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“We’re One Team”: Examining Community School Implementation Strategies in Oakland

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Abstract: The community school model posits that the traditional school model is not sufficient to overcome the role of poverty in equitable access to learning, and that improving student achievement requires addressing the needs of the whole child. By leveraging community partnerships to address student barriers to learning and shift relationships between schools, families, and community, the community school model represents an expanded vision of what schools are, who they include, and what they are responsible for. This paper aims to improve our understanding of community school implementation, based on qualitative research in five community schools in Oakland, California. We apply the Children’s Aid Society’s framework of four community school capacities including: (1) comprehensiveness; (2) collaboration; (3) coherence; and (4) commitment (Lubell, 2011) in our analysis. We find evidence of a collaborative culture, in which school and community partner staff worked together across traditional boundaries to serve students. Schools showed signs of coherence of vision and goals, and alignment of services and supports with the instructional core of the school. Community school strategies not only provided important school-based services but also represented an expansion of the traditional school model by leveraging and aligning community partners to improve student outcomes.

Keywords: community schools; education policy; school improvement; community partnerships

1. Introduction

The community school model, while not new, is increasingly gaining momentum nationwide as an education reform strategy with the potential to address the effects of poverty and other factors beyond instruction that we know contribute to gaps in student achievement [1–3]. Community schools may be viewed as one strategy among a long and winding road of school reform efforts, from pushes for smaller schools to more centralized (or de-centralized) authority to many other reforms [4]. Further, for some the community school approach is grounded in a fundamental conclusion that the traditional school model itself is not sufficient to overcome the role of poverty in equitable access to learning, and that, beyond academic instruction alone, improving student achievement requires addressing the needs of the whole child. Viewed this way, the community school model represents an expanded vision of what schools are, who they include, and what they are responsible for, by leveraging community resources both to address student barriers to learning and shift relationships between schools, families, and community. This paper aims to improve our understanding of community school implementation, drawing on qualitative research in a sample of community schools in Oakland, California.

Although no single definition describes a community school, and different names may be used to describe similar approaches [5], the model is characterized by partnerships between schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) to deliver coordinated services such as health services and expanded learning opportunities, designed to improve the well-being of children and families and

to support students' readiness to learn [6,7]. Some trace the roots of the community school model as far back as the late 1800s, and many cities—including Chicago, New York, and Cincinnati—have had substantial numbers of community schools for some time [8]. However, it appears that education leaders nationwide are increasingly demonstrating an expanded role for community schools as a major element of district-led school reform efforts. Recently, for example, the mayors of New York City (2014) and Philadelphia (2016) pledged to dramatically increase the number of community schools in efforts to address persistent gaps in educational achievement by socio-economic status and race. Further, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law by President Obama in December 2015, includes funding for full service community schools.

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in California has embraced community schools as central to its district reform agenda and, with 33 community schools as of early 2016 (approximately one-third of all district schools), is progressing towards its goal of being a community schools district. In partnership with CBOs, Oakland community schools provide an array of integrated services intended to remove student barriers to learning by, for instance, addressing health issues, expanding the amount of time for learning, implementing alternative disciplinary practices, and engaging families in student learning and school improvement.

Community schools aim to comprehensively take on barriers to learning for low-income students through services that are not just based at the school but that involve CBOs and families [8]. In theory, the model is set apart and strengthened by intentional inclusion of and outreach to multiple community and family stakeholders, and collaboration between them. Further, community schools foster coherence, as programs and services are integrated with the core of the school and with each other, and aligned with the fundamental school mission of promoting student success [9]. Through this approach, the community school model aims to increase the realization of many elements of effective schools and ultimately to support teaching and learning that promotes student success [10].

While some prior research lays out a theory of change underlying the community school model [11] and still other research provides evidence of positive correlations between community schools or other models including school-based services and student outcomes [11–13], less research has illuminated the mechanisms and challenges of community school implementation itself [9,14]. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of elements of effective community school implementation based on qualitative research in five community schools in Oakland, including interviews with principals, teachers, community school managers, partner organizations, and other school staff. Further, we provide descriptive evidence exploring the link between community school implementation and school effectiveness, based on reports from teachers and principals.

2. Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

2.1. *The Community School Model*

A considerable body of literature describes the general community school model and theory of change. While instantiations of the model vary from place-to-place, and based on local context, at their core community schools focus on the whole child and aim to remove barriers to academic learning through an array of integrated services and supports. Common elements of the model include expanded learning opportunities, health and wellness services, and family engagement strategies, as well as alternative approaches to discipline such as restorative justice [7,11]. Community schools leverage the resources of the community to improve student achievement through partnerships with CBOs, while often also serving as a hub for services and other resources for community members more broadly.

Various conceptual frameworks in the literature lay out factors that set well-functioning community schools apart from the traditional school model. The Children's Aid Society (CAS) National Network of Community schools has developed, coordinated, and studied community schools in New York City and beyond since 1992. CAS puts forth both a developmental triangle for community schools

(discussed further below in the Findings section) that includes: (1) core instructional programming; (2) expanded learning opportunities; and (3) comprehensive student supports. The developmental triangle is complemented by a framework of capacities that characterize well-developed community schools. In discussing our research findings below we will draw on the CAS framework of four capacities (4 Cs) that describe the community school model implemented well (see Figure 1). These competencies, which are intended as both a mindset and a skill set that enable communities to plan and execute an effective community school model, include: (1) Comprehensiveness; (2) Collaboration; (3) Coherence; and (4) Commitment [8]. First, community schools resolve to comprehensively address barriers to learning by meeting the multiple needs of children and families (Comprehensiveness). Well-functioning community schools take on student barriers to learning in structured partnerships with multiple stakeholders including community-based organizations. Further, these schools make intentional outreach efforts to these partners, share leadership, and ultimately develop interdependent relationships in carrying out their work [5,15] (Collaboration). Third, community schools and their partners negotiate shared perceptions, vision, and goals (Coherence) and, relatedly, align school and partner skills and activities accordingly. Finally, community schools aim for long-term sustainability based on this shared vision and goals (Commitment).

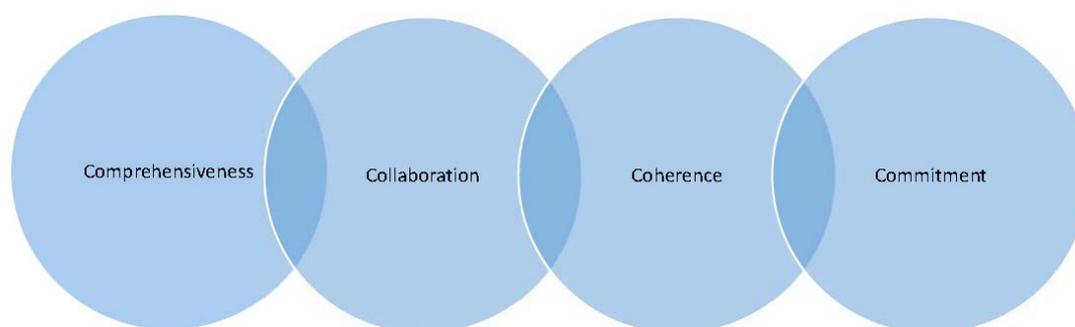


Figure 1. Four Capacities of Community Schools (Adapted from Children’s Aid Society, Lubell, 2011 [8]).

