

Examining Student Outcomes Across Programs in Redwood City Community Schools

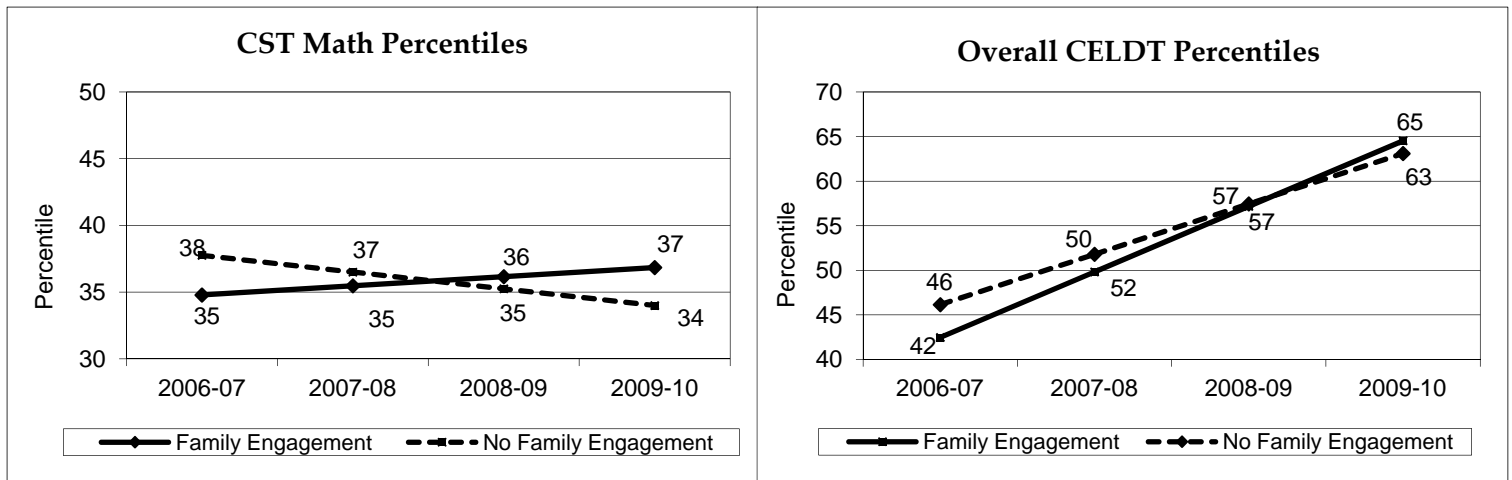
Introduction

For the past three years, the Redwood City School District (RCSD), Redwood City 2020, and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University have partnered to examine participation and outcomes in RCSD's four community schools. The RCSD community schools offered over 60 different family engagement, extended learning, and safety net support programs to students and their families in 2009-10. Linking program participation data to student demographic, achievement, attendance, discipline, fitness, and survey data, we examined both participation patterns in community school programs as well as the connection between participation in community school programming and student outcomes. This analysis included the short-term goals of attendance and students' feelings of being cared for at school and the long-term goal of student achievement.

Findings

- **Most enrolled students participated in community school programs, particularly students with the highest need.** In 2009-10, over 70% of students enrolled at the four community schools in Redwood City participated in programs or had parents who participated, with many families accessing multiple services. Programs served high numbers of English learners, low-income students, and students whose parents have not completed high school.
- **In the short-term, community school program participation was linked to students feeling connected to their school.** Students who accessed programs, particularly family engagement and extended learning opportunities, were more likely to report feeling cared for at school over the last two years than students who did not access services.
- **Program participation was linked to growth in long-term math achievement.** Over the last four years, students whose parents accessed family engagement programs and those who accessed both safety net supports and extended learning programs for at least two years had higher gains in their math achievement scores over time compared to non-participants (Exhibit 1).
- **Family engagement was linked to improved English language development scores over time.** English learner students whose parents accessed programs improved their English language development scores at a higher rate over time compared to similar students whose parents did not participate in programs, continuing a trend seen in last year's evaluation.

Exhibit 1: Family Engagement Participants and Non-Participants, 2006-07 to 2009-10



Implications and Next Steps

The findings from this report have the following implications for practitioners and policy makers focused on community schools:

- *Focus on providing wrap-around services for students and families.* Results consistently show a positive link between family engagement and student outcomes, and this link was strongest for students who also attended extended learning programs. This points to the importance of providing wrap around services that meet the multiple needs of both students and their families, particularly at the middle school level, where parent involvement is lowest. Past research highlights strategies that can turn this finding into action. Effective strategies include utilizing peer-to-peer parent mentoring and providing opportunities for parent input in decision-making.
- *Foster students' sense of being cared for and connected at school.* Findings show the importance of students' feeling cared for at school. An increased sense of care over time seems to explain the key finding that participation in community school programs is associated with improved in-school outcomes. This has implications for practice because previous research clearly shows that school staff practices can affect students' sense of care. For example, consistently using norms of mutual respect, building individual relationships with students, and encouraging students to help one another can all increase students' feelings of being cared for at school. Additionally, because we found that program participants began with a higher sense of care compared to non-participants, it is important to identify and engage the families who are not already connected to their schools.

Our analyses suggest that there are underlying factors beyond the traditionally used demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are related to both community schools participation and outcomes. Moving forward, we will continue to work with our partners to refine the research questions and improve data collection; we also plan to collect qualitative data—all to best understand how the programs and services at community schools affect students' outcomes.