Oregon's African American / Black Student Success Plan

Final Evaluation Report

June 2019

Prepared for

Oregon Department of Education
Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

255 Capitol Street NE
Salem, OR 97310

Prepared by

RMC Research Corporation
111 SW Columbia Street, Suite 1030
Portland, OR 97201

Prepared by

Caroline Qureshi
Nicole Cerra
Dr. Emily Saxton
Dr. Karen Drill
Erin E. Stack
Rachel Lahoff

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Project Description

In 2015 the Oregon Legislature enacted House Bill 2016, which directs the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to develop and implement a statewide education plan for African American/Black/African students who are in early childhood through postsecondary education programs. ODE awarded funding under House Bill 2016 to four grantees in the Portland metropolitan area from July 2016 through June 2017 (Year 1). These grantees, referred to as Phase 1 grantees, received renewed funding from October 2017 through June 2019 (Years 2-3). An additional five grantees, referred to as Phase 2 grantees, were awarded funding from July 2018 through June 2019. See Exhibit 1 for a full list of funded grantees and their House Bill 2016 project names.

Exhibit 1. The African American/Black Student Success Plan Grantees

Grantee Lead Organization(s)	Project Name
Phase 1 Grantees	
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) Africa House	Black/African Student Success Project (BASS)
Multnomah Education Service District (MESD)	Bars to Bridges Project
REAP Inc.	The REAP Expansion Project
Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) and Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center and Rosemary Anderson High School (POIC + RAHS)	African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County
Phase 2 Grantees	
Elevate Oregon	African American/Black Student Bonding Project
Early Learning Washington County	Building a SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County
Medford and Ashland School Districts	Building Capacity for Educational Equity
Lane Education Service District	Lane African American/Black Student Success Project
African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO)	Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators

Collectively, the nine Phase 1 and Phase 2 grantees represent school districts, education service districts, and culturally responsive, community-based organizations (CBOs)in two regions in Oregon: Metro Portland and Southwest. These grantees received African American/Black Student Success Plan funds to create or expand an exemplar program and develop collaborative practices to address one or more of the 14 indicators of success outlined in the African American/Black Student Success Plan (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. The African American/Black Student Success Plan's Indicators of Success

	Indicator
1	**Increase access to high quality, community-based early learning programs** focused on providing culturally specific environments to prepare African American/Black children for kindergarten
2	**Increase the number of culturally and linguistically responsive educational and certification pathways** for early learning providers reflective of African American/Black children in early childhood environments
3	**Build a consistent approach and aligned pathway between early childhood and K–3 education** to promote enrollment of African American/Black early learners
4	**Build culturally and linguistically congruent newcomer services** for African students who have had little or no formal schooling in Oregon
5	**Increase the number of Oregon school districts that recruit, hire, and retain African American/Black educators** at a rate comparable to that of Oregon's African American/Black student population
6	**Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum** in Oregon schools for African American/Black students
7	**Increase literacy outcomes** for African American/Black students
8	**Reduce the number of discipline incidents** for African American/Black students
9	**Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates** for African American/Black students
10	**Increase the rate of freshman on track** for African American/Black students
11	**Increase graduation rates** for African American/Black students
12	**Increase the postsecondary enrollment rates** of African American/Black students high school graduates and GED completers
13	**Increase the number of credits completed in postsecondary education institutions** by African American/Black students
14	**Increase associate degree or certificate and bachelor's degree attainment** of African American/Black high school graduates

Exhibit 3 presents the project logic model which describes activities, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes across all nine projects. Appendix A provides a snapshot of indicators targeted by project.

Exhibit 3. African American/Black Student Success Plan Logic Model

Grantees

Phase I (funded in 2016)

- Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization's Africa House
- Multnomah Education Service District
- REAP, Inc.
- Self Enhancement, Inc.

Phase II (funded in 2018)

- African Youth and Community Organization
- Early Learning Washington County
- Elevate Oregon
- Lane Education Service District
- Medford/Ashland School Districts

Activities

- One-on-one student mentoring
- Student engagement activities
- Professional development provided by grantee staff
- Professional development received by grantee staff
- Parent engagement activities
- Partnerships with schools/school districts, colleges/universities, and community organizations
- Community outreach

Outcomes

At the Systemic Level

- Increase access to high quality, community-based early learning programs focused on providing culturally specific environments to prepare African American/Black/African children for kindergarten.
- Increase the number of culturally and linguistically responsive educational and certification pathways for early learning providers reflective of African American/Black/African children
- Build a consistent approach and aligned pathway between early childhood and K–3 education to promote enrollment of African American/Black/African early learners
- Build culturally and linguistically congruent newcomer services for African students
- Increase the number of Oregon school districts that recruit, hire, and retain African American/Black educators at a rate comparable to that of Oregon's African American/Black student population
- Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum in Oregon schools for African American/Black/African students

For African American/Black/African Students

- Increase literacy outcomes
- Decrease discipline incidents
- Increase attendance rates
- Increase the rate of freshman on track
- Increase graduation rates
- Increase the postsecondary enrollment rates
- Increase number of postsecondary credits completed
- Increase associate degree/certificate and bachelor's degree obtainment

Impacts

Increase equity for Black/African American/African students in Oregon schools.

Evaluation Approach

RMC Research Corporation conducted an implementation and outcome evaluation that used a qualitative case study approach that was influenced by culturally responsive, participatory, and empowerment approaches. **Culturally responsive evaluation** centers evaluation in culture, recognizes that culturally defined beliefs are part of all evaluations, and responds to context-specific values and beliefs.[1] Moreover, culturally responsive evaluation seeks to bring balance and equity into the evaluation process—particularly with historically marginalized groups. This approach explicitly emphasizes shared lived experiences,[2] recognizes the work of early African American scholars,[3] considers the culture of the program and the participants,[4] attends to power differentials among people and systems,[5] explicitly names White privilege,[6] and pays careful attention to the assembly of an evaluation team.[7] **Participatory evaluation** is grounded in the experience of program staff, clients, and participants; aims to be useful for program administrators and decision-makers; and retains ownership of the evaluation with stakeholders.[8] **Empowerment evaluation** aims to use evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster program improvement and self-determination through self-evaluation and reflection.[9]

One aspect of evaluation RMC Research values most is collaborating with key stakeholders. Establishing a strong culture of communication and collaboration early on ensures that any necessary adjustments over the course of the evaluation can be made in a timely manner. At the start of each funding period RMC Research met individually with each of the grantees to learn about their programs and to begin cultivating a collaborative relationship. Using an approach that integrates principles from culturally responsive, participatory, and empowerment evaluation frameworks, RMC Research worked with the grantees to build internal capacity to conduct evaluation activities. This approach fosters each grantees' skills to continue evaluating their programs if funding is not available for evaluation in subsequent years. Throughout the evaluation RMC Research made themselves available to the grantees to provide technical assistance on data collection and to answer any questions about the evaluation. In addition,

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[1]Hood, S., Hopson, R., & Kirkhart, K. (2015). Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In K. Newcomer & H. Hatry (Eds.), *Handbook on practical program evaluation* (4th ed.; pp. 81–317). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
[2]Hood, S. (1998). Responsive evaluation Amistad style: Perspectives of one Black/African American evaluator. In R. Davis (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Stake Symposium on Educational Evaluation* (pp. 101–112). Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.
[3]Hood, S. (2001). Nobody knows my name: In praise of Black/African American evaluators who were responsive. *New Directions for Evaluation*, *2001*(92), 31–44.
[4]Frierson, H.T., Hood, S., & Hughes, G.B. (2010). Strategies that address culturally responsive evaluation. In J. Frechtling (Ed.), *The 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation* (pp. 75–96). Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation.
[5]Hood, S. (2009). Evaluation for any by Navajos: A narrative case of the irrelevance of globalization. In K.E. Ryan & J.B. Cousins (Eds.), *The Sage International Handbook of Educational Evaluation* (pp. 447–463). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
[6]Hopson, R.K. (2009). Reclaiming knowledge at the margins: Culturally responsive evaluation in the current evaluation moment. In K. Ryan & J.B. Cousins (Eds.), *The Sage International Handbook of Educational Evaluation* (pp. 429–446). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
[7]Askew, K., Beverly, M.G., & Jay, M. (2012). Aligning collaborative and culturally responsive evaluation approaches. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 35*(4), 552–557.
[8]Cousins, J.B. & Earl, L.M. (1992). The case for participatory evaluation. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 14*(4), 397–418.
[9]Fetterman, D.M., Kaftarian, S.J., & Wandersman, A. (1996). *Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment and Accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

RMC Research offered the option of an evaluation-related resource (e.g., logic model) or service (e.g., internal evaluation training) to each grantee to support their program-specific needs.

Culturally Responsive Evaluation

The evaluation of House Bill 2016 projects was guided by Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart's[10] considerations for culturally responsive evaluation (see Appendix B) and started during the first phase of funding (Year 1) with **preparing for the evaluation**. During this phase, RMC Research spoke with stakeholders from ODE's Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; the African American/Black Student Success Plan Advisory Group; and each project. These conversations were centered on the history of African and African American communities in Oregon and how that history, which includes multiple structural barriers that impede racial equity, would impact the evaluation. RMC Research also sought counsel from Dr. Rodney Hopson, an expert in culturally responsive evaluation, to provide guidance and feedback throughout the evaluation. RMC Research **answered stakeholders' questions** about whether and if evaluators who were not of color would be able to conduct a culturally responsive evaluation and continued critical conversations to move forward as evaluation partners. These discussions were about power, perceptions of research legitimacy depending on the researcher's race, implicit biases, discipline disproportionality, African American/Black students' limited exposure to African American/Black educators in Oregon, school climate, and the value of external evaluation. To keep culturally responsive evaluation at the forefront of most conversations, RMC Research incorporated conscious reflection on the evaluation process at meetings with stakeholders at all levels of the system.

During the second phase of funding, RMC Research has continued these conversations with Phase I grantees and started them with Phase II grantees. Because each project funded by House Bill 2016 is unique, the pace, and modes of communication differed by project and were guided by each project's preferences. Data collection was scheduled jointly with each project; however, key stakeholders were crucial for recruiting participants for focus groups. For example, in order to gather Somali parents together to conduct focus groups, the SPACE project staff knew that the best method would be to create a family event that RMC Research also attended. This allowed RMC Research to gather feedback from parents in a way that was unobtrusive and convenient for them. To reduce linguistic barriers, Somali parent focus groups for three grantees were co-facilitated with Suleyman Nor, the bilingual facilitator at Beaverton School District and/or BASS staff. Additionally, after consulting with Mr. Nor, RMC Research decided to refrain from audio taping the parent focus groups to reduce possible apprehension about the process. RMC Research also contracted with focus group facilitators who had experience working on equity-related projects and with diverse populations.

To ensure that **human subjects were protected** and that data would be secure, RMC Research submitted all project materials to Solutions IRB for approval by their Institutional Review Board. Evaluation participants were given informed consent documents in English or their preferred language, and, if necessary, the forms were read in English or the participant's preferred language. **Qualitative and quantitative data** were analyzed and synthesized by RMC Research, and **then reviewed and refined by each project** to ensure that each case study accurately reflected the program, used the correct terminology, captured programmatic and linguistic nuances, and stayed as close as possible to stakeholder and participant perspectives.

[10]Hood, S., Hopson, R., and Kirkhart, K. (2015). Culturally Responsive Evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In Newcomer, K. and Hatry, H (Eds.). Handbook on practical program Evaluation (4th ed.) (pp. 281-317). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Evaluation Design

To evaluate the African American/Black Student Success Plan, RMC Research conducted a **mixed-methods evaluation** that included (a) consulting with grantees and the ODE Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and (b) conducting an implementation and outcome evaluation using culturally responsive, participatory, and empowerment evaluation approaches. The evaluation was guided by the questions and data sources shown in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4. Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question	Data Sources
Implementation Evaluation	
1. What are the primary program activities?	▶ Program documents ▶ Program data ▶ Project leadership interviews
2. What factors are facilitating implementation of programs?	▶ Project leadership interviews ▶ Direct service provider interviews
3. What significant challenges have the programs encountered?	▶ Project leadership interviews ▶ Direct service provider interviews
4. What are the programs' successes and lessons learned?	▶ Project leadership interviews ▶ Direct service provider interviews
5. How have programs changed or adapted based on implementation facilitators and challenges?	▶ Project leadership interviews ▶ Direct service provider interviews
Outcome Evaluation	
6. What effects have the programs had on their targeted indicators?	▶ Project leadership interviews ▶ Direct service provider interviews ▶ Student/parent/participant focus groups
7. To what extent have the programs met their targeted indicators?	▶ Program data

To address each of the evaluation questions, RMC Research used a combination of a case study and cross-site evaluation design. Because each project is unique, using a case study approach allows for the full story of each project to be told without losing the individual project characteristics. As such, this report dedicates a chapter to each project, reporting on program implementation, successes, lessons learned, facilitators, challenges, effects of programming, and indicators targeted. As part of the cross-site approach, RMC dedicated a chapter describing the findings across all nine grantees. Cross-site findings identify the most common challenges and facilitators to projects serving African/African American/Black students. Cross-site findings can also identify areas where projects may be able to leverage each other's resources in order to overcome implementation challenges.

Implementation Evaluation

The implementation evaluation was driven by ongoing conversations with each grantee about project activities and addresses Evaluation Questions 1 through 5. **The sample for the implementation**

evaluation includes project leadership and direct service providers from each of the nine projects. RMC Research developed two focus group protocols (one for program leaders and one for direct service providers) that reflect implementation and include questions about primary program activities, successes and lessons learned, facilitators and challenges to implementation, and program changes or adaptations made because of implementation facilitators and challenges. The project leadership and direct service provider focus groups were conducted in spring 2019. Implementation data were analyzed using an inductive approach to identify emerging themes, and then summarized to provide a point-in-time picture of program implementation.

Outcome Evaluation

The outcome evaluation was guided by conversations with each grantee regarding targeted outcomes and address Evaluation Questions 6 and 7. The sample for the outcome evaluation includes **program participants, project leadership, and direct service providers** from each of the nine projects. RMC Research worked with grantees to determine the focus group participants and develop the focus group protocols. Each grantee had the option of two participant focus groups and chose the type of participant they felt would be most helpful in terms of telling the story of the project. Exhibit 5 shows the type of participant focus group each project chose.

Exhibit 5. Participant Focus Group Types by Project

Program	Focus Group Type (number of groups)
Black/African Student Success Project (BASS)	Parent (1), Youth (1)
Bars to Bridges Project	Youth (1), Juvenile Court Counselors (1)
The REAP Expansion Project	Youth (2)
African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County	Parent (1), Youth (1)
African American/Black Student Bonding Project	Youth (2)
Building a SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County	Youth (1), School Staff (1)
Building Capacity for Educational Equity	Parent (1)
Lane African American/Black Student Success Project	Parent (1), Youth (1)
Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators	Youth (1), School Staff (1)

Note. Building Capacity for Educational Equity was unable to gather a second parent group within the data collection time period.

Focus groups were conducted in spring 2019. RMC Research also included outcome evaluation questions in the project leadership and direct service provider focus groups to assess their perceptions of how programs influence students' short-term outcomes. Focus group data were analyzed qualitatively and summarized to provide a point-in-time picture of how programs influence targeted short-term outcomes. RMC Research also conducted cross-site analyses to identify similarities and differences across grantees.