2.2. Community Schools Research

A growing yet still nascent body of research examines the relationship between community schools (and integrated school-based services more broadly) and student outcomes [11]. A recent review of existing research found that integrated student supports models can improve academic outcomes, although findings are mixed [12]). A recent study of community schools in Redwood City, California, found increases in attendance when students and their families accessed available services, as well as English proficiency gains for English Language Learners whose parents consistently participated in family engagement opportunities [13]. Finally, a recent study of community schools in Baltimore indicated that schools that had been implementing community school practices for five or more years had statistically significant higher rates of attendance and lower rates of chronic absence when compared to non-community schools [16].

Relatively less published research that we are aware of has studied factors influencing the implementation of the community school model. In early work on community schools, Lawson and Briar-Lawson (1997) [17] found that services were often added on to school sites without intentional efforts to integrate them within the school, and that co-locating service providers did not necessarily lead to better quality of services. On the other end of the spectrum, in a recent study of community schools in New York City, Rao (2013) [18] finds evidence of “organizational hybridity” by which schools and partner CBOs shift from an approach where responsibilities are divided as each organization works towards its own goals, to one in which each knows its role as all work collectively towards a shared goal [18].

Richardson (2009) [14] outlines a model of highly effective community schools, which focuses on principal leadership, community partnerships, and organizational development (consisting of resources and staff available for programming as well as capacity for managing resources related to community school implementation). Based on research that applies the Richardson framework in exploring components of effectiveness in three full service community schools in an urban school district in the United States, Sanders (2015) [9] highlights several necessary conditions if full-service community schools are to be transformative learning environments for socially and economically disadvantaged children and youth. Sanders notes that principals must possess a comprehensive understanding of leadership in effectively administering community schools, that community partnerships are at the core of full service community schools, and that community school coordinators are critical for the development of these partnerships. Further, Sanders suggests that future research should illuminate the contribution of partnerships to student, family, and community outcomes, as well as how instruction is supported by community partners.

3. Community Schools in Oakland

Oakland is home to one of the most demographically diverse populations in the country, with residents of different racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, and other cultural groups. Amidst this diversity exist considerable concentrated poverty and disparities in opportunity and outcomes, especially for Oakland's children. Those born in some neighborhoods are, for example, much more likely to suffer from poor nutrition, be subject to violence, and lack adequate healthcare. For example, compared to a White child of the affluent Oakland Hills, an African-American child born in West Oakland is seven times more likely to be born into poverty, four 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, the African-American child will be at least twice as likely to die of heart disease, stroke, or cancer [19]. Further, Oakland has experienced considerable demographic shifts in recent years, attributable in part to both increasing immigration as well as increasing gentrification as housing costs continue to rise across the San Francisco Bay Area. Between 2000 and 2010, Oakland saw increases in the number of Latino and White residents, and decreases in its African American population [20,21].

In response to vast disparities in educational outcomes, in 2010–2011, Oakland launched an initiative to transform itself into a full service community schools district [22]. OUSD's community schools initiative emerged out of an extensive strategic planning process with schools, families, and other community stakeholders, and builds on existing, ongoing efforts to support more equitable life and academic outcomes for Oakland's youth. As of early 2016, 33 OUSD schools were identified as full service community schools, representing about one-third of district schools. Most of the district's full service community schools are middle and high schools, and scale-up efforts continue to expand implementation to elementary schools as well.

Like other community school models, OUSD's community school theory of change includes multiple strategy areas: (1) an array of integrated services intended to remove students barriers to academic learning including health and mental health services; (2) expanding the amount of time for learning; and (3) engaging families in student learning and school improvement. Oakland has also made concerted efforts to implement alternative disciplinary practices, in particular restorative justice. Oakland community schools aim to address students' needs and promote a positive school climate in which students are engaged learners and teachers are supported to provide quality instruction. OUSD's theory of change posits that these strategies will increase student and family access to services and, in turn, improve student attendance behavior and performance ultimately contributing to the goal that all students are college, career, and community ready when they graduate. Importantly, the community school model also includes organizational strategies for leveraging community resources and partnerships, coordinating services, and integrating services and partners into the operation and mission of the school. For instance, most community schools engage in strategic partnerships with CBOs, and have a community school manager charged with supporting and coordinating the community schools work. (See Appendix A for a system strategy map that outlines key activities and

outcomes associated with the Oakland Community Schools theory of change at the district, school, and student levels).

4. Research Design

4.1. Research-Practice Partnership

This paper presents findings from the first 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 [23,24] 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 [25]. (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" (Fishman, Penuel, et al., 2013 [25])). 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. This research partnership has been guided by two broad research questions:

1. How is the community school model being implemented across OUSD school sites?
2. What patterns in student and school outcomes are emerging across early-adopting schools?

The findings presented here based on our research in the first year of this multi-year collaboration, focus primarily on research question #1 regarding implementation of the community school model. While we briefly touch on research question #2 regarding student and school outcomes from the perspective of a range of community school implementers, this question will be pursued in greater depth in future research.

4.2. Sample

The study draws on qualitative interviews from a purposive sample of five OUSD community schools. Thus, the schools in this study are not intended to be a random sample of OUSD community schools, but rather represent relatively mature instantiations of the model where we hypothesized lessons may be learned to inform future implementation and scale-up. The schools were selected based on positive trends in key school indicators (e.g., decrease in chronic absence, suspensions, or expulsions) as well as anecdotal evidence from district staff that these schools had developed promising practices in key areas of implementation (e.g., work with partners and school leadership). Further, school selection aimed to capture a range of elementary, middle, and high schools, encompassing large and small schools, and diverse student populations. By and large, OUSD students are encouraged to attend their neighborhood schools, especially in elementary and middle schools although there is some opportunity for choosing schools outside of the neighborhood. In each of the sample schools, with the exception of the one large comprehensive high school, School E, the majority of students are from the neighborhood. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for these five schools. (See Appendix B for further description of these schools.)

Table 1. Oakland Study School Profiles, 2013–2014.

School	Grade	Student Enrollment	Latino	Asian ¹	African American/Black	White	English Learners	Free/Reduced Price Lunch	Attendance Rate	Chronic Absence Rate	Suspension Rate
School A	TK-5	604	45%	35%	17%	2%	54%	93%	96%	8%	2%
School B	6–8	574	34%	45%	17%	2%	35%	96%	96%	11%	13%
School C	6–8	324	86%	7%	3%	2%	43%	98%	97%	7%	11%
School D	6–12	473	88%	1%	11%	–	38%	99%	95%	14%	5%
School E	9–12	2,092	19%	19%	36%	22%	8%	54%	94%	15%	5%

Source: Ed-data School Reports, 2013–2014 [26]; OUSD School Websites. Includes students identifying as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Filipino.

