a modest but gradual increase in their overall sense of care at school.



### Future Directions

Findings from this research identify additional avenues of inquiry that may benefit community schools in Redwood City and elsewhere:

- **Which family engagement strategy is most beneficial to students and families?** Although we observed that family engagement was positively associated with students' attendance and English language proficiency, we were unable to determine in our data which family engagement strategy was directly associated to students' outcomes. Another area for future exploration is to ascertain whether these strategies were effective for all subgroups of students and families and at varying grade levels. More research—both in Redwood City and in the family engagement field more broadly—can help identify which approaches are most beneficial to students and families.
- **What role does family engagement play in other community school key strategy areas?** Current results demonstrate that participation in family engagement opportunities and other strategy areas (e.g., support services) are linked to positive student outcomes. However, more research is needed to understand how family engagement is integrated with other key strategies. For example, there is little understood about the role of families during the afterschool hours, and whether engagement in afterschool programs yields the same benefits to children as they do during the regular school day. Additional work investigating this question can advance understanding of the mechanisms by which family engagement works to influence students' learning and positive development.