Through collaboration with each grantee, RMC Research identified quantitative outcome measures relevant to each program. RMC Research descriptively analyzed program outcome measures and summarized the findings. Examples of program data include number of students and families served, number of professional development activities organized/led by grantee staff, and number of professional development activities attended by grantee staff.

Cross-Site Findings

Nine different projects have been funded through House Bill 2016 to create or expand an exemplar program and develop collaborative practices to address one or more of the 14 indicators of success outlined in the African American/Black Student Success Plan.

Across all House Bill 2016 projects, 3,541 students have been served to date, 103 student activities have been offered, over 352 family home visits or individualized support meetings have been facilitated (reaching 121 unique families), and over 1,000 attendees have participated in parent/family events.[11]

Each project and their evaluation findings are described in detail in the following chapters. Below is a brief description of each grantee, followed by the most prevalent project activities, success, challenges and student/family barriers found across the nine projects.

Phase I (funded starting July 2016)

Black/African Student Success Project (BASS)—The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) is a community-based organization that provides culturally and linguistically specific services to the region's immigrants and refugees. IRCO's Africa House functions as a one-stop center, providing services to Oregon's diverse Black/African immigrant and refugee communities. In 2016 IRCO received funding from House Bill 2016 to lead a consortium that includes four east Multnomah County School Districts—David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, and Reynolds—and Portland State University to pilot the Black/African Student Success Project (BASS). The goal of BASS is to develop a network of culturally responsive student and family supports for the growing population of Black/African immigrant and refugee students in the region.

Bars to Bridges Project—Bars to Bridges Project provides culturally responsive support and resources to detained African American, Black, and multiracial students to foster a successful transition back to school and community. The project aims to reconnect students to family and community resources and prepares students to enter the workforce. Bars to Bridges Project goals are to (a) reduce the number of students denied reentry into their neighborhood school, (b) support students' successful return to their neighborhood middle and high schools, alternative schools, community colleges, and 4-year colleges, and (c) keep students on a path to graduation. The reentry process is navigated by transition specialists who are culturally responsive and trauma-informed professionals responsible for all aspects of Bars to Bridges Project's wraparound support model, which fosters support networks for youth and their families.

The REAP Expansion Project—REAP, Inc. is a multicultural youth leadership program which offers a continuum of services that provide culturally responsive supports to children and youth in Grades 3–12. In 2016 REAP, Inc. received funding from House Bill 2016 to expand services to Aloha High School, Centennial High School, David Douglas High School, Oliver Elementary School, Parklane Elementary School, and Ron Russell Middle School. The REAP Expansion Project offers student participants (a) leadership programming and ongoing academic support during and after school; (b) restorative justice services related to behavior, curriculum, and restorative planning; (c) leadership conferences to

[11]Participation counts across all projects are estimates. Precise counts were not possible due to the unique data points that each project collected.

promote leadership, student voice, and expose students to African American/Black community leaders; and (d) services for chronically absent students and their families.

African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County—This project is a collaboration between Self-Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) and Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center and Rosemary Anderson High School (POIC + RAHS). The aim of this project is to ensure that African American students reach their full potential and become positive contributing citizens who complete at least two years of postsecondary education or successful workforce experience by age 25. SEI's services are guided by a strength-based positive youth development relationship model that includes African-American cultural traditions and norms, emphasizes relationships, and partners with other community organizations. SEI is dedicated to guiding underserved youth toward reaching their full potential through its relationship model, the SEI Standards, and SEI's Fundamental Beliefs. POIC + RAHS are committed to the future success of at-risk youth through the age of 25. To do this, POIC + ROHS provide the highest quality of service in education, mentoring, family outreach, employment training and placement. POIC + RAHS provide accredited educational services which are innovative, culturally specific and effectively engage and motivate youth of color to achieve post-secondary success.

Phase II (funding started July 2018)

African American/Black Student Bonding Project—This project is an extension of the Elevate Oregon program, which uses a culturally responsive model to provide in- and out-of-school programming to underserved children in the Parkrose School District. The main program components are delivered via Teacher Mentors. Teacher mentors provide support to students through: (a) an accredited curriculum focused on fostering seven character qualities (such as courage and respect) and six life skills (such as career-mindedness and communication); (b) consistent and caring mentoring relationships; and (c) leadership opportunities through the Little Lift program where secondary students act as mentors to elementary students. Elevate Oregon places emphasis on both positive daily interactions with their student participants and focuses on key transition periods such as the middle school to high school transition (e.g., Ninth Grade Counts Program). The African American/Black Student Bonding Project was specifically funded to support Elevate Oregon's work with middle school students in the Parkrose School District.

Building a SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County—This project is a collaboration between Early Learning Washington County, Beaverton School District, and the Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization (CAIRO) with the aim to provide services and support for Somali families in the Beaverton/Aloha area, which has the largest Somali population in Oregon. The overarching goals of the SPACE project are to (a) empower parents to develop skills, confidence, and knowledge in order to advocate for their children; (b) grow the pool of culturally informed educators in the Beaverton School District; and (c) support Somali students so that they can succeed in school and life. The SPACE Project reaches students and families from Pre-K to Grade 12 in the Beaverton School District via SPACE agents, the direct service providers, who provide both in-school and at-home support to students and families. SPACE agents also serve as a bridge between families and schools by helping schools and parents communicate with each other, providing cultural consultations with school staff, and providing trainings for school staff around African culture and history.

Building Capacity for Educational Equity—Building Capacity for Educational Equity is a collaboration between academic institutions and CBOs in Southern Oregon with the aim to ensure equity for African American/Black students and to create a sense of community and welcoming environment for African American/Black families and educators. Building Capacity for Educational Equity reaches students and families from Pre-K to Grade 12 using a multi-pronged approach which includes (a) meeting with parents and students on a regular basis to determine needs and provide support, (b) organizing student-focused

activities that foster a sense of community, identity, and empowerment, and (c) providing trainings to district and school staff as well as parents and students around equity issues. The majority of project activities are driven by an Equity Specialist and Teacher on Special Assignment. The project has also gathered an advisory board of five prominent community members to assist in planning and implementing events.

Lane African American/Black Student Success Project—This project is a collaboration between academic institutions and CBOs in Lane County with the aim to align and leverage services to address priority gaps experienced by African American/Black students and their families. Lane African American/Black Student Success Project reaches students and families from Pre-K to Grade 12 through either connecting students/families to existing resources or providing new programming and services through the student success navigators. Student success navigators provide services throughout three school districts (Springfield Public Schools, Eugene School District, and Bethel School District) and work primarily with high schools to support African American/Black students, foster a sense of community, ensure students are offered the same opportunities as other students, help them learn how to advocate for themselves, and ensure students are aware of the existing services that exist through community-based organizations like the NAACP and Connected Lane County.[12] Lane African American/Black Student Success Project also provides professional development on implicit bias, trauma-informed and restorative practices, and culturally responsive teaching for both project staff and school staff, builds relationships between school districts and CBOs, and is working to ensure goals between school districts and CBOs are aligned.

Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators—Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators is a collaboration between African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO), the Center for African Immigrants and Refugees of Oregon (CAIRO), and Portland State University's Graduate School of Education & Early Childhood Council with the aim to provide services and support for Black/East African immigrant families in Reynolds School District and those attending the CAIRO preschool. The Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators Project has four main components: (1) providing professional development to CAIRO school staff and cultural navigators (direct service providers) using a participatory research approach, (2) creating culturally responsive Pre-K curriculum for use at CAIRO using a participatory approach, (3) providing direct support to both parents and students in the Reynolds School District via the cultural navigators, and (4) serving as a bridge between families and schools by helping schools and parents communicate with each other and providing cultural consultations with school staff.

Program Implementation

RMC Research conducted focus groups with 36 project leaders, 47 direct service providers, 42 students, 28 parents, 11 school staff, and four juvenile court counselors across the nine projects to assess project implementation facilitators, barriers, successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

Primary Activities

Although each grantee has nuances unique to their own project implementation and organization, the overarching concept that all projects address is that **student success is more than just students thriving academically while they are at school**. Focus group participants described the myriad of barriers African/African American/Black students face that have an effect on academic success, including:

[12] http://connectedlanecounty.org/

- Experiencing bias and disproportionate disciplinary practices in schools,
- Experiencing stigma in schools due to being detained,
- Experiencing bullying in schools for ethnic or religious reasons,
- Having family obligations such as helping to pay bills or watching siblings,
- Having parents who may not be engaged with school or are unable to be present in their lives,
- Having to navigate language and culture differences in schools,
- Lacking a sense of community or belonging in their schools,
- Lacking school staff that are like them both in demographics and shared life experiences,
- Lacking transportation to get to and from school, and
- Navigating the complex reenrollment process for adjudicated youth.

The following is a summary of the most implemented activities to address student barriers to academic success.

Building relationships with schools.

Project staff from all projects reported that relationships are critical to project implementation and starts with establishing relationships with schools. The level of relationship building with schools varies by project. More established projects (i.e., projects who have been doing this work since before acquiring additional funding through House Bill 2016) reported mostly solid relationships where project staff are included in school staff meetings, behavioral meetings, and are a part of hiring and equity committees. Projects who are in their first year of implementation reported just starting to build these relationships by meeting with district staff, establishing a presence in the schools, creating partnerships at the district level to act as liaisons between project staff and schools, and providing presentations and trainings that explain the work they strive to do with students and school staff. All projects noted that this component takes a very long time (established projects noted it takes years) and is critical to being able to support student success.

Engaging and supporting parents.

Student success is driven by not just what happens at school, but also by the stability in students' homes and support from their parents or guardians. Having someone who can support parents as they get back on their feet, guide them through navigating the school system, and encouraging them to advocate for their children in schools translates to student success. All projects described how they **engage with parents** to determine if students have challenges at home and how project staff can help mitigate them. Direct service providers assisted parents with non-academic issues such as helping them navigate the logistics of getting the heat turned back on in their home, or accompanying parents to a Department of Human Services (DHS) meeting because of language or cultural barriers. Direct service providers also assist parents with academic-related issues such as helping parents understand their and their children's rights within the school system (e.g., knowing they can request an Individual Education Plan (IEP) reevaluation as many times as they want), helping African immigrant parents make sense of report cards, or accompanying parents to school meetings if they felt intimidated to attend on their own. Parent engagement varies by project, with some projects focusing on family

> "I'm trying to help the parents reach a point where they can self-advocate. Come into the space and not feel too intimidated to walk past the entry doors of the school or be able to request a meeting with broken English or no English at all."
>
> Direct Service Provider Focus Group

engagement activities such as district family nights, and others who reach out to parents on an individual basis.

Engaging and supporting students.

Within schools, student success is driven by a number of factors, including students' social-emotional skills, leadership skills, sense of belonging at their school, relationships with teachers and peers, and academic skills. Most projects are designed so that direct service providers can offer both one-on-one support and group activities to address the myriad factors that drive student success. **Direct service providers** place themselves in the schools or juvenile detention centers so that they can form relationships with students and begin to assess their needs in order to provide support. Additionally, direct service providers are often demographically matched to the students they are supporting which enhances their ability to build trust between themselves and the students.

> "Your [direct service provider] can tell when something is going on. Whether it's in class or outside of class, . . . they can figure it out really easily. It's kind of hard to get that past them. They are usually there to be like, 'Hey, what's going on? Do I need to talk to someone? Do I need to talk to a teacher? Do you need to get your feelings out? What's going on?'"
>
> Student Focus Group

Individualized support is provided in a variety of different ways depending on the project. Some projects have dedicated direct service providers in the schools at all times, and students are able to visit them at any point during the school day to get needed support. Direct service providers for other projects have scheduled times where they visit students in their reading or math classrooms to provide individualized support. These one-on-one sessions offer students a non-judgmental safe space to discuss a wide variety of topics including tutoring help on an academic subject, providing emotional support to students because of conflicts in school or at home, helping African immigrant students navigate the social landscape of school, and supporting cultural identity.

> "Our [direct service provider] talks to us as more of an equal instead of seeing us as children like some teachers at school. It feels more comfortable talking to them."
>
> Student Focus Group

Structured group programming and field trips are provided by most projects and typically focus on social emotional skills (e.g., stress management), life skills (e.g., goal setting), self-advocacy, cultural identity, gender specific support (e.g., girls empowerment group), leadership, student voice, and entrepreneurship. Field trips are often centered around visiting different industries and colleges to give students an idea of what their post-secondary options are. Structured group activities can be either during school or after school, depending on the project, and have the added function of **creating a sense of community** among African/African American/Black students. Often students feel isolated due to their small numbers in schools, and the fact that their teachers are rarely demographically matched to them. Creating programming that brings together African/African American/Black students allows them the space to share experiences with their peers which increases their sense of belonging in school.

> "It was a good feeling to know that you were going to school and then go[ing] to your after-school program. I can tell [other students] about what kind of stuff I use for my hair, or just something that you can relate to culturally. I didn't have to feel like, 'Oh, my accent is too heavy.' It was a moment of [feeling] free and just be[ing] yourself."
>
> Student Focus Group

Bridging communication gap between parents, students, and schools.

All projects reported that one of the main project activities that leads to student success is acting as a bridge between schools, students, and parents. Project staff described a variety of different types of communication gaps including student-teacher and parent-teacher gaps. Focus group participants reported a lack of positive communication between **parents and schools** due to cultural differences, language barriers, and school staffs' overall lack of experience in interacting with students in a culturally responsive way. Direct service providers facilitate positive relationships between parents and school staff by acting as a translator (both linguistically and metaphorically) to communicate to school staff the parents' points of views and concerns, and to communicate to parents the school's points of views and concerns. For example, direct service providers have had conversations with African immigrant parents about the importance of vaccinations and why they need to ensure their children are up to date in order to remain in school. Another example is explaining to teachers why parents do not want their child participating in a certain activity in school due to religious or cultural concerns.

> "I think being a part of [the district] also helps put some of our parents at ease and feel like they're connected as well. Now they know they can touch somebody at the district if they have an issue or a problem"
>
> Direct Service Provider Focus Group

Direct service providers provide a similar service between **students and school staff**. Often students do not have strong relationships or trust built with their teachers, and do not feel comfortable sharing personal challenges that may influence their academics or behaviors. Direct service providers, through their work forming relationships with students and school staff, are able to speak to school staff on behalf of students so that school staff can be aware of the whole picture of what is going on with a particular student. For example, one direct service provider shared that a policy of 'no cell phones in class' was amended by a teacher after the direct service provider informed her about a recent life trauma that had left the student feeling upset in class without access to her cell phone.

Providing support and training to direct service providers.

The work of the direct service providers can be emotionally taxing and logistically challenging. Project staff across all projects reported providing training to direct service providers to ensure they have the tools they need to support students and families. Types of training varies by project. Some projects send their direct service providers to trainings that other organizations facilitate, some projects provide training in-house from senior direct service providers or project leaders, and other projects employ a mix of the two strategies. Training topics include (a) understanding school policies around student and parent rights, (b) classroom management, (c) restorative justice, (d) conflict resolution, (e) trauma-informed care, (f) implicit bias, (g) microaggressions, (h) cultural agility, and (i) systemic racism.