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In winter/spring 2015, researchers conducted a total of 37 semi-structured interviews with key personnel across all five sample schools. At each site, the researchers interviewed the school's principal, the community school manager, two or three partner service providers (e.g., health clinic staff and afterschool program coordinator), and two or three teachers. The interviews were designed to elicit participant perspectives on elements of community school implementation, such as perceptions of what it means to be a community school, the role of service providers on campus, the relationship between partners and school staff, school leadership, and the intersection of community school work with teaching and learning.

Regarding analysis, we follow Patton's (2002) [27] pragmatist paradigm of "choosing the right tool for the right job". As such, our approach to the analysis was shaped by our charge from the district: to conduct site-level implementation research at a sample of mature full service community school sites to begin to determine patterns and degrees of implementation, as well as important early lessons learned to inform district planning. Our first cycle of analysis and coding consisted of developing descriptive codes [28,29] that corresponded to key areas of the OUSD community school model (e.g., partnerships, leadership, student and family supports) (these codes largely reflected the categories of the district's System Strategy Map (Appendix A)). Additionally, we coded for instances where teaching and learning were explicitly discussed. These codes were then reviewed and reassembled to distill a narrative portrait comprising of rich description (including consistencies and variation across sites) for further analysis [30,31]. For our report to the district, the next stage of analysis focused primarily on the extent to which mature community school sites were implementing the model as designed [32]. For the purposes of this paper, we have expanded our analysis to interpret our narrative portraits within the Children's Aid Society's four community school capacities framework to understand the key elements of OUSD's district model of community school design within a broader national context of community school implementation.

5. Findings

In this section, we present findings on community school implementation in the five sample schools. First, we briefly describe the Children's Aid Society four capacities, and examine how sample schools provide services intended to comprehensively meet student needs, foster collaboration between and inclusion of multiple stakeholders, promote coherence of goals and organizational directions as well as alignment of school and partner activities around shared understandings, and involve long-term commitment to this work [8]. While implementation varied across sites and was adapted to local context, we highlight key themes across these relatively mature community school sites. Next, we present findings examining the implementation of three key strategy areas for Oakland community schools. Specifically, we describe implementation of two elements of the CAS developmental triangle including integrated student supports (specifically, health and wellness services) and expanded learning opportunities. In addition, we explore family engagement strategies that are a particular emphasis of Oakland community schools. (Core instruction, the third element of the CAS developmental triangle was beyond the scope of this study.) While our study design did not include a comparison group of non-community schools, our findings shed light on how, within the community school framework, these strategies not only provide important school-based services but also represent an expansion of the traditional school model itself by leveraging and aligning community partners to improve student outcomes.

5.1. Four Community School Capacities

5.1.1. Comprehensiveness

By definition, community schools offer some degree of comprehensive service to students and their families, often delivered by partner service organizations (partners), such as health clinics,

afterschool providers, and other CBOs [7,11]. Across the Oakland community schools in our sample, partners provided resources including academic supports such as tutoring, mentoring, afterschool programming, health and mental health services, field trips and sports camps, and many more. Further, these schools made concerted efforts to support and engage families.

5.1.2. Collaboration

For community schools to be more than a collection of services co-located on a school site, there must be extensive collaboration across all stakeholders. Collaboration entails the structured involvement of all stakeholders through outreach, relationship building, and shared leadership [8]. At each of our sample sites, we saw ongoing instances of collaboration between school staff (e.g., principals and teachers), partner agencies, and families.

While each of our sample schools held partnerships with multiple agencies—often upwards of 20 or 30—each school appeared to have at least one core partnership with an agency that played a more significant role on campus. Core partners, in addition to fulfilling their primary role of service providers at the school (e.g., directing and coordinating afterschool and health programming), often played roles in the sites' family engagement work, coordinating services for individual students, or spent extra time communicating and coordinating with teachers. We found in our interviews that often partner-employed staff were not distinguished from district-employed staff; rather, they were thought of as school staff. Indeed, we found that subjects could not always readily identify which staff was funded by a partner agency, and which by the school. The principal at School A indicated that not only does the school involve community partners, but they have interdependent relationships in carrying out the business of the school:

(Our partners) are behind every single initiative that we do that I would say falls under community schools. . . . It's not there's (partner organization) and (name of school), it's (partner organization) at (school). We're just one team. So, I never think of [so and so], any of that team as an outside agency coming in. They're the core of our school.

Simply bringing all stakeholders to the table can present a disruption from traditional roles and norms that may require intentional effort and scaffolding to facilitate. This spirit of inclusion and collaboration often began with the principal and, for partners, this positive tone around their involvement was crucial. In the words of one partner at School D: "Partners need to feel like they're wanted, included, and, I mean, I think that's a team job, but I think because [our principal] has that attitude, it makes the team know that they're allowed to have that attitude, too. So, she's a tone-setter."

A strong community school manager-principal relationship also appeared to be critical. Community school managers at all five sample sites had developed strong relationships with the school principal and played a role in school leadership and planning. Both community school managers and principals reported that regular communication and a strong relationship allows the community school manager to ensure that the systems, relationships, and supports he or she is overseeing are aligned to school and student goals. At most sites, community school managers met regularly with the principal, often checking in multiple times throughout the day.

5.1.3. Coherence

Coherence in community schools relates to the extent to which school and partner staff, skills, and activities are aligned towards realizing a shared vision and goals. In this study, we focused specifically on the extent to which student support services are aligned with (i.e., cohere with) the school's and students' academic goals. To varying degrees across all sample sites, we found evidence that the "community" work of the school was aligned with and integrated into the academic core of the school. This manifested particularly strongly in terms of alignment between school-day and afterschool activities, coordination of student services, and staff working in alignment.

The community school manager, in particular, appeared to play an important role in aligning partner activities with school instructional needs and goals. Nearly all community school managers had some responsibility for recruiting, managing, and coordinating with partner agencies on campus. Some organized regular (i.e., monthly or quarterly) meetings of partners to provide updates and information regarding school goals, a practice encouraged by district staff. Most operated as the formal or informal point person or on-site supervisor for partners. Given that schools often held partnerships with several dozen agencies, this community school manager function was perceived as critical to ensuring coordination, integration, and alignment of these partner activities within the school. The words of the community school manager at School E indicate a focus on fostering relational coherence among the school and its partners: “my core role is to paint the big picture for people and help people see where they're connected to each other and how we all play a role in the same goal”.

Additionally, when challenges emerged, the principal would often engage the community school manager to help troubleshoot. For example, at School A the community school manager and principal found, in reviewing the data, that their grade 3 students' reading levels were particularly low. The community school manager and principal discussed this, after which the community school manager found a new partner that matched volunteer reading mentors with students. The community school manager strategically aligned these volunteers to provide support to the students most in need. School B's principal described the value of engaging the community school manager in school data review and decision-making in the following terms: “(we review) the data and also the priorities of the school. And then, the community schools manager goes out and finds partners, community-based organizations that can help fill those needs”.

