A high-quality education helps young people develop into successful adults.

Yet, far too many children across America face substantial barriers to educational success, including under-resourced schools and a range of needs that go beyond the "three Rs." While educational reform efforts seeking to improve chronically underperforming schools abound, community schools are becoming an increasingly popular strategy for school turnaround. The model centers around a design that provides students and families with access to needed supports, such as healthcare services, educational enhancement and academic enrichment programs, family economic supports, and other services that address common obstacles to students' educational success.

In 2008, beginning with New Mexico, The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) advanced a community school model in a diverse group of high-need, underperforming middle schools. The effort, Elev8 Full Service Community Schools, expanded to Baltimore, Chicago, and Oakland, Calif. and integrates four pillars of support that research has linked with student achievement: out-of-school time or extended-day learning, school-based healthcare, family support, and community engagement. The goal was to alleviate non-academic challenges that undermine student performance and to improve the supportive overall school climate.

Elev8 implemented its four pillars in varied ways that were intended to address the needs and conditions of the local communities. The effort was directed by a lead agency in each location with roots in the region, and the schools in which it operated served a more diverse and disadvantaged population than the districts and states in which they were located. Atlantic also made investments in technical assistance for the partners and provided financing for communications, policy, and national advocacy to promote practice improvement and to help the sites advocate for community schools.

Each Elev8 school employed a team of staff, service providers, and an Elev8 coordinator to implement the four pillars. At the height of its implementation phase, Elev8 was located in 20 schools. In the 2013-14 school year, it was located in 16 schools. Elev8 schools collected data on an annual basis to understand the extent to which key Elev8 goals were being achieved.

Key Findings

This executive summary includes findings from a study of **"adaptations"** to the original design made by both the funder and the Elev8 sites. Also included are key results from the final **Elev8 national evaluation report** for students and the Elev8 schools.

1. Adaptations to Model

Adaptations made to the Elev8 model as the initiative progressed offer lessons and may have implications for other community schools efforts.

FUNDING: Atlantic's initial vision for Elev8 was premised on 10 years of infrastructure and service-funding investments. Needed infrastructure, including health clinics, and services were funded at the start. After four years, Atlantic's emphasis shifted to using compelling stories, evaluation data and family champions to promote sustaining and expanding the model. Regions were funded at about 20 percent of the first four years to support this policy and advocacy work. (Unfortunately, this shift coincided with the collapse of the economy, which made it very challenging for the regions to sustain Elev8 services as initially designed through leveraged funding and partnerships.)

MODEL DESIGN: Over the course of the initiative, Atlantic Philanthropies made other adaptations to increase the impact of the work and to address implementation challenges. Based upon the early implementation of the initiative in New Mexico, Atlantic gave other local sites more time to plan the design of Elev8 schools. This was to accommodate the need to engage providers, secure school leadership and staff buy-in, set up data and management systems, develop systems and processes for service integration, and to lay the groundwork for the shifts necessary to create an Elev8 school. The foundation also loosened its specific requirements for engaging with certain national partners, guidelines on the program "dosage" that students were to receive, and requirements about the organization of school-based health care. All of these adjustments were key to the success of the initiative since they allowed sites to match their work to their unique contexts.

IMPLEMENTATION: The grantees themselves made adaptations to better align Elev8 with the mission of the lead agency, to address specific school needs, to better align Elev8 with the cultures of its participants, to make Elev8 more sustainable, and to expand Elev8's impact.

For example, in Chicago, the lead Elev8 agency, the LISC, emphasizes community organizing and advocacy and envisioned Elev8 as serving the community. At the start, however, Elev8 was focused on supporting the school's students and their families so that student would be prepared to learn—and not on incorporating broader community voice. Chicago also adapted the school-based health center, originally intended just for students, so that they could serve community members.

The four Elev8 regions adopted different models for out-of-school time programming. Some schools provided intensive one-on-one supports to students who were at the highest risk of failing academically. Some schools provided before- and after-school programming, summer programming, and weekend programming, and other schools provided more traditional place-based after-school programming. In Oakland, the lead

agency decided to focus Elev8 efforts more squarely on students who were exhibiting the greatest academic challenges or were at risk of delinquency or gang involvement.

Elev8's family supports also were customized to the needs of the community. Supports ranged from benefits maximization, to legal services, to family events, to parent resource rooms at schools. Community engagement consisted of a broad variety of activities, ranging from parents' nights and school open houses to parent and community involvement in school governance bodies. School-based health centers' (SBHC) scope of services varied from region to region; in some schools, SBHCs were open to the community, and in others only students were served.

In Baltimore, the last Elev8 site to get up and running, many of the adaptations made aligned with the mission of East Baltimore Development Inc., the first lead partner. The focus of EBDI was to improve the living conditions in that part of the city. Elev8 schools didn't set up family resource centers, as had been done in other sites, since the lead agency had strong relationships with community organizations that could serve that role.

2. Student Outcomes

Elev8 schools collected data on an annual basis to understand the extent to which key goals were being achieved.

HEALTH: The majority of Elev8 students received annual health screenings or check-ups as well as dental care. In the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year for which data are available), across all four sites, 78% of Elev8 students reported receiving an annual check-up in the past year, and nearly 80% of students indicated they had dental care in the last year.

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL: A large majority (85%) of Elev8 students indicated that they have caring adults to whom they can go for personal advice or to talk about how they are doing in school. Just over three quarters of Elev8 students reported having positive relationships with their peers. Elev8 students felt relatively safe in school, on average. On a scale from 1 (not at all safe) to 10 (very safe) students provided, on average, a daytime school safety rating of 7.7.