> "It was an amazing opportunity to collaborate with others and see what's working, what's not working, what is being implemented, ideas that we haven't even thought of."
>
> Direct Service Provider Focus Group

In addition to the above activities which are prevalent across all projects, the following activities are also being employed by some projects:

- Leveraging resources from other CBOs to maximize resources and reduce redundancy.
- Implementing a restorative justice program that allows students an alternative to suspension.
- Providing culturally responsive training to school staff and community stakeholders.

Successes

The most frequently reported successes include (a) student successes such as increased engagement in school and academic performance; (b) improved relationship between families, schools, and project staff; and (c) leveraging resources from other grantees or community based organizations.

Student successes.

Project staff from all projects shared stories of student successes, which spanned a wide variety of types. **Increased student engagement** in school was the most frequently reported student success. Project leaders, direct service providers, students, and school staff reported that students are more engaged due to the work of the direct service providers, which include:

> "I saw a lot of my Somali girls, they were so impressed that [direct service provider] could work here. They were like, 'Oh, she can work here? I can work here?' Because most of our staff is white. To have a more diverse staff is something we're always working on doing. Having a cultural navigator provided that for kids and for parents."
>
> School Staff Focus Group

- Forming relationships and bonds with students on a personal level.
- Communicating to students they are smart and capable of doing well in school.
- Providing accountability such as calling a student to make sure they are on their way to school, or walking students to their classes.
- Providing a platform for student voice to be heard through project programming or supporting activities within the school such as Black Student Unions.
- Proactively intervening in real time when issues arise.
- Providing academic support which increases student confidence and makes them feel more excited about being at school.

Stories shared included students who previously struggled with attending school or were not engaged while at school, and after working with direct service providers they not only attended school more often, but also became more engaged and even started taking on leadership roles. Students themselves echoed these sentiments in focus groups, citing how their relationships with the direct service providers drive and motivate them to attend school more often and try harder.

> "[Project] opened my eyes to the idea that you don't always have to go to the top college to succeed. You can go to community college and still get to where you want to be. That just took the stress off and makes me feel like even if I don't get into those, I still have a chance."
>
> Student Focus Group

Project staff also reported **students thriving academically** as a result of working with direct service providers and engaging in project activities. Project staff shared many examples of individual students who made marked improvements in their overall GPAs (e.g., moving from 1.0 to 3.0 GPA). Students echoed these sentiments, sharing that the individualized attention they get from their teacher mentors 'hypes them up' or motivates them to succeed in school. Teachers also shared stories of increased academic success, one teacher shared, "The student specifically that [the direct service provider] is working with this year, I can really see the changes in him. He

> "When you know that you have people around you who care whether you go to school or not, then you feel like you should go to school. Some days I feel like I should not go to school, but when I see [the direct service providers] twice a week I feel the urge to go to school every day."
>
> Student Focus Group

started working with him kind of at the end of the first semester and he was failing some classes and wasn't showing a ton of motivation. He was able to get his grades up and pass some of those classes and then this semester he's been off to a much stronger start. He'll come in and say, 'Hey, what can I do? What do I need to turn in?'" Additionally, students are thinking more about post-secondary plans and report that the direct service providers and project activities have opened their eyes to the possibilities. One student reported not realizing historically black colleges and universities existed before going on a project field trip, and now has been accepted to one of those universities and will be attending fall 2019. Another student shared that engaging in project activities "made me realize there are different paths to success", and if they do not get into a four-year college, there are other options.

Other student successes that were more project-specific include:

- An increased interest in post-secondary plans.
- An increased ability to self-advocate.
- A reduced rate of behavioral incidences.
- Smoother transitions back to neighborhood schools after adjudication.
- Decreased recidivism among adjudicated youth.

Improved relationships between families, schools, and project staff.

Projects reported that over time relationships between **project staff and schools** have become stronger and more collaborative. This success is more prominent with established projects (i.e., projects who have been doing this work previous to procuring funding through House Bill 2016); however, newer projects also reported making strides with school and district staff. Two projects reported that positive relationships with schools led to an increased interest in expanding services due to district and school staff recognizing the value of their work. Project staff also reported that school staff overall are appreciative of their presence and the support they provide, and many teachers are open to collaborating with direct service providers to make sure students are getting the support they need.

> "Now there is somebody to turn to, to help with various issues that come in the school system. We had some things that have come up where we communicated directly to [direct service provider] and were able to go down to the school and speak with the staff and principal. It really helped a lot. I think having that person, having someone to turn to helped."
>
> Parent Focus Group

Project staff and parents shared that relationships between **families and schools** have become more positive. Because the direct service providers have established relationships with both parents and school staff, they are able to navigate issues and concerns because they built trust with both parties. One parent noted that previously, there was an 'us versus them' dynamic between parents and school staff, but now "the administration appears to be making a greater effort to partner with us and communicate." Another project noted that as direct service providers guided African immigrant parents through all of the nuances of how schools function, parents became more empowered to advocate for themselves and their children, and have even begun attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings with the help of the direct service providers.

Leveraging resources from other projects or CBOs.

More than half the projects described a variety of ways they have been able to leverage resources and partnered with other CBOs in order to efficiently implement programming.

Project staff described leveraging professional development events of other House Bill 2016 projects. For example, Bars to Bridges facilitated a professional development series on equity for community stakeholders and connected with direct service providers from the REAP Expansion Project so that they could attend. REAP Expansion Project is also collaborating with Bars to Bridges on providing after-school programming for Bars to Bridges youth. Another example of leveraging services within the House Bill 2016 projects is professional development from the Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators project that included direct service providers from the Building a SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County project. These collaborations have helped projects problem-solve while conserving resources and are promoting a strong relationship between grantees. Project staff also reported leveraging existing resources outside of House Bill 2016. For example, Building Capacity for Educational Equity project reported sending direct service providers to an equity training opportunity through a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust.[13]

> "I didn't see us organized around this idea of supporting our African American group before. We had different people doing different pieces. This grant is actually allowing us to actually sit at a table, start talking, and think long term and not just this grant for this particular time."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

In addition to the above successes which are prevalent across all projects, the following successes were reported by some projects:

- Finding and building the capacity of a strong group of direct service providers.
- Increased project visibility.
- Creating a sense of community among African American/Black families.

Challenges

The most prominent challenges reported by focus group participants include (a) the disconnect between districts or schools and project goals, (b) the intense workload of direct service providers, (c) late or uncertain funding, and (d) data collection.

Disconnect between districts/schools and project goals.

Nearly all projects described frustrations around working with districts, schools, and school staff and noted that to decrease the student achievement gap for African/African American/Black students, districts/schools and CBOs need to learn more about how to work in a culturally responsive manner. At the **district level**, project staff reported at times districts did not prioritize project programming like finding time for teacher professional development on restorative justice or implicit bias. When the buy-in is missing at the district level, it is difficult to get buy-in at the school or school staff level. One project also noted that a school district has not aided the project with funding despite agreeing to at the start of project implementation. Similarly, at the **school level**, project staff reported schools do not prioritize group activities for students, equity trainings for school staff, and student field trips. If schools do not see the value in a particular activity, it is very hard for program staff to move forward with implementation. Program staff also noted

> "We need change within the normal [school] system. That means that they have to embrace cultural education. They have to embrace the fact that there needs to be change in how we look at our students and how we interact with our students. It can't be just that we hire [direct service providers] and people of color and put them out there and make them do this work."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

[13] https://mmt.org/

frustrations around the perspective of several schools that CBOs or other types of funded projects are going to come into the schools to 'fix' the problem of African American/Black student achievement without having to do any work themselves. Some districts or schools resist reevaluating their policies and practices. For example, many African immigrant students are referred to special education services when it is not clear that there is an actual special education need. When the referral is questioned, schools are not willing to budge or re-think their decisions. Similar frustrations were shared around working with specific **school staff**. Examples include (a) teachers asking direct service providers to talk to parents who speak English instead of attempting to converse with the parent directly, (b) teachers writing off a conflict between a group of Somali girls and other girls as 'teenage girls' drama when in fact the Somali girls were experiencing racism, and (c) teachers quickness to defend themselves as 'not being racist' to avoid engaging in difficult discussions.

Intense workload of direct service providers.

Another prevalent challenge across projects was the intense workload of the direct service providers. Addressing student success using a holistic approach means providing a wide range of supports to a wide range of people. Direct service providers are finding themselves navigating more than just school policies. Direct service providers are (a) assisting **parents** with home challenges, helping them get their drivers' license, accompanying them to court hearings and school meetings, (b) providing **student** support for academic, social, and emotional issues both individually and as part of group programming, and (c) working with **school** staff to increase their cultural competency and to ensure they are aware of the whole picture of what students are facing. Compounding the intensity of this workload is that oftentimes there are not enough direct service providers to meet the needs of the students. Projects that are more established and have been providing culturally-specific supports for years have dedicated staff at each of the schools they work with; however, newer projects have the added challenge of trying to support multiple schools and districts with just one or two direct service providers. Additionally, because these direct service providers are demographically matched to their students, they have experienced similar barriers in their own past that the students are facing now and become emotionally invested to the point of not being able to establish boundaries (e.g., receiving phone calls at all hours of the day and night).

Late and uncertain funding.

Project staff from all projects noted the **delay in funding** which led to a delay in project implementation, was a notable challenge. Having a gap in funding led to a turnover in direct service providers for some of the Phase I projects. This is problematic because one the main drivers of success for all projects is establishing relationship and trust with students. A gap in funding has the potential to jeopardize the trust that it took so long to establish between project leadership and the community. Without getting paid, some project staff may need to move on and find employment elsewhere. Once funding returns, new staff need to be hired and those relationships will have to be re-built. Students were described as being wary of direct service providers because they often will come in and out of students' lives due to the ebb and flow of resources. Students are hesitant to trust new staff because they are not sure they will be around long-term. The late funding was also problematic for the newer less-established House Bill 2016 projects because they had to combine relationship building and programming implementation together in one year instead of being able to lay the groundwork with relationship-building first. Relatedly, project staff felt uneasy around **the uncertainty of funding continuation**. Project staff did not know whether funding would be continued or not. This ambiguity has inhibited program implementation because it is difficult to plan future activities.

Data collection and mapping activities to indicators.

Another project logistic that has been a challenge for projects is **data collection and tying project activities to one of the 14 African American/Black Student Success Plan indicators**. Because projects are addressing the student achievement gap using a holistic approach, it has been difficult to draw distinct lines between project activities and targeted indicators. Visiting a student at school during their lunch hour for social-emotional support, or helping a parent turn their heat back on were common activities reported by project staff. These types of activities may seem unrelated to student academic achievement; however, they play a role in how well a student does in school. Without stability at home, or a feeling of belonginess in school, it is more difficult for students to stay engaged in school. Relatedly, some projects also relayed concern about the expectation of ODE to **show improvements in these indicators** in such a short amount of time. Datapoints like increasing graduation rates take multiple years of data collection, including a baseline year, to be able to show change over time due to an intervention.

> "How do we actually raise a child's attendance? What does it take? I don't think that's captured in this work. It may take us doing a home visit for five hours with the family to get the heat back on to help that child's attendance. Then that five hours, this work doesn't capture it. The data that we're asked to provide doesn't capture it."
>
> Project leadership Focus Group

In addition to the above challenges which are prevalent across all projects, the following challenges were reported by some projects:

- Engaging parents in group activities due to lack of time to establish trust and transportation challenges.
- Engaging students in after-school programming, due to students having other responsibilities after school.

Summary and Recommendations

To address the myriad of barriers African/African American/Black students might face that have an effect on academics, projects are using a holistic approach that integrates students, parents/guardians, schools, and juvenile court counselors. Projects are building relationships with each party that feeds into student success; are engaging students in a variety of activities that address their academic, social, and emotional needs; are engaging in empowerment activities with parents and increase their confidence in advocating for their children; and are providing assistance to school staff for how to recognize and address implicit bias, systemic racism, and disproportionate disciplinary practices. RMC Research offers the following recommendations based on these findings.

Facilitate periodic meetings between all projects so that project staff can more easily leverage each other's resources and determine where the strengths and weaknesses are for each project. For example, one project's challenge is engaging students in after-school programming, while another project has established an embedded curriculum within the school so that they can provide services during a time that is convenient to students, and students can get credits for engaging in the activities. Another example is one project reported having difficulty establishing a mentoring program for students, while other projects have begun establishing mentoring programs. Collaboration between projects could provide ideas for how to overcome the various challenges they are facing.

Incorporating a technical assistance component so that projects can increase their internal evaluation capacity and sustainability. Project staff reported frustration with data collection both in terms of

logistics and being able to understand what types of data are most important to collect. In lieu of hiring an evaluator to perform an external evaluation, provide funding for each grantee to dedicate a certain amount of FTE for evaluation purposes. Then allocate evaluation dollars to an evaluator to provide technical assistance to each of the grantees. This would increase capacity and sustainability of each grantee's evaluation and data collection skills, which will also enable them to procure funding from a variety of sources more easily because they will have data and findings to show the validity of their project.

Implement a cultural competency assessment of Oregon schools. The amount of feedback about schools' limited ability to work with and relate to African or African American students was tremendous. Many grantees were frustrated at the onerous responsibility of feeling like they had to 'fix' a broken system in addition to supporting their students' needs. RMC Research suggests implementing a study to assess the cultural competency of schools and use the findings from that study to establish next steps to address any gaps. Community-based organizations and schools should work symbiotically, with both parties working toward the same goal. Based on this evaluation report, there appears to be a disconnect between schools and community-based organizations that needs to be addressed.

Committing to long-term and consistent funding is critical when addressing something as complex as African/African American/Black student achievement gaps. Established projects who have been doing this work for years before receiving House Bill 2016 funding noted that it takes years to establish positive relationships with school and districts. Additionally, establishing relationships with students and parents also takes time, and the trust that is built is quite fragile due to students and parents feeling underserved and treated poorly by institutions in general. Projects made a strong impact on students, parents and schools with the short time period based on the qualitative findings. However, the project funding was only for a two-year period and with the delay of funds some projects had less than 2 years to implement and then make an impact. Due to the short time period expectations for change need to be realistic. During the short time period, projects felt undue pressure to start up program, implement a program, create a data collection system, and then measure change.

Black/African Student Success Project (BASS)

The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) is a community-based organization that provides culturally and linguistically specific services to the region's immigrants and refugees. IRCO's Africa House functions as a one-stop center, providing services to Oregon's diverse Black/African immigrant and refugee communities. In 2016 IRCO received funding from House Bill 2016 to lead a consortium that includes four east Multnomah County School Districts—David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, and Reynolds—and Portland State University to pilot the Black/African Student Success Project (BASS). The BASS project is a Phase I grantee (i.e., funding through House Bill 2016 in Year 1, July 2016-June 2017). The goal of BASS is to develop a network of culturally responsive student and family supports for the growing population of Black/African immigrant and refugee students in the region.

The target population of BASS is Black/African students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 in the four participating districts. These students experience a particular set of barriers, including high child poverty rates, language and cultural differences, racism, discrimination and xenophobia, and high neighborhood crime rates.[14] Given the marginalized conditions specific to these students, this project seeks to establish replicable systems of change to increase student engagement, school attendance, and academic achievement. BASS incorporates trauma-informed social-emotional supports (i.e., positive cultural identity, future orientation, and conflict resolution through a restorative justice lens) into the core program components such as after-school student activities and group parent activities[15,16,17]. A fundamental aspect of BASS is the advocate, who provides individualized support to students and their families. Within the participating schools and districts this project promotes parental involvement, enhances student access to extracurricular tutoring and transition support, and provides culturally informed professional development for school staff.