5.1.4. Commitment

Finally, central to effective community school implementation is a commitment to sustainability based on the shared goals of schools and partners. In our sample schools, we saw this manifested as a commitment to long-term relationships, mutual support, and student needs and goals. We learned that, across all sites, fostering collaboration and coherence required not only new practices, structures, and a shift in cultural norms, but also the time and commitment to work through difficulties, build trust, and ultimately, foster a new kind of relationship between all stakeholders. We saw this especially in the area of partnerships, the community school manager, and the role of parents at the school.

Each of our sample schools had one or two core partnerships with agencies that played a significant role on campus. These core partners had all held long-term institutional relationships with their sites. Additionally, many of these partnerships pre-dated the official district community school initiative, and many of the on-site staff employed by key partners had been at the school for a number of years. However, partnerships often took years to develop and, in many cases, required strong leadership from school principals and others to set the tone that partners belonged at the school. The type of alignment described above often happened through ongoing conversations between agency staff and school leadership. Sometimes, this also meant engaging in difficult conversations about how and where needs were not being met, and negotiating a solution that supported all parties. School D's community school manager described this process of negotiation with a partner in the following way:

I just said, “Look, here's what's happening on our side. Here's my experience. This isn't working for us. I think you're a great program. I think we're really aligned. Can we do this?” And then, finally, they said, “Yes . . . Let's try it.” And so then, we tried it, and I think it was mutually agreed-upon that it worked really well.

Most of the partnership relationships discussed were dynamic and able to change to align partners' activities with the school's mission; however, staff at most schools shared that some relationships with partners dissolved when the partner's activities were no longer aligned with the vision or serving the needs of the school most effectively.

The relationships between the principal and community school manager often took time to develop, but facilitated strong alignment between the academic and community work of the school. School B's community school manager talked about her relationship with her school's principal in the following terms:

So, at this point, I feel like it's really a true partnership where both of us trust each other and it's not like I need to hide anything from him or he's hiding anything from me; it's to the point where I've heard other people tell me how principals aren't sharing budgets with them. This is the year where . . . he's sharing his school's budget with me. I know exactly how the money is being spent. And same for him, he understands how (my agency) is spending (our) funds.

This type of transparency between school and partner staff may not be typical in most traditional schools. While not all principals and community school managers shared this fine detail of fiscal information, they all engaged in conversations around resource use and allocation, aimed at ensuring that resources were being best leveraged to support student needs.

5.2. Implementation of Key Strategy Areas

This section explores community school implementation in three key strategy areas: health and wellness services, expanded learning, and family engagement. Table 2 presents information regarding student participation in health services, as well as in expanded learning programming in the sample sites. Overall participation in health services ranged from 27 percent in School E, the large comprehensive high school, to 88 percent in the School B, a middle school. Notably, in School C, 62 percent of health visits were for mental health services. Participation in expanded learning programming also varied considerably, ranging from less than 20 percent in the large comprehensive high school, School E, to nearly all students in schools C and D. Unfortunately, no systematic data regarding family participation in programs is services are currently available. Below we present findings from our qualitative research relating to each of these three strategy areas.

5.2.1. Integrated Student Services: Health and Wellness

The community schools in this study offered a wide range of school-based health and wellness services. Four of the five schools were affiliated with a specific health clinic on-site or nearby, administered by a partner agency. Medical services included routine immunizations and physicals, as well as emergency services and reproductive health services, and some schools also provided on-site preventive dental services and vision and hearing assessments. All schools provided behavioral health services, including mental health counselors for individual or group therapy. Across the sample sites, there were typically one or two primary providers of health and mental health services (e.g., one community clinic and/or behavioral health service provider) that served the site in various ways. At the same time, a patchwork of other partners also contributed, for example, by sponsoring a school counselor or intern two days a week. Additionally, OUSD has implemented multiple initiatives to address behavioral health, such as restorative justice circles, and positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS), that are frequently adopted by community schools across the district, including several of our sample schools.

Table 2. School Health Center and Expanded Learning Participation.

School	Health Clients and Visits			Health Visits by Type					Expanded Learning	
	Student Clients	Student Visits	% Students Registered Clients	Mental Health	Medical	Health Education	First Aid	Dental	% Students Participating in Expanded Learning	Expanded Learning Attendance Rates
	2012–2013				2013–2014					
School A	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	48%	96%
School B	556	4426	88%	11%	19%	8%	46%	17%	70%	93%
School C	146	524	46%	62%	36%	2%	—	—	99%	39%
School D	334	1783	74%	—	46%	14%	9%	31%	99%	87%
School E	531	1675	27%	26%	46%	12%	16%	—	19%	80%

Source: Alameda County Health Care Services Agency and UCSF 2012–2013 School Health Center Report; California Department of Education School Enrollment 2012–2013; OUSD After School Data Prepared by Public Profit 2013–2014. Notes: School health center data is missing for School A because it does not have a school-based health center. Otherwise “—” refers to a sample size of fewer than 15 clients and fewer than 15 visits.

Most school staff indicated that the availability of health and wellness services was a primary means for removing barriers to student learning through addressing medical and behavioral issues, as well as minimizing the amount of class time students miss. Staff also cited numerous examples where an academic or behavioral concern with a student turned out to be a health issue that the school's health center then addressed. For example, a student who wasn't doing homework was finally discovered to need glasses; that is, she couldn't read the assignment on the board. According to respondents, students at sample schools also have access to substantially more social-emotional supports within the community school model, as well as there being better systems in place to identify students that need support and connect them to the right services. In School C, a middle school where nearly two-thirds of visits to the health clinic are for mental health services, staff told us that these services have become part of the fabric of the school, and getting counseling services has come to be seen as normal and not something to be ashamed of. In the words of one teacher:

I think that it's really great for students to know that they can get services, and it's very—it's been incredibly normalizing to students that if you have something going on, that you should go and talk about it. 'Cause I'll have students who just in the middle of class, they've got their little confidential pass, but they'll just stand up and be like oh, I gotta go to therapy.

At our sample sites, Coordination of Services Team (COST) meetings were a central structure for aligning school and partner efforts, especially related to health and wellness services to meet student needs. Although there is some variation in the composition of COST across schools, teams typically include the community school manager, health and mental health partners, school administrators, and teachers. COST meetings focus largely on health and behavioral health, although some address academic and other student issues as well. In some cases, a teacher's primary role in COST was identifying and referring students to the team. Our research suggests that COST provides one of the most frequently utilized structures in which the academic core of the school intersects with the student support services. While COST existed prior to the implementation of the district's official community schools initiative, staff in many schools noted that the role of COST has grown and developed considerably in the last several years. COST appears to be a crucial mechanism for identifying and responding to student needs. Teachers and partners play an integral part in COST, presenting an additional structure through which the instructional and community facets of the school work in tandem. Additionally, some school staff have expressed interest in more systemic, data-driven approaches identifying students who may need additional supports, for instance making referrals based on students' academic data, in addition to teacher referrals.