ACADEMIC: One of Elev8's core goals was to improve the academic performance of Elev8 students. Elev8 measured itself against progress on three academic indicators: the percent of Elev8 students with 10 or fewer absences; the percent who have a GPA of C or better; and the percent who pass their core courses. Across regions, the percent of Elev8 students with 10 or fewer absences varied substantially, ranging from 45% to 80%. Between 54% and 81% of Elev8 students achieved a GPA of C or better, and between 79% and 90% passed all of their core courses. Importantly, Elev8 students' grades were constant or climbing in three of the four Elev8 regions over time.

3. School-Level Outcomes

Elev8 was a whole-school initiative; all students attending Elev8 schools were expected to benefit from improvements in school climate and performance that resulted from Elev8 activities and programs.

SCHOOL CLIMATE: One indicator of positive school climate is the degree to which positive and respectful relationships existed among Elev8 partners, school leadership, Elev8 staff, and school faculty at each Elev8 school. In 2014-15, (the most recent year for which data were available), staff at all Elev8 schools in three of the four regions reported positive and respectful relationships existed; in the fourth region, positive relationships were reported at three of the four schools. Similarly, Elev8 endeavors to create school environments in which students feel that they belong; between 37% and 52% of students by region "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they felt part of the school community in the 2013-14 school year (the most recent year in which data were available).

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE: Elev8 researchers explored how its implementation was associated with school outcomes such as school attendance rate, school truancy rate, and the percent of students proficient or better on standardized tests. Overall, there were no large changes in school performance. It is notable that some Elev8 regions did show small improvements that might be associated with the implementation of Elev8. However, in some cases, gains declined or were reversed during the later years of Elev8 implementation, coinciding with years in which regions began to rely more heavily on alternative funding sources for services or because Atlantic's funding for direct services ended.

Concluding Thoughts

These lessons on the conditions for success and key takeaways from adaptations that were made are offered in the hope that they can serve as useful guidance for similar efforts.

1. Conditions for Success

Regardless of context, there were four key conditions essential for Elev8's success: building a shared vision, clear and consistent communication, strong family and student engagement, and adequate, sustained resources.

BUILDING A SHARED VISION: By definition, Elev8 was built upon a foundation of relationships that existed both within schools and across schools and supporting organizations. Robust implementation of the model required a jointly built, shared vision of the goals of Elev8 and of the path toward meeting them. Each of Elev8's stakeholders came to the initiative with its own agenda, and early research on Elev8 showed that the success of Elev8's efforts was partly a function of whether all stakeholders bought into the concept of Elev8 overall so that they were working collaboratively rather than against one another. Other key factors included the leadership of the principal; buy-in among school staff; and a shared vision among providers.

CLEAR AND CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION: Routine and strategic communication across Elev8 staff, school staff, service providers and community members was another key condition of Elev8's successful implementation. At the most basic level, communication keeps stakeholders updated on programming, informed of events, and helps to recruit individuals for services. But the need to communicate effectively in Elev8 went deeper, so that principals and Elev8 coordinators, Elev8 services providers and school staff, and key stakeholders were all kept informed.

STRONG FAMILY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: Family and student engagement is at the heart of Elev8's success. Despite the robust and inclusive planning processes that occurred in many schools, Elev8 often struggled to engage families as the model rolled out. In order to ensure strong implementation of the Elev8 model, schools had to become welcoming environments for parents and community members. Space, cultural competency, and accessibility were keys to creating this environment. Many factors promoted student participation in Elev8 programs, including trust, high-interest programming, and the accessibility of the services.

ADEQUATE, PREDICTABLE, AND COORDINATED RESOURCES: In addition to start-up costs for planning and capital expenditures, community schools initiatives require resources for service sub-contracts, personnel, materials and supplies, the leadership of the lead agency, marketing and development, training, and research and evaluation. The costs of sustaining the Elev8 model are great and policymakers, funders, school districts and programs interested in such a model should be prepared to make a significant, multi-year investment and focus immediately on leveraging funding to stain and build on early benefits. Elev8's initial Atlantic funding brought many partners to the table, including schools, service providers, and community leaders. Coordination of these diverse resource streams was critical.

2. Five Key Lessons

In addition to demonstrating that organizations must be flexible in order to successfully navigate the implementation of a community school, other key lessons on adaptations include:

OPENNESS TO ADAPTATIONS: Sometimes initial assumptions might miss the mark when it comes to community culture, building sustainable partnerships, and meeting schools' needs. Therefore, policy makers, funders and lead agencies must be open to adaptations in community school efforts.

MISSIONS MATTER: Lead agencies' missions matter when implementing a community school: lead agencies play a key role in the successful implementation of a community school, and that agency's mission, strategy, and approach must be in alignment with the initiative to ensure strong outcomes.

ESSENTIAL INTERMEDIARIES: Intermediaries are an essential partner in a community school effort because they have the unique ability to convene partners, help them build a shared vision for the work, acclimate them to the school culture, and hold them accountable.

PAY ATTENTION TO SYSTEMS: Given that system barriers and long-held systemic beliefs held by some stakeholders are often unexpected obstacles to successful implementation, adaptations are particularly relevant when working within systems.

EXTERNAL FORCES PLAY A ROLE: Despite the many advantages being flexible and adaptable offers to the successful implementation of an initiative such as Elev8, external forces, such as fluctuations in funding streams and changes in the political and economic landscape, means that adaptations alone are insufficient for ensuring the sustainability of a community school.