Program Implementation

RMC Research conducted four focus groups including a group each of BASS project leaders (n = 5), advocates (n = 6), students (n = 9), and parents (n = 7). Focus group participants were asked about in-school, after-school, and out-of-school programming; parent engagement activities; and professional development for teachers and school staff. Project leaders and advocates were also asked about project implementation, facilitators and challenges, successes, and lessons learned.

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[14]Curry-Stevens, A. & Coalition of Communities of Color. (2013). *The Black/African immigrant and refugee community in Multnomah County: An unsettling profile.* Portland, OR: Portland State University.

[15]van der Kolk, B.A. (1996). *Traumatic stress: The effects of overwhelming experience on mind, body, and society*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

[16]Sullivan, D. & Tifft, L. (2008). *Handbook of restorative justice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

[17]Zehr, H. (2005). *Changing lenses: A new focus for crime and justice* (3rd ed.). Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.

Primary Activities

BASS aims to improve outcomes of Black/African students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 by (a) connecting students to advocates who provide academic and psychosocial support to students, (b) serving as a cultural and linguistic bridge between students, families, school staff, and other social services, (c) interfacing regularly with leadership from school districts and schools, and (d) collaborating with a variety of external nonprofit organizations and universities.

BASS connects students with advocates. Advocates provide academic and psychosocial support to students through one-on-one meetings, group meetings during lunchtime or afterschool, in-class support, and field trips. Advocates provide **academic support** by helping students with homework and making sure students are on track academically (e.g., reviewing grades, identifying classes required for graduation). Advocates also help students set and reach academic goals, including helping students create a vision for their post-secondary education. In terms of **psychosocial** support, advocates offer an empathetic ear to students struggling to adapt to a new culture. Advocates reported that students talk to them about a range of subjects from dislike of school meals to difficulty with teachers to cultural identity. Several students said that afterschool groups provide an opportunity to be with students from a similar background. Other students said that afterschool groups offer a chance to explore other African cultures.

> "It was a good feeling to know that you were going to school and then go[ing] to your after-school program. I can tell [other students] about what kind of stuff I use for my hair, or just something that you can relate to culturally. I didn't have to feel like, 'Oh, my accent is too heavy.' It was a moment of [feeling] free and just be[ing] yourself."
>
> Student Focus Group

Advocates serve as a cultural and linguistic bridge between students, families, school staff, and other social services. One advocate said that advocates conduct a needs assessment at the first meeting with a family to identify how to help them. Some families do not speak English and they need help communicating with their child's teachers. Other families may not understand the school system—because it differs from the system in their home country—and need help understanding, for example, how to interpret grades and understand homework. Other families may need connections to additional social services such as legal support to obtain a green card. Advocates also meet regularly with school counselors to ensure students are on track to graduate. They convene parents for meetings with school district representatives to, for example, educate parents of middle schoolers about the transition to high school, and they participate in parent-teacher conferences. Advocates wear many hats, and project leaders stated that for families, "advocates are pretty much everything to them."

> "Sometimes we have a meeting with the parents, teachers, or counselors, and then the parent cannot make it. The teachers tell us exactly what they want to tell the parents. Then we go to the parent's home and tell them exactly what the teachers were talking about."
>
> Advocate Focus Group

BASS interfaces regularly with leadership from school districts and schools. BASS project leaders reported that BASS staff meet quarterly with the superintendent, assistant superintendent or equity director from each of the four target school districts. In addition, project leaders reported that some advocates meet every other month with schools' assistant principals to see how BASS students are doing and how the school can support the advocate. One project leader said these meetings have helped build relationships between schools and advocates.

BASS provides professional development to advocates and school staff. Advocates reported receiving training that helped them better perform their jobs and overcome difficulties. Topics included classroom management, mental health and trauma for children and adults, restorative justice, assertive engagement, suicide prevention intervention, conflict resolution, and mindfulness. Advocates also reported that they provided professional development trainings to school staff regarding students' cultural practices (e.g., praying, fasting, wearing the hijab), and common refugee experiences (e.g., life in refugee camps, experiences of war and trauma). Advocates stated that in many cases, school staff were unaware of African students' cultural practices and past experiences.

> "I did a training one time about the journey of a refugee. We started from living in the refugee camp to where we are right now. A lot of teachers didn't know anything about that. It was just eye-opening for me because I expected them to know this."
>
> Advocate Focus Group

BASS collaborates with a variety of external nonprofit organizations and universities. BASS is part of Successful Families 2020 and partners with Latino Network, Self Enhancement Inc., and Metropolitan Family Services to improve outcomes for youth and families of color. BASS also works with a host of nonprofit organizations and schools through Ninth Grade Counts, a network of summer transition programs for incoming ninth graders. IRCO convenes Youth Council—a youth-led committee in which BASS students are involved — that organizes events on topics important to youth (e.g., positive cultural identity and the arts; conflict resolution through the arts). BASS advocates regularly interact with organizations that run SUN schools. Lastly, Portland State University (PSU) partnered with IRCO on a *Story of Justice* training and on teacher trainings, and BASS has made efforts to connect with Portland State University's Black Student Union.

Addressing Student Barriers

Focus group participants cited students' and parents limited knowledge of English, differences between school systems in African countries and the United States, cultural differences between families and school staff, bullying, discipline disproportionality, and families moving out of the districts that BASS serves as the main barriers students face to becoming engaged in school.

Students and parents may have limited knowledge of English. One advocate described how students may speak English well, but cannot read or write in English. Students who do not receive help with reading and writing become frustrated and withdraw from schoolwork. Project leaders reported that parents tend to learn English and adapt culturally less quickly than their children, resulting in a culture gap between parents and children. Parents continue to discipline children as they did in their home country, and children rebel, at times by running away from home. Limited knowledge of English also prevents parents from communicating with teachers. Advocates mitigate these challenges by providing academic support to students and acting as a translator between parents and teachers.

> "In our culture, the teacher is the second parent, but I can't talk with teacher. We just say 'hi', 'bye'."
>
> Parent Focus Group

Differences between school systems in African countries and the United States. Project leaders and advocates reported that BASS students and parents often do not understand the school system in the United States because the systems in many African countries are different or parents and children have been in refugee camps that lacked formal education. Advocates described that parents were confused about school practices such as homework and grades. Parents stated that advocates educated them about how the American education system works. For example, one parent said they would not know what grades their child was getting in school without assistance from advocates.

> "The majority of our refugees, who have spent so many years in a refugee camp, have to restart everything. They came here with pretty much zero urban living experience, with limited or no understanding of the American education system."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Cultural differences lead to misunderstandings between families and school staff. Focus group participants described a variety of examples where cultural differences led to misunderstandings between families and school staff. For example, a mother of a student described how she couldn't shake a male staff member's hand because it was against her religion. Now, the male staff member will not look at her, she said. In terms of cultural difference, advocates stated that in some African societies, the first-born child will help their parents by getting a job if the family is struggling financially. If a family does not have a father, the first-born son will also take on the father role. Advocates reported that students who take on multiple family roles tend to struggle academically and have conflicts with school staff more often. One advocate described how she mediated a conflict between a school administrator and a student who had been working until 1am the night before the conflict occurred.

Immigrant and refugee children experience bullying at school. Advocates described various situations in which BASS students were bullied at school for their limited English language skills, hair, or clothing (particularly the hijab). Other students were called terrorists. Advocates reported that BASS parents have a different understanding of bullying in that they did not see verbal abuse as bullying and told their children to forget about these incidents. In these situations, advocates described educating parents about bullying and that their children do not need to withstand poor treatment at school.

Immigrant and refugee children experience discipline disproportionality. Advocates and parents voiced concern that BASS students were being disciplined more frequently than other students. One advocate described a situation where a student had an emergency bathroom need and was unable to tell her teacher where she was going. When the student returned, the teacher sent her to detention for the entire day. Several parents described situations where teachers gave their children unfair grades, made biased comments, or sent kids to detention for minor offenses.

Rising housing costs are forcing families to move out of the districts that BASS serves. Refugee resettlement organizations assist refugees with finding and, for a few years after refugees' arrival in the United States, paying for housing. BASS project leaders indicated that after organizations no longer support refugees, some families will have to move because they cannot afford to pay rent on their own. Families may move several more times due to rising housing costs. Some parents don't realize that as they move, children move in and out of school districts, and that BASS advocates are not present in every school district. However, project leaders reported that advocates attempt to support students who have moved out of the school district, but distance often limits advocates' in-person meetings with students.

Adaptations

Project leaders and advocates described four ways BASS was adapted since Year 1:

Empowering students to advocate for themselves. Advocates described how they have shifted from communicating with teachers and the school for the student to encouraging the student to advocate for themselves. One advocate shared, "Students don't ask for help although they're struggling with a class. I used to do that for them, but we have tried to make sure that they do that themselves because that's their day to day life and I'm just there a few days a week."

Shifting BASS services to schools with high need. Project leaders described that over time they have identified schools with a high need for BASS services and shifted services to those communities. However, due to limited funding, they cannot reach all schools that would benefit from BASS services.

Focusing teacher trainings on teachers' needs and interests. Project leaders reported that at the beginning of the project, teacher trainings were eight hours long and focused on what the trainer thought teachers should learn. Over time, the trainers have adapted the trainings to last only 1 hour and to provide plenty of time for teachers to ask and discuss questions about the content of the training.

Learning how to work with younger children. BASS has expanded from serving Grade 3-12 students to Kindergarten through Grade 12 students. Advocates described having to learn how to work with younger children after the project expanded.

Facilitators to Implementation

Working directly with school districts, spending time building relationships with school staff and understanding how schools work, and providing professional development to advocates made project implementation easier.

Working directly with school districts. Project leaders reported that BASS staff meetings with school district leaders has facilitated the relationship between teachers and advocates. It takes time for advocates to build trust with teachers because they may misunderstand why advocates are present in their school. Project leaders noted that when district administrators inform teachers of the purpose of advocates, teachers are more amenable to advocates' presence.

Spending time building relationships with school staff and understanding how schools work. Advocates reported that when they started working in schools, they did not understand the system. One advocate said, "you can't just ask anybody questions. There are specific people you have to ask." Advocates stated that it takes time to understand how schools work. It also takes time for advocates to build trusting relationships with teachers, counselors, and school administrators. Relationships with school staff and knowledge of the school allows advocates to better perform their job.

Successes

Schools showing increased interest in BASS services; improved student success; improved understanding and relationships between teachers, schools, and parents; and increased visibility for issues African immigrant and refugee communities confront were described as successes of the BASS Project.

Schools have increased interest in BASS services. Initially, BASS reached out to school districts to ask them to facilitate a relationship with schools. Now, teachers and schools are reaching out to BASS to see if advocates can work in their schools. Project leaders reported that BASS is functioning at capacity;

there is more need for the project than can be provided. This speaks to the successful implementation of this project.

> "Since we started working with the district, a lot of things improved. When we send advocates to the school, it takes time to get to know the teacher, to get along, and to make connections. Some teachers are not really welcoming sometimes because of misunderstanding what [the advocates] are there for. And then the district played a big role in this. They are connecting us. [The teachers] listen to the district. Finally, [the schools] gets to know us. Now it's the reverse. It's the schools who are asking the district to make connections with us."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Improved student success. BASS students reported feeling more comfortable and understood at school, more independent and confident, and more excited to go to school. Advocates stated that they took great pride when students had academic success, like improving their grades, finishing high school, and going to college. Parents related that their children have enjoyed school more while participating in BASS activities.

> "When you know that you have people around you who care whether you go to school or not, then you feel like you should go to school. Some days I feel like I should not go to school, but when I see [the advocates] twice a week I feel the urge to go to school every day."
>
> Student Focus Group

Improved understanding between teachers and advocates. As described in the activities section, advocates act as a cultural and linguistic bridge between teachers and families. Advocates described improved relationships with teachers indicated by teachers reaching out directly to advocates for assistance with students.

Improved relationships between schools and parents. Project leaders reported that in many African countries, parents are not involved in schools unless their children have a disciplinary infraction. Advocates' work in developing relationships with parents and acting as a translator between teachers and parents has led to more parent involvement in their children's education. In addition, with the increased funding provided through House Bill 2016, BASS has been able to understand in more depth the barriers that immigrant and refugee families face.

Increased visibility for issues African immigrant and refugee families confront. One project leader described how the BASS project has strengthened IRCO's partnerships with ODE and other organizations doing similar work, which in turn has made Oregon's Governor and the Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives aware of issues African immigrants confront. The visibility of BASS has revealed to ODE, decision makers, and other organizations that the barriers African immigrant students experience are different than those of African Americans. To that end, a project leader was recently invited to speak at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Eugene.

Challenges

Focus group participants stated that BASS is facing a variety of programmatic challenges including schools expressing more need for BASS services than can be provided, advocates being on call all the time and having too many roles, advocates addressing intractable family problems, and complications with engaging parents and teachers.

Schools are expressing more need for BASS services than can be provided. BASS project leaders clearly stated that they are receiving more requests for advocates' services than they can provide. At some schools, advocates are only present once per week due to limitations in funding, and schools have requested their services on more days per week. Schools that do not currently receive BASS services have reached out to BASS for assistance.

Advocates are on call all the time and have too many roles. As described in the activities section of this chapter, advocates have many, varied roles. Advocates described having difficulty balancing the needs of the students, families, and schools they serve. Project leaders discussed how advocates are on call 24 hours per day, seven days per week. One project leader attributed this to the complex problems that African immigrant students are experiencing such as issues with drugs, guns, and gangs; these issues have no time limits. Another project leader stated that African families, "have no concept of time," and will reach out to advocates at night and on weekends.

> "My message [to students] is, I'm here for you if you need help. Sometimes it takes a lot of my personal time to fulfill that need. A [student] scholarship was due today and we were like, let's do that, but we don't have time because today I have a parent engagement event and then another training. It's been a little bit difficult to navigate all of that in a short amount of time."
>
> Advocate Focus Group

Advocates are addressing intractable family problems. Focus group participants described that advocates become deeply involved in the lives of students and families and they routinely encounter serious issues such as students running away from home or attempting suicide. Project leaders voiced concern that advocates took on the stress of the students and families they serve. In addition, advocates play the role of mediator between school staff and families, and advocates described how staying neutral in these situations is a challenge. Advocates also discussed how they faced discrimination at schools; several advocates described school staff following them or questioning their presence at the school. One advocate commented that during BASS's first year, a counselor provided advocates with support, however there was not enough funding to sustain this service.