Teachers overwhelmingly reported that the services and supports integrated into the school through community school implementation allowed them to focus more time on developing and engaging students in academic content. One teacher at School D explained that these services reduce the number of "hats that a teacher needs to wear". Having these additional supports available provides teachers with a way to focus on their teaching and to have other staff or partners at the school site handle problems that would otherwise fall on them. While community school teachers often play an important role in screening students for services, they do not have to take it upon themselves to identify service providers for students, given the supports within the community school model. Partners, community school managers, and sometimes family liaisons all become resources for addressing student needs. This, ultimately, serves to "take some of the weight off you as a teacher". In the words of one teacher at School C, "(You) don't have to be social workers or coaches. You don't have to worry that you don't have those resources because we have partners". In sum, teachers at most sample schools reported that the comprehensive services and supports, implemented collaboratively and in alignment with school goals, helped reduce their burden as teachers and allowed them to focus on instruction.

5.2.2. Expanded Learning

All of the sample sites offered expanded learning opportunities, including before school, after school, and during the summer. These opportunities, most frequently provided in partnership with CBOs, aim to increase both the amount of learning time for students as well as the range of learning activities available. For example, School D offered three hours of extended day programming to all students with a grade point average below 3.0, whereas in two sample sites nearly all students participated in the after-school programming. During the extended day, students could access homework assistance as well as enrichment activities. Another site has a coordinator supervised by the community school manager who connects students to summer learning and enrichment opportunities ranging from science camp to dance academy to college prep courses. In the schools we studied, these activities expanded learning after school, before school, and during the summer.

In many traditional schools, partner agencies operate independently, autonomously, and distinctly from school personnel. However, across the community school sample sites, we saw evidence of a school culture in which adults work together to support students' learning needs [33]. At each of the community schools we visited, staff described multiple examples of collaboration between service providers and core instructional staff. At one school, the principal blends in-school and afterschool efforts by having a common faculty meeting time for all teaching and partner staff to meet together each month. At another school, afterschool program staff have one day off per week where "they don't teach a class but it's all about going in and checking with those teachers for what the curriculum is, what they're learning, what unit is going on." Each of these practices represents shifting norms of communication from the traditional ways of relating between school day teachers and afterschool staff. Nonetheless, in some sample schools, finding opportunities for teachers and afterschool staff to communicate about the students they serve was an ongoing challenge and source of frustration.

Additionally, it often took concerted effort and commitment from school leadership to shift the culture, structure, and norms to make room for partners at the table. For example, at one School A, the principal began including relevant partners in meetings with teachers. At first, some school staff with reluctant to share space with non-traditional colleagues. One teacher at the school recollected the following:

When I first came here, people would actually say ... in a staff meeting, 'Why is (this partner) in this meeting? We don't want them here. We're a faculty. We're professionals. And we should be able to have our own meeting and talk about things as teachers, as professionals, without having non-teachers here.' And that was like four years ago ... (The principal) just shut her down immediately ... He's just like, 'That's not an option ... (this organization) is our partner and they do belong in this meeting.'

In multiple schools we saw a blurring of the lines between school staff and community partners as they worked towards the shared goals of promoting student success. At School B, the afterschool program staff (i.e., mentors) have begun implementing "push-ins", whereby mentors provide extra assistance to teachers in the class, and "pull-outs", in which mentors work with a small group of students outside the class. One teacher at School B noted, "So, our programs are intertwined in that they're helping me during the day, and a lot of times I'm helping them after they get out of school." At School C, where afterschool activities include an academic period as well as activities like canoeing, biking, or soccer, afterschool staff take part in many school activities from field trips to cafeteria lunch duty. The principal at School D no longer makes a distinction between school-day and afterschool programming explained, "We don't call anything afterschool; there's no such thing as afterschool; everything is part of what you do." In this school, where almost all grade 6 and 7 students stay after the traditional school day for activities such as STEM, coding class, and Folklorico (i.e., dance), the afterschool program is called 8th and 9th period, and activities provided by CBOs are included on students' daily school schedules. The community school manager noted, "I'm working in this system that's working together ... I don't think the kids even know that they're in afterschool, because it's so

seamlessly integrated.” Well-integrated afterschool programs also appeared to mitigate difficulties in learning: teachers noted that the afterschool programming provides an opportunity for homework help, additional instruction, and activities aligned with school-day instruction.

5.2.3. Family Engagement

Lastly, community schools in our sample have found multiple ways to engage parents/caregivers in their children’s education as well as to support families as a whole. At minimum, each school offers comprehensive services to support families’ basic needs: food assistance, housing support, and English language classes. In most schools, these services were located in a family resource center on campus. Including parents in the school community is identified in the research as a critical component of not only supporting child development and academic learning [34–38], but also of fostering school coherence [10] and improvement [39,40].

All of the sample schools were actively working to engage families in the school community, especially in the areas of children’s learning and school improvement. For example, School D combined their family resource center and college prep center to help families understand how they could help their child become college-ready; families were counseled on graduation and college entrance requirements, filling out the FAFSA form, and other college essentials. School A implemented a new evidence-based approach to parent-teacher conferences in which teachers share where each student is in relation to the class, work with parents to identify goals for their student, and provide parents with activities that can support meeting those goals. Lastly, a number of the sample sites have made a concerted effort to engage parents as leaders in school improvement efforts. At one site, this meant establishing a parent-action team, scaffolded through a cycle of action and inquiry to address critical school issues such as college-going culture, chronic absence/attendance, and school culture/climate. At nearly every site, parents were perceived not only as critical constituents for the school to serve, but also as assets.

The community school manager often played a critical role in integrating parents and families into the school community. This sometimes included supervising family resource center staff (e.g., family liaisons), running parent leadership programs, and identifying resources that respond to family needs. However, a significant component of the community school manager’s work with families entailed engaging the school community to ensure that families are an integral part of school life. One teacher at School D said of her school’s community school manager: “She’s always the voice of including parents. She’ll come to division meetings [teacher grade level meetings] every once in a while. If teachers aren’t considering parents in this way, she brings that parent voice in, which is nice.” Community school managers also often work with partners (e.g., health clinic or afterschool program staff) and teachers to troubleshoot issues, develop inclusive practices, and ensure positive parent-school relationships.

Staff at several of the schools described the important role that parents play as advocates, both for their child, and for all children at the school. This includes advocacy to support policies and measures that bring new resources into the school. The principal at School D credits parents for advocating at the district and state levels for the passing of legislation which brought significant new funding streams to the school. Staff at that school also credit parents’ tenacity in demanding district attention to the poorly equipped science labs on campus.