> "Most of us have been through the things our students have been through. We've been through war, we've been refugees too. Sometimes when we see students and parents going through the same it makes us go back and remember what we went through. We used to meet a counselor once a month or twice a month, just to tell her how we feel. She used to tell us how to take care of ourselves."
>
> Advocate Focus Group

Advocates experience roadblocks in engaging parents and teachers. Advocates reported that at times parents do not understand why they need to be involved in school activities. Oftentimes, parents, especially single parents, are overwhelmed with life's responsibilities, and are unable to take the time to meet with teachers or the advocate. Advocates also said that calling parents about their children's disciplinary issue at school can be difficult, especially if disciplinary issues are frequent. Advocates stated that building a relationship with parents eases these challenges because parents learn that advocates intend to support them. Project leaders also reported that it is challenging to fit into teachers' busy schedules to provide trainings to teachers in how to work with immigrant and refugee students.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7 Bars to Bridges Project provided RMC Research with outcome data present in Exhibit 6. The BASS project has **served 409 students** since its implementation in September 2016. Indicators targeted by BASS include:

Indicator 4: Build culturally and linguistically congruent programming for African immigrant and refugee students to support academic and social-emotional development

Indicator 6: Increase the amount of available culturally responsive practices in Oregon schools for African American/Black students

Indicator 7: Increase literacy outcomes by 6.8% per year and numeracy outcomes by 6.8% per year for African American/Black students

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 10: Increase the rate of freshman on-track for African American/Black students

Indicator 12: Increase the post-secondary enrollment rates of African American/Black students high school graduates and GED completers

Exhibit 6. BASS Program Data

School-Related				
Target	**2016-2017**	**2017-2019**	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicators**
—	—	6	# of suspensions	8
—	—	0	# of expulsions	8
85%	—	—	% of students with an attendance rate of 90% or higher	10
	—	19	# of students enrolled in 9th Grade Counts program	10
—	—	15	# of students with a 90% or higher attendance rate for 9th Grade Counts	10
—	—	205	# of students receiving support related to literacy/numeracy	7
75%	—	190	% of students with improved literacy levels	7
75%	—	162	% of students with improved numeracy levels	7
Program-Related				
Target	**2016-2017**	**2017-2019**	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicators**
210	204	205	# of students served	4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12
—	—	548	# of youth activity hours	4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12
100	—	86	# of youth enrolled in summer programming	4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12
—	—	205	# of students receiving social and emotional skill building activities/supports	8

25–45	123	130	# of school staff who received ongoing Cultural Competency Training	6, 8
175	187	175	# of parents enrolled in individualized support	4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12
125	92	140	# of parents who participated in group activities	4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12
210	187	—	# of parents that were contacted more than once per month	4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12
—	—	25	# of students/families receiving support around college and career readiness planning	12
—	—	5	# of youth referred to post-secondary education opportunities and resources.	12

Note. Dashes indicate no target set or data was not collected available.

Summary and Recommendations

Black/African Student Success Project used funding from House Bill 2016 to develop culturally responsive student and family supports for Black/African immigrant and refugee students in four east Multnomah County School Districts. A fundamental component of BASS is the advocate, who provides academic and psychosocial support to students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 and acts as a cultural and linguistic bridge between teachers, students, families, and social service organizations. Immigrant and refugee students confront a variety of barriers including limited knowledge of English, cultural barriers such as unfamiliarity with the educational system in the United States, bullying, and discipline disproportionality. Project leaders interfacing regularly with school districts and advocates building relationships with school staff facilitated project implementation, leading to a variety of successes including: schools expressing great interest in receiving BASS services; improved relationships between teachers, students, and their families; and increased visibility of African immigrant and refugee issues among decision makers and ODE. Nevertheless, challenges remain; the BASS project is functioning at capacity and cannot fulfill the growing number of requests for advocates' services. Based on these findings, RMC Research offers the following recommendations:

Provide psychosocial support to advocates. Advocates become closely involved in the lives of students who are struggling with language barriers, adapting to a new society and educational system, bullying, and discipline disproportionality. Advocates and project leaders described students who ran away from home or attempted suicide. Further, advocates are always available for students, day or night. The advocate job is demanding and advocates require support to learn how to take care of themselves as they support their students.

Conduct more outreach for program, especially to boys and young men. In general, students stated that BASS could conduct more outreach to African immigrant and refugee students at their schools. In particular, students suggested that BASS work to involve more boys and young men in the project as most of the involved students are girls and young women.

Invest staff energy in facilitators to program implementation. Advocates reported that building relationships with school staff and understanding how each school works allowed them to better perform their job. In addition, project leaders described how communicating with representatives from school districts facilitated the relationship with teachers and advocates. Continuing to invest time and energy into relationship building is critical for the continued success of this project.

In the future, consider investing in broader roles for advocates. Students and parents offered their perspectives on how the project could be improved. One parent requested that BASS provide in-home tutors to help her children with homework. She said she would like to help her child, but she cannot speak English. Students also had two suggestions. First, assist students in accessing computers during afterschool meetings with advocates. One student said all her homework needs to be completed on a computer and school library computers are often in use by other students. Second, one student commented that BASS should work to make the whole school feel safe for African immigrant students rather than only the BASS project. Another student said this could be achieved through continued training of teachers in how to work with African immigrant students.

Bars to Bridges Project

Bars to Bridges Project is a Phase I grantee (i.e., funded through House Bill 2016 in Year 1, July 2016-June 2017) and launched in September 2016. Bars to Bridges Project provides culturally responsive support and resources to detained African American, Black, Biracial, and Multiracial students to foster a successful transition back to school and the community. Bars to Bridges Project programming is grounded in research on culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural connectivity,[18,19] and trauma-informed care.[20]

Bars to Bridges Project is a service that Multnomah Education Service District provides at the Donald E. Long School (DEL) inside the Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention facility. Bars to Bridges Project works with detained African American, Black, Biracial, and Multiracial youth aged 11–21 at the Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) school program at Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Center (DEL), the Assessment and Evaluation Program at DEL, the Linn-Benton Juvenile Detention School Program, the Multnomah County Detention Center, and the Multnomah County Inverness Jail. The project also works with Youth Corrections Education Program (YCEP) youth up to age 25 enrolled at Three Lakes High School and Riverside High School at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility and Ocean Dunes High School at the Camp Florence Youth Transitional Facility in Florence, Oregon.

The project aims to reconnect students to family and community resources and prepares students to enter the workforce. Bars to Bridges Project goals are to (a) reduce the number of students denied reentry into their neighborhood school, (b) support students' successful return to their neighborhood middle and high schools, alternative schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges, and (c) keep students on a path to graduation. The reentry process is navigated by transition specialists who are culturally responsive and trauma-informed professionals responsible for all aspects of Bars to Bridges Project's wraparound support model, which fosters support networks for youth and their families.

During Year 1, Bars to Bridges Project used House Bill 2016 funding to establish partnerships with culturally responsive organizations (e.g., SoValTi, Guiding Light Family Services), and expand existing partnerships with community collaborators (e.g., Mental Health First Aid). During Years 2 and 3, the second round of funding, transition specialists continued to receive professional development from a variety of sources, and began providing professional development to community partners.

Program Implementation

Project leadership (n = 2) and transition specialists (n = 10) were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and challenges faced while implementing programming. Findings also include feedback from a focus group conducted with four juvenile court counselors and a focus group conducted with four students who have been working with transition specialists to gain insight into what is working well, what could be improved in terms of programming, and how programming influences educational experiences for students.

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[18]Ogbu, J.U. (1983). Minority status and schooling in plural societies. *Comparative Education Review, 27*(2), 168–190.
[19]Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465–491.
[20]Hopper, E.K., Bassuk, E.L., & Olivet, J. (2010). Shelter from the storm: Trauma-informed care in homelessness services settings. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal, 3*(2), 80–100.

Primary Activities

Bars to Bridges Project aims to support the successful transition back to school and communities for detained African American, Black, and multiracial students by (a) connecting students with transition specialists who are able to build trust with students and their families; (b) serving as a bridge between students, parents, the school system, and the juvenile justice system; (c) providing professional development opportunities to transition specialists to ensure their continued growth and capacity; and (d) hosting culturally responsive and trauma-informed professional development to community partners.

Bars to Bridges Project connected students with transition specialists. Through House Bill 2016 funding, Bars to Bridges Project's transition specialists provided services to 410 African American, Black, Biracial and Multiracial students. Transition specialists **build trust with students and provide consistent support**. Transition specialists start by explaining the program's focus on education, sharing their personal stories, and emphasizing that they are not law enforcement or part of the juvenile justice system. Next, transition specialists engage with students at least weekly by checking in on any new issues that come up during school or at home and then provide support. This relationship continues after the student returns to an education setting. Providing consistent support has been essential for building trust with youth. One transition specialist shared that students might not trust adults because they are used to adults cycling in and out of their lives. The consistent relationship with transition specialists fosters trust and a more open connection with students. Transition specialists also build trust by **advocating for youth and providing much-needed resources**. Transition specialists believe in student worth and advocate for them at school. Additionally, transition specialists provide resources such as cab rides/bus fare to get to appointments and school, school supplies, and food—further strengthening their relationship with students.

> "sometimes we're [transition specialists] the only person that has the youth's back. Sometimes they don't have a guardian. They could be in the system and they might not have even one consistent adult in their life that is showing up for them and that makes a huge difference."
>
> Transition Specialists Focus Group

Transition specialists provide a bridge between students, parents, the school system, and juvenile justice system. Being able to navigate the **school system** and forming relationships with school staff is a critical component of the work transition specialists do. Transition specialists communicate what is going on with a student to teachers and other school staff using a solution-based approach. Transition specialists bring paperwork to parents and then to the school to help expedite the re-entry process, and attend re-entry meetings to ensure the student has an advocate. Once a student has been re-enrolled in a school, the transition specialist continues providing support by keeping tabs on attendance, IEP status, grades, homework assignments, and any other issues that may come up at the school. In many cases, schools will call the transition specialist first if there is a student issue because of how engaged and responsive they are. Transition specialists also act as a bridge between **parents and the school**. Parents might have an unstable relationship with the school because of previous experiences and could be resistant to communicate with the school. Parents also might not

> "If we tell the lawyer to say that the youth is passing all their classes and going to school every day, it sometimes will defer a judge to put a kid back in here and then miss eight days of school. That piece in itself is so huge to be able to say that they're in school, this is going be more detrimental to put them back in here."
>
> Transition Specialists Focus Group

know their rights, such as knowing that they can request an IEP reevaluation as many times as they want. Transition specialists inform parents of their rights, attend school meetings with the parents for support, and act as a liaison between the school and parents when issues arise. Transition specialists also act as a bridge between **juvenile court counselors**, students, and schools. Juvenile court counselors strive to make connections and build rapport with students, but because of their authoritative role, it is often difficult to get students to open up to them. Additionally, juvenile court counselors might not have the time to dedicate to learn about each school system. If the juvenile court counselor is having trouble communicating with a student, or with the student's school, they can rely on the transition specialist to assist.

Bars to Bridges Project supported the continued professional development of transition specialists. Because transition specialists are responsible for providing student-specific, culturally responsive, trauma-informed services, the Bars to Bridges Project leadership dedicates resources to ensure continued professional development. The senior transition specialist, who has been with Bars to Bridges since Year 1, provides as-needed training and meets regularly with the transition specialists. Transition specialists reported that MESD is supportive about sending them to trainings, and that their supervisor is always letting them know of events they might want to attend both locally and nationally. Examples of professional development opportunities include attending the Teaching with Purpose[21] conference yearly, the Kids at Hope[22] conference in Arizona, and attending local trainings run by MESD around trauma-informed care and de-escalation.

Bars to Bridges provides professional development to community partners. Project leaders and transition specialists hosted culturally responsive and trauma-informed professional development in resilience (Why Try),[23] de-escalation (Ellis Amdur),[24] culturally responsive instructional practices (Jamie Almanzán),[25] and the school to prison pipeline (Courtney Robinson)[26] for educators and school partners. Project leaders described trying to encourage a continuing dialogue where each event builds on the last. Transition specialists and project leaders facilitated a 3-part Building Bridges to Equity series for school staff, juvenile court counselors, and other community partners. During this series, transition specialists facilitated conversations and answered questions. Project leaders also send a monthly newsletter to community partners (e.g., school staff, juvenile justice staff, community partners, families). The newsletter provides information on equity and inclusivity trainings and events that are available in the region and highlights youth success stories.

> "People have come up to me and said they are glad to have learned about the culturally responsive piece, which seems to be missing from the public school system."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

[21] https://www.facebook.com/pg/teach2empower77/about/?ref=page_internal
[22] http://kidsathope.org/
[23] https://www.whytry.org/
[24] https://www.edgework.info/ellis-amdur/
[25] https://jamiealmanzan.wordpress.com/about/
[26] http://drcourtneyrobinson.com/

Addressing Student Barriers

Focus group participants cited students' many other responsibilities, lack of transportation, skepticism about returning to school, adjustment to life after detention, being stigmatized at their school, lack of parental knowledge/engagement, and the complicated process to reenrollment as the main barriers students face in terms of returning to school.

Students' lack of excitement about school because they needed to work. Transition specialists reported that often students are in 'survival mode' and are driven to work. Some students are obligated to help pay their family's bills or are on their own. Transition specialists show students that getting an education first or at least concurrently will open up opportunities and will allow students to earn more money down the road. Additionally, transition specialists show students their options to engage in school, such as being able to accrue credits toward graduation through working. One student reported that their transition specialists "helped me get into this program in the school and I got college credits while I was in the high school program and they paid me, which was awesome."

Students' access to transportation. All focus group and group interview participants shared how transportation is one of the biggest barriers for students and their families. Transition specialists have been able to mitigate this barrier by paying for bus and cab fare so students can get to school, reentry meetings, court hearings, and any other critical appointments they have. Transition specialists also bring paperwork to and from guardians to help expedite the reentry process.

Students' skepticism about returning to school. Transition specialists and juvenile court counselors reported that students who have been out of school might feel apprehensive to return. Sometimes just having an adult who cares about them walking them into school that first day or meeting them for lunch can alleviate a lot of fears and uncertainty.

Students' adjustment after detention. Transition specialists and juvenile court counselors also spoke about how many students come out of detention, which is highly structured, and then go back home where there is little to no structure. This shift can be very hard for students. Transition specialists shared that baby steps are often what it takes to get students back into the rhythm of going to school:

> "For those youth it's like, let's start with baby steps. We'll get you in the door. We get you in the door, you're going. Now we're getting you to go to all your classes, stop skipping some classes. Get you to go to all your classes. Okay, now we're going to get you to engage in your classes. So, it's like, you gotta meet the youth where they are. You can't just meet these youth and expect them to go. They haven't been to school in a year and like, oh, you gotta go to school and be perfect. Sometimes that's what these schools expect. That's not realistic. We gotta get this youth in the habit of going and in the habit of school again. "
>
> Transition Specialist Focus Group

Students experiencing stigma because of having been to detention or corrections. Project leaders, transition specialists, and juvenile court counselors reported students being marginalized once they return back to school because of their history. A large part of the work that transition specialists do includes advocating for students at the schools, meeting with their teachers, counselors, principals to ensure that everyone is on the same page and agrees that the student should be back in school. Another way transition specialists help mitigate this barrier is with the professional development that they facilitate for school staff. These professional development sessions open the eyes of school staff to see how implicit biases affect students negatively, and often times, for the long term.

Parental involvement in the education process. Transition specialists and juvenile court counselors reported lack of parental involvement as a serious barrier to the reentry process. Parents might have negative relationships with schools based on past history, which can make it difficult feeling comfortable speaking to teachers, counselors, and principals. Parents also are not always aware of their rights around setting up IEPs and that schools are not allowed to ask about their child's charges. Transition specialists have been able to mitigate this barrier by (a) acting as a conduit between parents and the schools, which takes some of the pressure off of parents especially in the beginning when their relationship with the school is the most volatile, (b) accompanying parents to school meetings which increases their ability to advocate for their children as they are seeing the process modeled for them, and (c) informing parents of their rights so that they can begin advocating for themselves and their children on their own.

Navigating the complicated process to reenrollment. Project leaders, transition specialists and juvenile court counselors spoke at length about how complicated the process is to get students reenrolled, and how the process can vary from school to school. Transition specialists have been able to mitigate this barrier by (a) establishing solid relationships at the schools and with specific school staff, (b) becoming experts at what paperwork is needed and the time frame, (c) helping students and guardians complete necessary paperwork, and (d) attending reentry meetings with students and guardians.

Adaptations

Project leadership and transition specialists described three main ways the Bars to Bridges project was adapted since Year 1:

Deemphasizing the neighborhood school. During Year 1, the emphasis was helping students get back into their neighborhood school. As the project was rolled out, it became evident that there are times when the neighborhood school is not the best option for every student (e.g., rival gangs at the neighborhood school). Now the emphasis is to collaborate with each student around the education setting where the student would have the most success.

Adding a tiered system of support. Since Year 1 project leadership and transition specialists created a tier system to guide what level of support each student needs. There are three tiers: Tier 3 is three interactions a week, Tier 2 is one to two interactions a week, and Tier 1 is one or two interactions every couple of weeks. Some kids go to Tier 0 because The Bars to Bridges Project cannot locate them. This system has helped transition specialists ensure they are providing students with the amount of support suits them and ensures that resources are being used efficiently.

Identifying a Senior Transition Specialist. During Year 1 transition specialists received ongoing training from two culturally responsive organizations (SoValTi and Guiding Light Family Services). Since Year 1 the transition specialist who has been with the project from the start became the Senior Transition Specialist. This role coordinates transition specialists, leads trainings, and helps advocate for the group by going to community partnership meetings or resource fairs to speak about Bars to Bridges. Through the work of the senior transition specialist, and with the strong background of the current transition specialists, ongoing training with outside organizations was not necessary. Training now is more strategic and based on the gaps and needs transition specialists have at any given moment.

Facilitators to Implementation

Investing in relationships with students, having a strong relationship between transition specialists and juvenile court counselors, and having a highly skilled team of transition specialists that participate in ongoing professional development made program implementation easier.

Investment in relationships with students. Transition specialists establish contact with students in detention where they gather information about their circumstances and needs, and continue to invest in the relationship after students leave detention. Transition specialists shared that the relationship is easy once students see they are advocates: "[students] see we are not probation officers trying to keep them locked up…I think that's one of the most easiest things that we have in this role, just being able to tell the client what we do and them agreeing to work with us right then and there in the building." Juvenile court counselors echoed this sentiment, saying how important it was that the transition specialists provide a safe and non-judgmental space for students to share the issues they are facing.

> "I like it that he don't try to make it seem like he better than me. He's not perfect. Sometimes he'll be late, or he'll forget some stuff. He's normal. He ain't trying to look-, have his nose up at me. That's cool."
>
> Student Focus Group

Strong relationships between transition specialists and juvenile court counselors. Juvenile court counselors described how communication with the transition specialists is organic, fluid, and effective. Juvenile court counselors described transition specialists' role as mentors, and that it is a nice balance to their position of holding youth accountable. Juvenile court counselors shared that the transition specialists have a good rapport with both the youth and themselves, and that they are in frequent communication about what is going on with their students, even if there is nothing big happening. Additionally, juvenile court counselors appreciate their quick responses to phone calls and text messages, and their willingness to attend court hearings, school meetings, and other events.

> "[Transition specialists] usually text us and let us know, 'This is the update on your kid. He's got a school orientation this date.' It doesn't feel forced. I know where they're at. Even if I don't see them, I can just call and text them and I can get a response back. It's very organic."
>
> Juvenile Court Counselor Focus Group

High-quality transition specialists who work well together. The project leaders reported that transitions specialists with a strong background and ability to collaborate and problem-solve has helped with program facilitation. Transition specialists described being good at sharing resources with each other and leveraging their relationships with specific schools. Juvenile justice personnel were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences working with transition specialists, describing them as "phenomenal," "absolutely great," and that "we need more."

Professional development and working with culturally responsive partners. Transition specialists have benefitted from attending conferences and trainings and described their supervisors as being supportive of their professional growth. Transition specialists facilitated professional development which has further increased their capacity to communicate with school administration and staff about culturally responsive practices, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice approaches.

Successes and Lessons Learned

The project leaders, transition specialists, and juvenile court counselors were asked about the successes and lessons learned that came from implementing the Bars to Bridges Project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Students transitioned from detention or corrections back to school. Transition specialists and juvenile court counselors shared several stories of successful school reentry. Transition specialists helped students by (a) motivating youth to want to go back to their neighborhood school or to an alternative education setting, (b) explaining to students and their guardians all of their options and helping them establish a plan (e.g., reentry to their neighborhood school, GED, alternative school), (c) helping students and guardians complete reenrollment paperwork, and (d) advocating for students at schools, where students often feel the schools do not want them back.

> "Within a week, she was already registering in school. That's stuff that we [juvenile court counselors] could have done, but it would probably take longer because we have to navigate the system."
>
> Juvenile Court Counselor Focus Group

School attendance and engagement increased. Transition specialists proudly shared stories of students attending and engaging in school, getting their GED, and graduating. One student shared that "Some days I don't feel like going and I'm fittin' to be late and [transition specialist] will call me a taxi or something so I can get there on time. So, I got no excuses." Another student described how the incentives their transition specialist provided to them for going to school has increased their attendance by giving them something to look forward to.

Students' ability to self-advocate has increased. Transition specialists described how they advocate for the student at the beginning when they learn what does and does not work. As time goes on, and the student gains confidence and understands their rights, they begin to advocate for themselves. Examples of self-advocacy include scheduling their own appointments with their counselor and talking to school staff about their needs. One transition specialist described a situation where a student was behind academically but was not comfortable talking to teachers about it. The transition specialist went with the student to talk to the teachers and they formed a plan to get the student back on track. Going forward, that student was more comfortable talking to their teachers because of the modeling the transition specialist provided. One student in the focus group echoed this sentiment, saying that without their transition specialist they would not be as comfortable talking to teachers and counselors.

> "When you see them start to take their own initiative and going in and keeping everything up and advocating for themselves, that's really what we want is for them to go and do that for themselves. Not just in school but in life."
>
> Transition Specialist Focus Group

Students are making post-secondary education plans. Transition specialists and juvenile court counselors shared how students are experiencing a shift in their perspective about the importance of post-secondary education. Strategies transition specialists use to increase students' interest in education include (a) showing students that being behind does not mean it is too late to get back on track, (b) sharing with students and families all of the options they have, many of which they do not know about (e.g., community college, trade schools, getting college credits while in high school), (c) encouraging students that they are capable and smart and can accomplish whatever they want, (d) staying informed about where students are with credits and how close to graduation they are, and (e) taking students to college conferences to increase their confidence and excitement around post-secondary education. Transition specialists described themselves as 'that one constant person, more so than their own guidance counselor' who regularly lets them know where they are at with their credits, what their options are, and encouraging them that they are capable. Bars to Bridges has been able to partner with Portland Community College and the Open Doors program to promote secondary and college readiness. One transition specialist reported that the Opening Doors program "provides the computer skills that are critical to navigating and succeeding in college, finding housing, or applying for jobs."

> "I wasn't going to college. I was just going to do real estate. [transition specialists] told me to take up a trade as well. I've been studying to be an electrician and do real estate at the same time."
>
> Student Focus Group

Criminal justice outcomes improved. Transition specialists shared examples of reducing recidivism, saying that "the youth that we have seen come in and out of juvenile detention over and over are not coming in here as often because they're having better relationships with their school." Juvenile court counselors described how having someone like the transition specialist, who is able to proactively address issues before a student is expelled, has been monumental. These sentiments were echoed by students, who reported that often they would call their transition specialist when they were about to make a bad decision. One student said, "sometimes I'm at school and…if I'm feeling out of my character, they'll let me go and call [transition specialist]. And he'll tell me 'Are you working forward to this so that way you can be better at this in life?' That helped me a lot there, especially in school. If I mess up one time I'm done. If he can talk me out of doing some things, that's cool."

> "He's [transition specialist] helping me do a lot better at dealing with the way I'm supposed to deal with it instead of the way I would rather deal with it. If it wasn't for him teaching me how to do these kind of things I'd be in County."
>
> Student Focus Group

Bars to Bridges Project established positive relationships with juvenile court counselors. Juvenile court counselors spoke at length about how effective their partnership has been with the transition specialists. Transition specialists have been able to fill the gap by spending time establishing relationships with schools, thereby decreasing the time for students to complete the reentry process. Juvenile court counselors also noted how they never feel at odds or challenged by transition specialists because they have the same goals.

Lessons Learned

Support for youth must be individualized. Project leaders and transition specialists shared each student has different life experiences and issues, so the solution must be individualized and tailored to their specific needs. What works for one student may not be the appropriate solution for another.

> "Just always be consistent. Do the same thing. The kid should know when you're going to walk in the door."
>
> Transition Specialist Focus Group

Consistency is critical when working with youth. Ensuring that transition specialists keep their appointments and provide consistent communication and support is critical in relationship-building with youth.

Maintain honesty, transparency, and a calm demeanor when working with youth. Transition specialists also reported that students have more respect for them when they are transparent and honest. One student shared that they appreciated that their transition specialist maintained honesty at all times, even when it was difficult. Transition specialists also described how often they are the ones students call when they are escalated, and it is important to be able to stay calm and listen in order to de-escalate situations.

Measuring change through data collection is difficult. Transition specialists know they make a difference. One transition specialist shared "sometimes it takes a while to build that relationship, or the kids won't really let on that we're helping them or making a difference. You never know when something you do or say is going to make a difference for somebody." Relatedly, project leadership noted how they have had to refine the data collection process in order to fully capture the effects of the project. For example, the project team realized they needed to refine how to accurately determine recidivism rates, and did this by calculating recidivism based on "single incidents of new law violations" because a youth could have more than one new law violation in a single incident of recidivating. This change ensured only one new law violation per incident was being counted. Additionally, the project team made data collection changes to ensure that they were distinguishing between new law violations *before* and *after* a youth worked with a transition specialist.

Challenges

Parent engagement after-school programming, and working with school policies were the main challenges to implementation.

Parent engagement. During Year 1, the project tried to bring parents together with parent-specific activities; however, transportation issues were a barrier to participation. Transition specialists have had success engaging with parents, however, it is typically individual engagement rather than a community of parents who share struggles and support each other. Project leadership shared that they do host holiday celebrations which families are invited to and are still looking at other options such as hiring a parent coordinator.

After-School Programming. Project leaders described trying to provide after-school programming for students but encountered barriers such as transportation, social challenges where some students are not allowed to be in the same room, and obligations students already have. Transition specialists and juvenile justice counselors reported that many students have so many commitments such as meeting with parole officers, handling paperwork, working, and taking care of siblings, that after school activities end up being low-priority. Project leaders said that despite the hurdles, they are still looking at options and collaborations, but they have had more success figuring out what each student is interested in and finding ways to engage them on an individual basis.

When school policies do not align with Bars to Bridges work. Project leadership shared that when transition specialists are re-entering students into schools that have policies in place that are not in alignment with their work in terms of making public education accessible to all people all of the time, it makes the process of re-entry more challenging. For example, if a student is at a non-neighborhood school (e.g. a charter school or alternative school) and they get enrolled at a detention facility even for a day, they no longer have the option of going back to their original school without going through the

entire application process from scratch. Another example is that some schools require multiple meetings before reentry, even if the student has only been absent for a week or two, and the time it takes to set the meetings up can delay the reentry process by a few weeks. It should also be noted that these barriers were more prevalent in the first two years of project implementation, and that many of the districts that project staff work with closely have changed policies as a result of working with the Bars to Bridges Project.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7 Bars to Bridges Project provided RMC Research with outcome data present in Exhibit 7. The Bars to Bridges Project has **served 410 students** since its implementation in September 2016. Indicators targeted by the Bars to Bridges Project include:

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Exhibit 7. Bars to Bridges Project Program Data

School-Related			
2016-2017	**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**Program Measure**
30%	20%	17%	Percentage of students attending alternative schools
50%	21%	20%	Percentage of students attending neighborhood schools
5%	3%	5%	Percentage of students attending postsecondary schools
—	36%	47%	Percentage of students on track to graduate
—	8%	4%	Percentage of students with diploma
—	10%	8%	Percentage of students with GED
—	6	10	Number of students enrolled in post-secondary education
—	129 days	119 days	Average length of time a student was out of school before entering Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Facility
—	41 days	40 days	Average length of time at Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Facility
—	12 days	15 days	Average length of time for student re-entry to school
Juvenile-Detention-Related[a]			
2016-2017	**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**Program Measure**
73	—	—	Number of times that students returned to Juvenile Detention Hall (JDH) on parole or probation status violations[a]
—	.3	.4	Average number of new law violations[a]
17%	18%	6%	Percentage of recidivism at Bars to Bridges
30	46	29	Number of warrants after client began working with a Transition Specialist
—	8%	19%	Percentage of students still incarcerated at end of school year
—	48	22	Number of court-approved placements to community-based organizations or youth corrections facilities

Parent/Guardian-Related			
2016-2017	**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**Program Measure**
1,514	—	—	Number of contacts with parent/guardian or support network
17	—	—	Number of students with DHS guardianship
Program-Related			
2016-2017	**2017-2018**	**2018-2019**	**Program Measure**
131	146	119	Number of students involved in programming
—	18%	23%	Percentage of students in Tier 0[b]
—	29%	28%	Percentage of students in Tier 1[b]
—	22%	20%	Percentage of students in Tier 2[b]
—	31%	29%	Percentage of students in Tier 3[b]
—	35%	35%	Average percentage of recipients who opened the Bars to Bridges eNewsletter
—	10	10	Average number of professional development trainings attended by Bars to Bridges staff
—	2	3	Number of professional development trainings offered to community stakeholders by Bars to Bridges staff

Note. Dashes indicate data was not collected due to a change in data collection protocol between Years 1 and 2.
[a]Project staff decided in Year 2 to consider new law violations as what determines recidivism for Bars to Bridges youth for three reasons: (1.) a violation can occur while still in the system, (2.) warrants are often added alongside a violation, so it could distort the numerical data, and (3.) new law violations are issued when an accusation of a new offense has occurred, which denotes more clearly an instance of re-offending.
[b]The project implemented a tier system in its 2nd year of implementation to track which students needed more/less frequent check-ins with Tier 0 being minimal and Tier 3 being high level (i.e., check-ins multiple times per week needed).

Summary and Recommendations

Bars to Bridges Project used House Bill 2016 funding to provide detained youth and youth in corrections with transition specialists who connected them back to their school and communities after reentry. Transition specialists worked with students individually and with their support networks and schools. Overall, students and juvenile court counselors were overwhelming positive about their experience working with transition specialists and indicated that they are a key resource for students before, during, and after reentry. Similarly, transition specialists were able to successfully transition students back to school and influence student attendance and school engagement. Transition specialists provided an array of services for students from meeting their basic needs to supporting their academic growth. In addition to working directly with students, the Bars to Bridges Project has provided professional development sessions to school staff and other community partners on resilience, de-escalation, culturally responsive practices, and the school-to-prison pipeline. RMC Research offers the following recommendations based on these findings.