At several of the community schools in this study, parent involvement was built into the fabric of the school. This is because some had been started as part of the small schools strategy in Oakland, with its heavy focus on parent involvement. However, even those sites scaffolded parent involvement as advocates through intentional strategies and practices. At School A, staff described the school leadership’s effort to create real partnerships and treat parents as critical stakeholders; for example, convening meetings with parents at which the principal explained the school budget including where Title 1 money comes from and how it is structured, as well as other sources of funding for the school. School B developed several parent advocacy groups, organized around a cycle of action for school

improvement. This was facilitated by the community school manager and a part-time parent organizer consultant, hired specifically for that purpose. In the cycles of action, parents look at data regarding issues at the school (e.g., the student achievement gap). They then form an action plan to learn more; for example, by visiting other schools that have developed best practices in response to an issue (e.g., attendance), and propose action in response. Several staff underscored the critical role that data play in this type of engagement. Parents are constantly seeing and reflecting on data, and it appears that the school facilitates structured opportunities to take action.

Including parents in meaningful ways also required a long-term commitment. While school staff spoke at length about how, as a school community, they are doing a much better job engaging parents and families, they also discussed the ongoing challenge of reframing traditional, often unidirectional parent-staff relationships. As the community school manager at School A mentioned, at their school they try to “engage the families so that they are equal partners. So, kind of moving away from ‘We have these things and we’re just going to give them to you.’ But, rather, really developing a mutual partnership.”

6. Discussion

Research has long documented the pernicious effects of poverty on educational attainment. Traditional schools, unfortunately, are often ill prepared, under-resourced, and ultimately, insufficient to mitigate these negative effects, especially in the contexts of high-poverty urban communities. Community schools represent an attempt to redress the effects of poverty and inequality through re-conceptualizing the role of the school as one that includes comprehensively addressing student barriers to learning. At the same time, research indicates that a co-location of services on a school site does not guarantee the quality of those services, or the ability of those services to effect student and school outcomes [17]. Rather, recent research suggests that to be effective, community schools must undergo organizational transformation to incorporate new roles, structures, and resources [9,14,18]. Additionally, schools and school staff must develop new capacities accordingly [8,9,14]).

A robust literature exists on the role of community and partner agencies in children’s learning. Research has long identified that children exist in multiple spheres of influence including school, home, and various other community institutions and contexts [34,35]. These other arenas outside the school walls are intricately linked to what happens within the school setting. During the last few decades, a body of research has emerged exploring how partnerships between school personnel and community entities are a valuable way to reinforce and enhance students’ learning [41–43]. Accordingly, some scholars and practitioners have argued that partnerships should not be pursued just for partnerships’ sake but, rather, conceived through a mutual goal of effecting students’ educational and life outcomes, the benefits of collaboration between each parties’ respective strengths and expertise, and a shared commitment to meaningful and sustainable engagement [44,45].

Across our sample sites, we found that school staff often described their partnerships as strategic. Strategic partners supported student learning by aligning with school goals and integrating with school resources. While school staff acknowledged that community-based partners provided key resources, they also found that aligning and integrating those resources to ultimately support school and student outcomes required: (1) developing and explicitly communicating shared goals; (2) collaborating with partners to include them in school structures and processes; and (3) a shared commitment to a long-term relationship of mutual respect. Especially we found this latter point—building a long-term relationship—to be critical. While school and community agencies often have similar goals—that is, positive outcomes for students—in practice, school-community partnerships are often complex and at times challenging, involving distinct organizational cultures, accountability systems, communication styles, and perspectives. In each of our sample schools, sites had examples of strong partnerships they felt to be deeply aligned with their school goals, vision, and every-day administration, as well partnerships that were more peripheral or, even, had ended as school leadership had determined they were no longer serving the school’s and students’ needs. In sum, partner agencies are critical elements of community school implementation, providing comprehensive services to students, their families,

and at times, the broader community. However, to align and integrate these partnerships into the school (ultimately, fostering greater coherence) requires collaboration from all adults at the school, as well as a shared commitment.

School leadership is key to opening the process of integrating and aligning community partners into schools. Richardson (2009) [14] argues that effective community school implementation requires leaders able to “plan and implement a vision, create relationships with critical people and organizations, understand and navigate (formal and informal) power relationships, and commandeer resources to support the proposed vision and structure”. During the course of our study, we found striking similarities in the approaches to leadership across each of our sample sites. While this study did not actively compare traditional to community school sites, these findings may help illuminate the unique ways in which leadership manifests at effective community schools.

Across our sample sites, while the principal was clearly the guiding force of the school, non-school site entities—such as partner agencies, community school managers, and sometimes families—played an integral role in school vision, planning, coordination, and even management. OUSD refers to this leadership approach as collaborative leadership, and has made the term a key feature in their community school model. All five of our sample sites demonstrated, to varying degrees, a collaborative leadership approach and considered it to be an important feature of their school. We also observed that this more inclusive form of leadership was necessary to foster inclusion of multiple stakeholders and alignment and integration of the various components of community school work, especially the comprehensive services with the school’s academic core. Concretely, principals played a significant role in facilitating collaboration between instructional and support staff, prioritizing parents and parent voice, articulating a strong vision for the school, and incorporating divergent stakeholders into that vision (e.g., sharing administrative responsibilities with the community school manager, allowing partners a place at the table). While collaborative leadership may appear in traditionally schools as well, it was essential for maintaining the dynamic shared vision that characterized successful community schools in our sample.

The collaborative culture of these community schools allowed for resources to be better leveraged and aligned to support student needs. For example, as described above, an afterschool provider collaborated with school leadership to adjust their own staffing schedule to allow afterschool mentors to spend time in the classroom during the day. This institutional collaboration—the willingness to be flexible and align one’s organizational resources to the school’s needs—facilitated on-the-ground collaboration in the classroom; mentors had time to coordinate their curriculum with teaching staff, ensuring afterschool instruction was aligned with school-day instruction, as well as strengthening the school-day instruction by providing another skilled instructor in the classroom. In our sample schools, the community school manager often played an important role in bridging and aligning school and partner efforts.

At all five sample schools, we observed evidence of a collaborative culture, in which adults at the school worked together across traditional boundaries to serve students’ needs. Through this collaboration, facilitated by key structures and supports (including the hiring of a designated community school manager), schools showed signs of greater cohesion and coherence; community services and supports were aligned with and integrated into the instructional core of the school. This work was made possible through long-term commitment—from school, partner, and district staff—to build relationships, foster trust, and ultimately, sustain the model. Further, while the primary focus of this paper is on the community school implementation process itself, overall we found that school adults perceived that community schools helped remove barriers to learning, allowed teachers to focus more on instruction, and contributed to a positive school climate.