Provide more transportation options. Transportation was noted as one of the biggest challenges facing students and their families. Incorporating options in addition to providing bus and cab fare would greatly improve students access to programming.

Providing more college tour opportunities. Juvenile court counselors noted how impactful college tours were for their students. These tours allowed students to see their options and led them to be more engaged in thinking about their future. More of these opportunities would benefit students.

Reach more students. Juvenile court counselors spoke at length about the need to reach students who desperately need these services, but who are not actually in detention. Transition specialists only get assigned students once they are in detention; however, there are students who may violate probation and then get sanctioned detention. These students do not have access to transition specialists, but their need is just as great. Juvenile court counselors reported that parents struggle with the fact that their child only receives services after they get arrested: "[Parents] have been asking for help for five years, struggling with behavior issues with their kids, and then all the sudden as soon as the kid gets arrested, here comes [a transition specialist], here comes a therapist, here comes all this help that they've been asking for, and the kid has to penetrate the system before he gets help. It's an oxymoron." Another juvenile court counselor reported that sometimes the students who are not considered the highest risk (i.e., Caucasian students) get overlooked, which is challenging. This juvenile court counselor had a Caucasian student who needed a high level of support that the counselor tried to provide, but was not as efficient as a transition specialist would have been. Juvenile court counselors also cited the need for transition specialists to work with other ethnicities such as Hispanic, Asian, and Pacific Islander. For example, one juvenile court counselor cited a Pacific Island community where traditionally families from this community do not go to school, so when they come to the United States they do not know how to navigate the school system—and might not be interested in enrolling their children in school. These are some of the most difficult communities to reach, since they are not showing up at schools at all, it is difficult to even know they exist until they get into trouble with the law.

The REAP Expansion Project

REAP Expansion Project (REAP) is a Phase I grantee that was first funded through House Bill 2016 from July 2016 to June 2017 (Year 1). REAP is a multicultural youth leadership program which offers a continuum of services that provide culturally responsive supports to children and youth in Grades 3–12. During Year 1 REAP expanded services to Aloha High School, Centennial High School, David Douglas High School, Oliver Elementary School, Parklane Elementary School, and Ron Russell Middle School. During Years 2 and 3, the second round of funding, REAP continued programming in these schools. The REAP Expansion Project offers student participants (a) leadership programming and ongoing academic support during and after school; (b) restorative justice services related to behavior, curriculum, and restorative planning; (c) leadership conferences to promote leadership, student voice, and expose students to African American/Black community leaders; and (d) services for chronically absent students and their families. The REAP Expansion Project also works with schools and districts to conduct a series of school climate surveys at partner schools and provide culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and restorative justice training and coaching for educators and administrators.

Staff roles include:

- **Project Leadership—**Manages program reporting and correspondence among implementation team, staff, students, families and community stakeholders. The leadership team includes the executive director (grant manager), director of programs, youth direct services manager, marketing and leadership development manager, and fundraising and program innovation manager.
- **Youth Essentials Coordinator (YEC)—**Previously referred to as site coordinators, the youth essentials coordinators administer direct programming during and after school hours to students, provide one-on-one support to students, and refer students to REAP and outside agencies for emergency services.
- **Partner—R.A.A.P. Counseling & Consulting—**Provide culturally responsive, trauma-informed care and discipline practices training and coaching for educators at partnering schools and assist with school climate assessments.
- **Partner—ILEAP—**Provide secondary parent engagement and school climate supports.

Program Implementation

Project leadership (n = 5) and youth essentials coordinators (n = 7) were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and implementation challenges. Findings also include feedback from two student focus groups (n = 14 students) about what is working well, what could be improved in terms of programming, and how programming is influencing students' education experience.

Primary Activities

The REAP Expansion Project aims to support students to flourish in their schools and communities by increasing their sense of voice, leadership, and overall community and school engagement via (a) building relationships with students and establishing a community at each school, (b) implementing leadership programming that addresses students individual needs, (c) providing restorative justice programming, (d) reaching out to parents and guardians with district family nights, (e) providing professional development to both school and REAP staff, and (f) working with school staff to assess school climate.

Building relationships with students and establishing a community is the one of the first steps YECs take when working with youth. For many students, the first step toward school engagement, leadership, and autonomy is being heard and affirmed. YECs offer a variety of student-focused services that cultivate community, including individual and group advocacy activities and check-in lunches. Students, YECs, and project leadership all described YECs as central to establishing community in schools. They connect with students, learn about students' families and friends, and evaluate how those external factors may impact students' experiences in schools. Students noted how important it was that they felt safe when talking to YECs. Additionally, YECs are available at the schools every day and are demographically matched to the students they serve. Students noted that it is nice having adults in their building who 'look like them' and are accessible.

> "A lot of what we try to do is build those connections with the students. Help them have an adult, trust an adult. A lot of times they may have conflict with their teachers. So it's difficult for them to go talk to their teacher for different things. We try to provide and fill that gap for them."
>
> YEC Focus Group

> "Our [YEC] talks to us as more of an equal instead of seeing us as children like some teachers at school. It feels more comfortable talking to them."
>
> Student Focus Group

Leadership programming that addresses individual needs is a large focus of the REAP Expansion Project. Opportunities for leadership include (a) Solutions, (b) Renaissance, (c) Reflections, (d) Young Entrepreneurs Program, (e) Young Entrepreneur Leadership Institute, (f) Black Male Challenge, (g) Black Female Challenge, (h) Challenge Academy of Leadership Innovations, and (i) District Family Nights. Leadership programming supports student voice through individualized assessment, coaching, and formal group programming. Students fill out an assessment at the start of the school year to give YECs an idea of where the student would like to grow and their strengths/weaknesses. YECs focus their conversations, relationship building, and programming on each student's needs. For example, one student shared that they were particularly weak in public speaking. With the help and support of REAP they were able to eventually speak at their school assembly. Another example is the entrepreneur program, YELI, where students create their own business plans with the help of REAP staff. Students reported that REAP is effective because of the support of REAP staff and the family-feel of the REAP environment.

> "When everyone is supporting you and encouraging you to do something, people feel like they can do it and they will succeed in doing it because of the encouragement and advice they're getting. It kinda just makes them feel like, 'I'm going to try it. Even if I fail, I'm just going to try it'.
>
> Student Focus Group

Reflections Programming, which is a restorative justice-focused intervention, include both proactive, targeted support for students (**Mindful Moments**) as well as alternatives to suspension (**Elevate**). Instead of suspending students for an incident, students attend Elevate, a 1-to 2-day program. YECs guide students through a reflection process that includes sharing their perspective, considering other perspectives, reflecting on what they could have done differently, creating a restorative justice plan to address the issues and establishing steps to get back in the classroom. YECs also facilitate restorative circles that allow students to express how they were physically or emotionally harmed and provide an opportunity for those who harmed to take responsibility for their actions. Mindful Moments serve as an opportunity to work with students to promote quick problem solving skills and reinforce de-escalation techniques so students can approach the issue more composed and open to resolution. Mindful moments include structured breaks where students come to YECs on a regular basis to work on either specific skills or to just discuss their life. Another component of mindful moments are classroom pullouts, where students who might have difficulty focusing on a lesson in their regular classroom will come to YECs who will work with them to complete the activity.

> "Mitigation is kind of the name of the game. As long as we can get in front of the problem before it explodes. We work pretty closely with the behavior team to make sure that the students who are having a difficult time have multiple eyes, so we are part of that team."
>
> YEC Focus Group

District Family Nights have a renewed focus since Year 1 of the project. Family nights occur once in fall and once in spring and include different strategies to engage parents. For example, one family night included a talent show where students could showcase their skill sets. The overall aim of parent nights is to engage parents and inform them of the different programs REAP provides from elementary to high school. Family nights provide opportunities for REAP to collect parent information via a survey, have parents sign up for REAP newsletters, learn how they can personally engage with REAP as volunteers, and play games. Additionally, family nights are opportunities for student leadership growth because family nights are led by students. Students come up with the concept, create the agenda, handle logistics, and are the MCs for the night.

Professional development for YECs is provided throughout the year and covers a wide variety of topics that include specific strategies YECs can use when working with students and parents. More contextual trainings give YECs a better understanding of school and district policies and how those policies affect their students' school experience. Examples of strategy-specific trainings include a training provided by Kendra Hughes with NW Regional Education Service District[27] on how to sustain healthy relationships with school partners, a training provided by Edgework called Grace Under Fire[28] on how to implement de-escalation tactics in the school setting, and ongoing trainings with R.A.A.P on how to work with students using a culturally responsive and trauma-informed approach. An example of contextual trainings include a training on the school-to-prison pipeline which enabled YECs to better understand the system in which they are supporting students. Many of the trainings available to YECs during Year 2 and Year 3 of the program were a result of collaboration with another H.B. 2016 grantee, From Bars to Bridges. From Bars to Bridges allotted spots for REAP staff to attend the trainings that they have organized, like the Grace Under Fire trainings.

Professional development for school staff is continuing to be implemented through the REAP Expansion Project's partnership with R.A.A.P. Counseling and Consulting. Trainings occurred quarterly, monthly, or weekly depending on the school. The professional development focuses on helping educators

[27] http://www.nwresd.org/
[28] https://www.edgework.info/

understand the myriad of factors that affect student engagement in the classroom. Staff received hands-on training on building trust and responding to student behaviors in a restorative way. YECs reported providing professional development indirectly through informal conversations with school staff and provided a formal training at one of the middle schools for the first time during Year 3.

Working with school and district staff is an integral part of the REAP Expansion Project that cultivates relationships and buy-in at the school and district level. Project leaders meet with the superintendent and assistant superintendent on a quarterly basis to update them on what is happening at each school and to discuss any issues that have come up. Project leaders and YECs also work with school and district staff to implement and present the findings of the school climate survey. YECs reported working intimately with school staff at school-level equity committee meetings, attending team meetings (level of engagement varies by site), meeting monthly with school administration, and attending weekly behavioral meetings through the reflections program. YECs also reported having frequent informal check-ins with teachers about different students.

Assessing school climate helps schools measure their progress toward their equity goals and identify needs. Students at David Douglas High School designed a climate survey and elicited feedback from students in the SUN program about item clarity and relevance to students. As of May 15, 2019, the school climate survey has been administered to all students in five of the six participating schools.

Addressing Student Barriers

Focus group participants cited students' social-emotional and home issues which schools are often ill-equipped to handle, and school policies around behavioral issues as the main barriers students face.

Students social-emotional and home issues were described as a barrier by YECs, citing that personal issues need to be addressed before diving into school engagement and leadership skills. Examples include students' family needs, food insecurity, and lack of support from parents. The first step toward mitigating these barriers is building relationships with students. YECs reported how crucial it is to have YECs, who often are of color, on campus daily advocating for African American/Black students. Those relationships make African American/Black students feel safe and affirmed, a precursor to growing leadership abilities and being empowered to lead. One student reported that their YEC bought the student self-care items with their own money, and that that kind of support makes the YEC feel like a family member, someone the student can trust. Students also noted that having the YECs available in the school for ad-hoc discussions is just as important as the actual programming.

> "When you go to [a YEC] you feel like they're actually trying to help you and giving you their attention…they're truly listening just to listen."
>
> YEC Focus Group

School policies around behavioral issues have a negative impact on attendance, disproportionate discipline, and graduation. Project leadership and YECs reported that schools often have policies in place that unnecessarily prohibit students from going to school, and that these policies compound attendance issues that students already are dealing with, leading to them getting further behind academically. For example, a common school policy is a catch-all 4-day suspension for play fighting. African American/Black students get this policy imposed upon them more frequently than Caucasian students do, based on the school's data. YECs try to mitigate this barrier via collaborative discussions with school administration and staff around what their policies are, how they are enforced, and alternative approaches that may be more effective. YECs also advocate for the students by getting in front of the problem prior to a referral to REAP. By working with the students individually, they are able to support

teachers by letting them know the reasons behind the student's behavior. The REAP Expansion Project is also tackling this barrier by providing school staff with professional development around trauma informed care and culturally responsive approaches towards students.

Adaptations

Project leadership and YECs described three main ways the REAP Expansion Project was adapted since Year 1:

Refined Reflections Programming. The mindful moments portion of reflections began during Year 1 of the project but has since been refined. The reflections programming is now more formally divided into two parts: Elevate, where students who have already had a discipline issue go in lieu of suspension, and Mindful Moments, a proactive set of activities meant to engage students in a way that prevents behavioral issues from occurring.

More District Family Nights. Family nights are now twice a year: in the fall as a back-to-school celebration, and in the spring to celebrate graduations and successes.

Facilitators to Implementation

Establishing partnerships with districts and schools and collaborating with them to ensure REAP has the resources it needs to establish relationships with students made program implementation easier.

Establishing partnerships with district and schools. The REAP Expansion Project continues to build relationships with the districts they serve in order to establish trust and communicate shared goals and desired outcomes. The stronger the relationship is with the district and schools; the easier implementation becomes because districts prioritize resources towards REAP programming. For example, one district was able to intentionally leverage dollars to support REAP programming.

> "Having a consistent presence in Beaverton and Centennial has been a huge win and speaks volumes for providing services in an area that has no history working with African American students."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Collaborative communication between REAP and school staff. YECs reported that when their communication with school staff is collaborative, open, and happens frequently, it is much easier to implement programming. For example, when teachers and YECs are in regular communication and respect one another's work, it is easier to proactively help students. Teachers will let YECs know when a student starts slipping in grades or attendance, as opposed to waiting until the student has stopped attending school altogether. YECs also reported that establishing positive relationships with teachers and other school staff can take time, and the level of communication is site-dependent, with some schools' teachers having a more positive relationship than others.

Having the resources to establish relationships with students. A few factors facilitate establishing relationships with students. First, having designated space at the school allows YECs, who are often the only adults of color in the schools, to establish a community in which African American/Black students feel accepted, safe, and understood. Second, having YECs in the school every day ensures a consistent student support system. YECs also reported that honoring student success has helped engage students. For example, creating an incentive for fun lunch, which is an opportunity for students to get together at lunch time and play games/engage in activities.

> "Just going somewhere where I feel safe enough to express my opinions If I'm having a bad day I can just say it. 'Today was crappy.' I have people I can talk to about it."
>
> Student Focus Group

Successes and Lessons Learned

Project leadership and YECs were asked about the successes and lessons learned from implementing the REAP Expansion Project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Decreasing suspensions. YECs and project leaders noted suspensions decreased since REAP started working with students. Project leadership reported that at the middle school in one of their districts, REAP staff have worked with 105 of 223 student infractions. Students have not returned for the same infractions. One YEC mentioned a student who was frequently removed from class due to behavioral issues: "She had been in Elevate three or four times. This year she is doing an amazing job. Every day she comes to our door to show us her check-in, check-out, like 'Hey, I'm doing a good job'."