In addition to interviews with key staff, we did analyze OUSD administrative data as an additional source of information regarding the relationship between community school implementation and student outcomes anticipated to be influenced by community school activities. We examined school-level trends in leading indicators of academic engagement and performance related to student

behavior and attendance. Figure 2 reports three-year trends in chronic absenteeism and student suspension rates for the three schools in our study sample that serve middle school students along with middle school district-wide averages. We examine middle school grades here because three of our five sample schools serve this population. Further, this grade level allows for comparisons between community schools and traditional schools, as there are very few community schools at the elementary school level, and few traditional schools at the high school level, making comparisons between community and traditional schools difficult. All three of these schools demonstrate reductions in the percentage of students suspended, consistent with district-wide trends. Further, in these schools, chronic absence either decreased or remained below the district average. Overall, these figures suggest trends in the desired direction although further statistical analysis is required to explore these relationships before making any causal inferences.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations to the research presented in this paper. First, while the findings reflect the perspectives of multiple stakeholders involved in implementing the community school work in these schools, they do not directly capture the voices of the students and families affected. Future research on this topic should include interviews with students and families in order to better understand their experiences and perspectives. Second, this study focuses primarily on understanding implementation of the community school model, and less so on the resulting outcomes for students, schools, and families. Reported outcomes are largely short-term and self-reported by respondents, in addition to examining unadjusted patterns in administrative data. Further, this study is limited in its investigation of the district role in community school implementation, and the extent to which district leaders perceive community schools as a new institutional design.

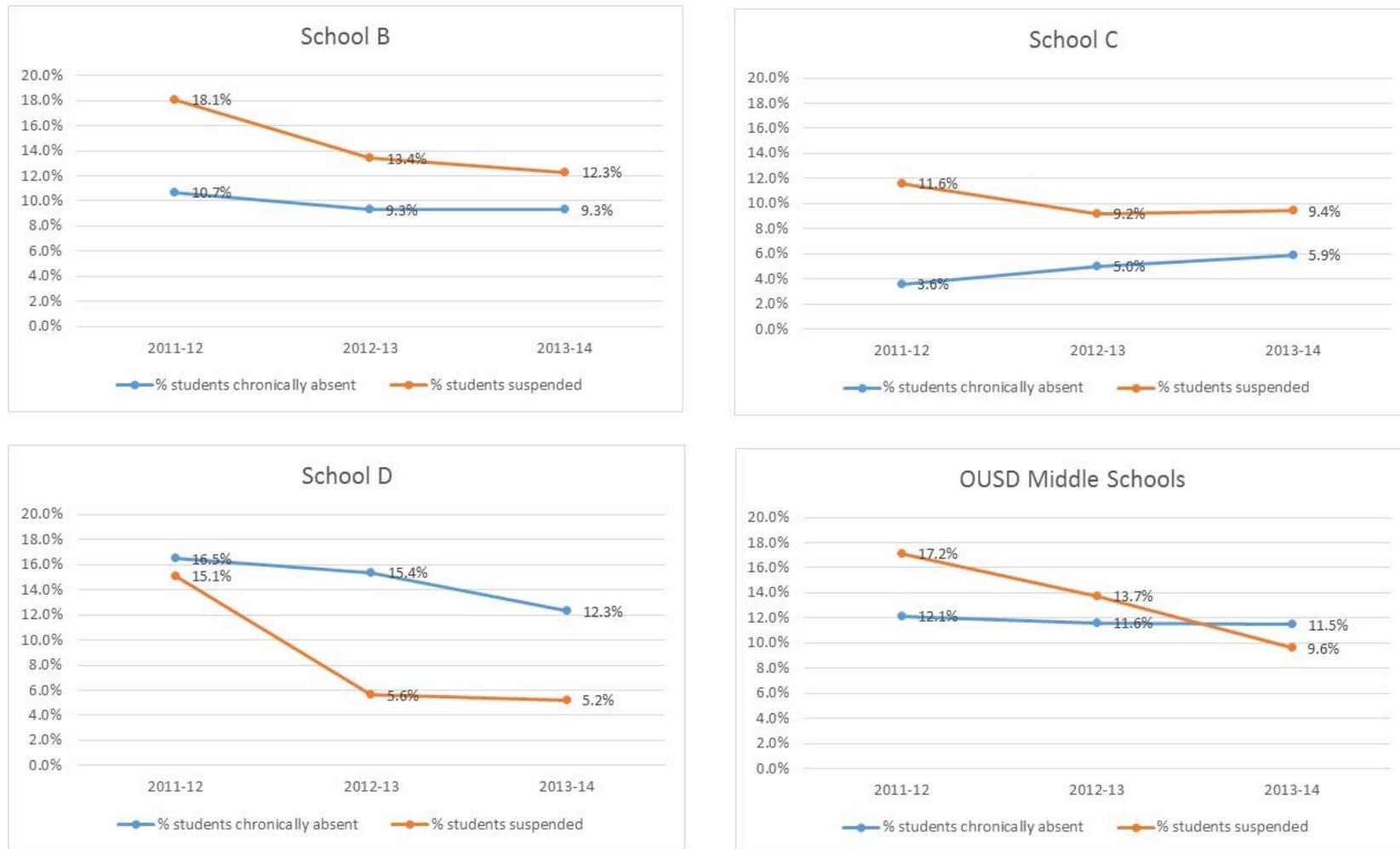


Figure 2. Chronic Absence and Suspension Rates in Study Sample Middle Schools (2011–2012 to 2013–2014).

7. Conclusions

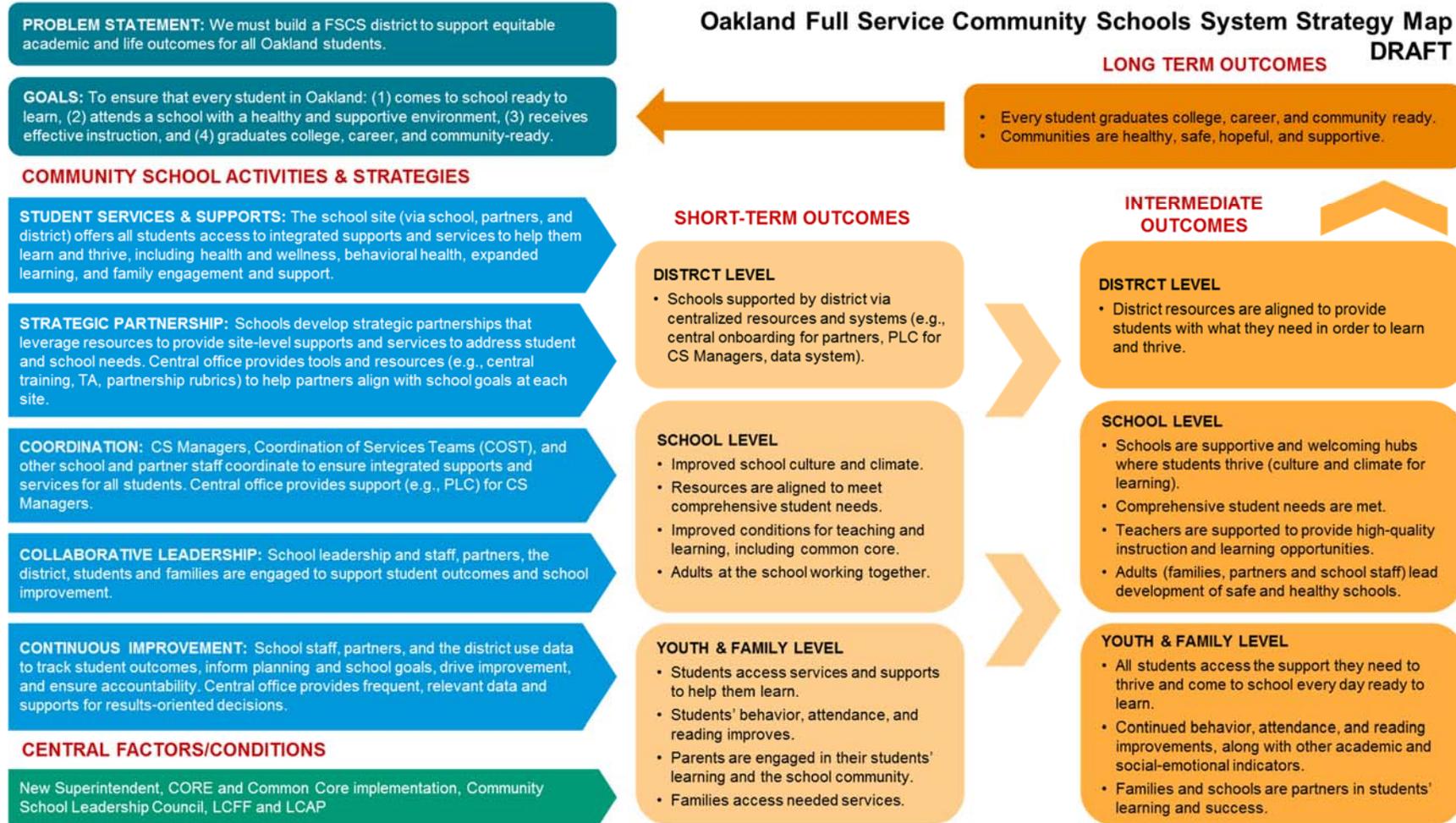
Although not without its challenges, our five sample Oakland community schools in many ways represent an expanded vision of urban schools, one that takes on student barriers to learning in close partnership with community partners and families. Importantly, these sample schools had been working as community schools for years, with ongoing negotiation of roles and relationships between school and partner staff. Based on interviews with a range of implementers we find evidence that the community school efforts in these schools have fostered meaningful collaboration between schools and outside organizations, as well as shared goals and alignment of activities to varying degrees. Further, we find suggestive evidence of positive shifts in proximal outcomes such as students receiving services, collaboration between adults in the building, and support for teaching, which, along with reductions in student absences and suspensions, are consistent with OUSD's theory of change for community schools as a strategy for improving student achievement. Additional research could help us better understand the extent to which a causal relationship exists between community school implementation and student outcomes, as well as the role of the district in supporting community school implementation. Oakland represents a particularly ripe context for study, as a full service community school district.

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Appendix A



Appendix B. Sample School Profiles

School A enrolls approximately 600 students in grades Transitional K–5. There is also a Pre-K program on site. The neighborhood the school is located in is highly diverse, with a large newcomer population. The school itself is nearly half Latino/a, 35% Asian, 17% African-American, with 54% of the students English Learners, and 93% eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The racial and ethnic demographics of the student body are more or less in line with those of the surrounding neighborhood as a whole, with a slightly higher proportion of Latinos and slightly smaller proportion of Asians. The school's current principal has been at the school for six years; the community school manager nearly 10 years (previously in other student/community support capacities). Recently, the community school manager position has become funded by the district; previously, it was funded and supported by the school's primary agency partner, which also provides after school services on campus.

School B is located in the same neighborhood as School A, and serves 574 middle school students, grades 6–8. In School B, 34% of students identify as Latino/a, 45% as Asian, and 17% as African-American, with 35% English Learners and 96% qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. The racial and ethnic demographics of the student body quite similar to those of the surrounding neighborhood as a whole. The Principal has also been at the school for six years, and the community school manager for almost 10 years (and previously, in other student/community support capacities, primarily coordinating the after school program). Recently, the community school manager position has become funded by the district; previously, it was funded and supported by one of the school's main agency partners, a community mental health provider.

School C was founded by parents and community members nearly 15 years ago. The school serves approximately 325 students in grades 6–8, the vast majority of whom are Latino/a (86%), with 43% of students English Learners and 98% qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. The student body appears to have a higher proportion of Latinos than the surrounding neighborhood as a whole where about half of the neighborhoods residents are Latino, about 20% African-American, and the remaining 30% Asian or White. The principal has been at the school almost three years, and with the district for twelve. The community school manager is a former school parent, and has been at the school for nine years total, including serving as a family liaison prior to becoming the community school manager three years ago.

School D is a "span" school, serving 462 students in grades 6–12. The school was founded by parents, teachers, and community members as part of the small schools reform strategy in Oakland, and has always considered parents a key part of the school community. The school is predominantly Latino/a (88%), followed by 11% African-American, and shares a campus site and some facilities with another small public high school (serving predominantly African-American students). Almost four out of ten (38%) students are English Learners, and virtually all (99%) students qualify for free or reduced priced meals compared to about three quarters for the district as a whole. The surrounding neighborhood is predominately Latino although the African American population is a close second and in some sections of the neighborhood comprises a majority. As noted by a teacher, the school is not a racial/ethnic reflection of the neighborhood as the school is predominately Latino and has a much smaller proportion of African Americans in the school compared to the neighborhood. A neighboring middle school has a considerably higher proportion of African American students. The current principal has been at the school for over five years, as has the current community school manager. The community school manager position recently became funded by the district; prior to this, the community school manager led the family resource and college prep center; other traditional responsibilities of the community school manager were shared across several community agency-funded support positions.

School E is a comprehensive public high school, enrolling nearly 2100 students in grades 9–12. The school offers an academy structure that breaks the curricular offerings into six small learning communities, including Health and Bio-Science Academy, the Engineering Academy, the Computer Science and Technology Academy, and the smaller Performing Arts, Fashion Arts, and Design

Academies, as well as an honors program for students in grades 11 and 12. The student body is 36% African-American, 22% White, 19% Latino/a, and 19% Asian. Approximately 8% of the students are English Learners, and 54% qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The school has an overall enrollment that is somewhat more diverse than OUSD districtwide. Notably, it enrolls more Non-Hispanic white students than typically seen in OUSD comprehensive high schools. According to the Principal and staff, however, ethnic/racial enrollment within the different academies varies. The Engineering Academy has a math GPA requirement for admission, and another academy is an honors program that admits students by teacher recommendation. Both of these selective programs enroll the majority of non-Hispanic white students at the school. This has been an issue that shapes the community school efforts, so the teachers and leadership provide a number of school-wide activities and programs that encourage a mix of students to participate with the aim of minimizing any feeling of within-school segregation. Some within-school segregation remains a fixture of the school culture, however. The current principal has been at the school for 14 years, and is in her first year serving as principal (previously she served as vice-principal). The CSM has been at the school for four years. Prior to her current role, the CSM worked on the school site with a partner organization.

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