Growing partnerships. During Year 1 the REAP Expansion Project established partnerships in Centennial and Beaverton School Districts, which had limited or no history of targeted support for African American/Black students, and expanded services in David Douglas School District. Relationship building is helping sustain programming in some districts. For example, the superintendent of one district secured funds to expand REAP programming at the middle school. In addition to building on those partnerships, the REAP Expansion Project has been exploring ways to partner with another H.B. 2016 grantee, the From Bars to Bridges project, to share training and professional development opportunities for project staff and to provide after-school programming for their students. To date the after-school programming collaboration is on hold due to student demographic changes.

School relationships. YECs reported that while the relationships vary by school, generally they have a good relationship with teachers and collaborate on how to best serve students. One YEC reported, "Staff are very welcoming. They love that we're there. They're always coming up to us to check in on different students or give us updates." YECs also noted that it has taken over a year to establish positive relationships, and that recently they solidified those relationships. Additionally, one school reached out to REAP to develop and administer a survey tool and follow-up focus groups with students to assess attendance trends for AA/B students to help boost attendance rates.

Increasing the number of students served. YECs reported that more students attended REAP activities as the year progressed and students wanted more REAP programming. One YEC said, "I am seeing more black males come into the program and wanting to be engaged during lunchtime, which is their free time. That is a plus."

Increasing student engagement with school. Project leadership, YECs, and students shared stories of students thriving in school, making post-graduation plans, and taking on leadership roles due to their involvement in REAP programming. For example, at Centennial High School the first student assembly led by African-American students was this year. Another example, at Aloha High School, principal instituted a student leadership cabinet comprised of students of color in response to the work of REAP. As a new principal at the school he was interested in increasing student voice within the school and recognized the work REAP has accomplished. Students in focus groups reported thinking more about post high school plans because REAP opened their eyes to their capabilities and the different paths they can take. They also noted that travelling to different companies has opened their eyes to different vocations and networking opportunities.

> "REAP opened my eyes to the idea that you don't always have to go to the top college to succeed. You can go to community college and still get to where you want to be. That just took the stress off and makes me feel like even if I don't get into those, I still have a chance."
>
> Student Focus Group

Lessons Learned

Building relationships with school staff is integral to success. Project leaders and YECs noted how important it is to build good relationships with school staff to increase staff awareness about what REAP offers and foster buy-in. When teachers are aware of the services and how they influence student engagement, working with school staff and the students is more effective.

Patience, consistency, and adaptability. YECs reported some of the lessons they learned from working with students. The number one lesson learned was consistency. Being able to show consistent support to students helps build trust between students and YECs. Patience was another lesson learned, and not getting too attached to what they think would be fun for students.

Challenges

Relationship building with districts and schools to prioritize programming, leverage funding, and coordinating after-school programming and field trips were implementation challenges.

Relationship building with the district. Project leadership reported that while they have a very positive relationship with some districts, they are still struggling with others. For example, one district has fully integrated the REAP team into their schools' culture and includes REAP in staff meetings, equity meetings, and behavioral meetings. It also leverages funds to sustain REAP programming. Conversely, other districts have not prioritized REAP programming in their schools and have been resistant to schedule staff professional development. Project leaders shared the frustration that despite districts signing Memorandum of Understandings, when it comes to implementation schools are not collaborating or approving students to attend activities such as student leadership conferences. Additionally, one project leader shared that the onus of acquiring funding for REAP programming is solely on REAP, and that if funding that REAP acquires does not continue, students in those districts will lose programming altogether. Some districts will not find the time for R.A.A.P to provide trainings for their staff, despite having a need for it. Project leadership think this resistance is

> "Some districts do not want to be exposed to some of their shortcomings. So when they are exposed, they get very defensive."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

due to denial that the district has issues that need to be addressed around bias and restorative justice. Project leadership reported a lack of collaboration with some districts, saying that districts do not want to acknowledge the work that REAP staff has done and instead want to claim the successes as their own.

Relationship building with the school. Similar to district relationship-building, project leadership and YECs reported that in some schools they have a very positive relationship while in other schools the relationships could be improved. For example, some schools include REAP in staff meetings on a limited basis (i.e., only some teachers will include them) and some teachers do not even know who they are. YECs also reported that they struggle with communicating with some teachers about their students. Teachers will wait until a student has stopped coming to school altogether, or until they are failing their classes, before they alert YECs that there is a problem. This has made proactive engagement with students challenging. Additionally, YECs reported that while teachers on the surface appreciate the trainings provided by R.A.A.P., oftentimes they are resistant to actually putting the trainings into practice, suggesting that teachers are looking for an easy step-by-step solution and when they realize it is not that simple, they shut down. Project leadership and YECs attribute these challenges to the overall support and the school/district priorities. If the school or district as a whole does not prioritize and acknowledge REAP's work, teachers are less apt to do so. Some teachers are also not interested in REAP regardless of district/school support.

> "Some teachers are fine the way they are. They don't want to change. They don't want to do anything when they've been comfortable for the past 5, 6, 7, 14 years they've been teaching."
>
> YEC Focus Group

After-school programming and field trips. YECs shared that the most challenging component of implementing programming is after-school programming and field trips. After-school programming is difficult because students have other obligations outside of school and convincing students to give up their free time can be hard. In some schools YECs have switched programming from after school to during lunch as a work-around to this challenge. YECs also reported that field trips are a challenge in some schools where they have been limited to a certain number of field trips per school year. One site only allows YECs to take students out for the Black Male Challenge and Black Female Challenge. Any other activities must be done after school.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, REAP staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 8. Since its implementation in September 2016, YECs reached **864 students**, the project has **held 15 district-wide leadership conferences/events** at which **1,085 students attended**, and **provided professional development to 127 educators** through their partner R.A.A.P. Counseling & Consulting or by REAP staff directly. Indicators targeted by the REAP Expansion Project include:

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 10: Increase the rate of freshman on-track for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Exhibit 8. REAP Expansion Project Program Data

School-Related				
2015–2016	**2016–2017**	**2017-2019**	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
3,542	1,884	154	Number of disciplinary referrals[a]	8
194	115	168	Number of suspensions[a]	8
Program-Related				
Target	**2016-2017**	**2017-2019**	**Program Measure**	
224	**320**	544	Number of students reached/served by site coordinator	8, 9, 10, 11
16	**40**	53	Number of meetings with teachers, counselors, administrators, school district leaders	8, 9, 10, 11
—	12	3	Number of district-wide leadership conference conferences/events held	10, 11
1,000	786	405	Number of student attendees at district-wide leadership conferences/events[b]	10, 11
—	61	219	Number of students referred to Reflections[a]	8, 9, 10, 11
—	48	168	Number of restorative plans created[a]	8, 9, 10, 11
—	57	168	Number of students that completed Reflections program[a]	8, 9, 10, 11
—	2	4	Number of summer programs planned	9, 10, 11
—	2	4	Number of summer programs held	9, 10, 11
—	838	1,153	Number of students enrolled in each academic year and summer program	8, 9, 10, 11
70%	100% (837)	100% (1,153)	Number of students retained in each academic year and summer program	8, 9, 10, 11
—	77	50	Number of educators at each PD event	8
—	77	--	Number of surveys completed by educators at each PD event	8
—	13	1	Number of PD events held	8

Note. Dashes indicate no target set.
[a]Number includes only those schools with Reflections programming (Oliver Elementary, Parklane Elementary, Centennial High School, Aloha High School for the 2016-2017 school year. Centennial Middle School was added during the 2017-2019 period).
[b]For the 2016-2017 period, the number includes students who attended conferences from a 4th district (Portland Public School District).

Summary and Recommendations

Overall, students, YECs, and project leadership described the REAP Expansion Project as a positive force in students' lives and the overall school culture. African American/Black students were more engaged in school and had a better sense of their leadership skills and how to utilize them. Interviewees also described communication barriers between REAP staff and school staff and challenges related to project

implementation. RMC Research offers the following recommendations for the REAP Expansion Project based on the evaluation findings.

Improve communication between REAP staff and schools. Project leadership and YECs described how REAP was integrated into the school culture, added new programming to better serve students, and increased REAP staff's ability to establish relationships with students, however they also reported that the level of integration varies by site, and that in some sites there are many teachers who either do not know what types of services they provide or are philosophically opposed to the work they do. The REAP Expansion Project staff has made a concerted effort to work with schools to increase awareness of REAP programming, and should continue this effort as it is still needed in some of the school sites.

Increase student accessibility to REAP programming. Project leadership and YECs reported student recruitment can be difficult because students have after-school obligations. REAP Expansion Project staff may consider working with schools to create more during-school activities and explore the possibility of creating activities where students could earn credits.

African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County

In 2016, Self-Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) partnered with Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center and Rosemary Anderson High School (POIC + RAHS) to implement the African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County.

SEI's overarching goal is to ensure that African American students reach their full potential and become positive contributing citizens who complete at least two years of postsecondary education or successful workforce experience by the age of 25. SEI's services are guided by a strength-based positive youth development relationship model that includes African-American cultural traditions and norms, emphasizes relationships, and partners with other community organizations. SEI is dedicated to guiding underserved youth toward reaching their full potential through its relationship model, the SEI Standards, and SEI's Fundamental Beliefs.

SEI Standards and Fundamental Beliefs

Preamble

The **SEI Standards** are founded upon the principles of integrity and respect. Integrity because integrity exemplifies truthfulness, modesty, and trustworthiness. Respect because respect exemplifies courtesy, honor and reverence.

1. In SEI, we greet each other every day with a smile and a handshake to strengthen the relationship between us.
2. In SEI, we honor and respect each other and so we address one another with proper language and speech.
3. In SEI, we value the space of ourselves and others and are careful not to intrude or injure each other.
4. In SEI, we are mindful of what is true, and strive to be honest in word and deed.
5. In SEI, we treasure our rich culture and hold the cultures of all people in high regard.
6. In SEI, we strive to reflect our beauty both inwardly in our understanding and outwardly in our appearance.

Fundamental Beliefs

1. All children can and will succeed.
2. All children have a gift.
3. When children are presented with options and exposure they will discover their purpose and realize their potential.
4. All children can learn.
5. We see kids for who they can become rather than who they are today.
6. All children develop best when surrounded by caring and nurturing adults.
7. Staff members are 100% responsible for the relationship.

Each aspect of SEI programing is grounded in research literature on the cultural traditions and norms of the African American community, culturally responsive pedagogy[29], culturally responsive themes[30], non-cognitive factors that influence persevering and thriving in adversity[31], high expectations[32], and positive and consistent adult relationships.[33]

As part of House Bill 2016 funding, SEI expanded services into the Parkrose School District and expanded services in Portland Public School District's Grant High School. These services include culturally responsive and comprehensive wraparound support for students and their families, academic support, 24/7/365 case management, family engagement, college preparation, career exploration, and skill building for youth at-risk of academic failure. By providing a continuum of services during and after school, in the summer, at home, and after high school graduation, SEI aims to build students' resiliency to overcome barriers. SEI After School Programming (ASP) provides tutorial, enhancement activities, credit recovery, as well as life skills classes and discussion groups, four days a week.

POIC + RAHS (referred to as POIC throughout the report) is committed to supporting the future success of at-risk youth through age 25 by providing the highest quality of service in education, mentoring, family outreach, and employment training and placement to break the cycle of poverty. POIC provides accredited, innovative, and culturally specific educational services to engage and motivate gang-impacted and disenfranchised youth of color to achieve postsecondary success. House Bill 2016 formalized a **partnership between SEI and POIC** to strengthen the safety net for high-risk, disconnected, African American/Black youth who have dropped out, have been expelled, or are on the verge of dropping out or being expelled from five Multnomah County school districts.

Program Implementation

RMC Research conducted four focus groups including a group each of project leaders (*n* = 2), SEI coordinators (*n* = 6), SEI parents (*n* = 4), and POIC students (*n* = 5). Participants were asked questions regarding activities and programming; student barriers; program adaptations; facilitators and challenges to implementation; and program successes.

Primary Activities

SEI and POIC aim to improve outcomes of African American/Black children and young adults by (a) connecting students to coordinators who provide academic, social, and emotional support to students, (b) promoting a strong black identity in students and facilitating conversations about race at schools, (c) using a variety of philosophies to guide programming, (d) facilitating relationships between parents, school staff, and SEI's wraparound services, (e) collaborating with a variety of external organizations, and (f) providing professional development and support to staff.

SEI provided services to 126 African American and Black students in Grant High School, Parkrose Middle School, and Parkrose High School who received SEI's full fidelity in-school, after-school, summer, parent

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[29] Gay, G. (2010*). Culturally responsive reaching: theory, research, and practice (second edition)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

[30] Hanley, M.S. & Noblit, G.W. (2009). *Cultural responsiveness, racial identity, and academic success: A literature review.* Retrieved from http://www.heinz.org/userfiles/library/culture-report_final.pdf

[31] Bandura, A. & Shunk, D. (1981). Cultivating competence, self-efficacy, and intrinsic interest through proximal self-motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 41*(3), 586-598.

[32] Center for Promise (2013). *SEI data dashboard: Youth systems, school, and state testing data.* Boston, MA: Boston University.

[33] Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007*). Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities in Schools, Inc.

engagement, and enrichment programming. House Bill 2016 supported in-school coordinators and parent coordinators. SEI also provides support for students and families over holidays and school breaks and ensures that the students with the highest needs are present.

SEI guides their programming through the Relationship Model. In-school coordinators function as a parent, teacher, or mentor with students. For students whose parents have a strong presence in their child's life, the coordinator may play the role of a mentor. Other students' parents may be less available, so the coordinator provides a parental role.

SEI connects students to in-school coordinators. In-school coordinators provide academic, social, and emotional support to students during school, after school, and during school breaks and summer vacation. Each coordinator takes on a caseload of 35–40 students and works with students to create an Individual Success Plan (ISP). ISPs include students' goals (related to, for example, grades, attendance, or involvement in school clubs) and strategies to meet those goals. ISPs are, as one coordinator described, "living documents" that coordinators and students regularly revise based on students' progress and interests. In-school coordinators track student progress using a visible point system so that students are aware of their progress towards goals and provide incentives — such as field trips or monetary rewards — to students who achieve goals. In-school coordinators expose students to a wide variety of experiences and places Including but not limited to NIKE with the Creation Project, Higher Education opportunities with College tours, and culturally specific activities and events such as Boys II Men, Girls II Women and Community Day of Service). These trips empower students to find topics that are interesting to them, provide an empathetic ear when students are struggling with personal issues, and are a visible presence in school. High school students in SEI's programs mentor middle school students on behavioral and academic challenges. In summary, in-school coordinators support students to be goal oriented, curious, and engaged in middle school, high school, and in their adult life.

> "For [kids] to work hard at something, you want it to be something they care about. Whether it's robotics or dance or photography, SEI nurtures it and makes them feel rewarded for the work that they put in. It's invaluable because then they learn what they like and don't like. They start to be an expert at something they really care about."
>
> SEI Parent Focus Group

SEI facilitates conversations about race at schools. At Grant High School, SEI students created the curriculum for Race Forward Conversations, an award-winning event where the school closes classrooms and community members, including SEI staff, facilitate discussions on race. SEI also brings adults of color to speak to their students at *Lunch and Learn* events at some schools, and SEI students speak at middle schools about race and rape culture. SEI students hold leadership roles in the Black Student Union at both Grant and Parkrose High School.

In-school coordinators implement SEI's wraparound services. While some SEI coordinators work only with students, other SEI coordinators function as a bridge between students, their parents, and the school. Parent coordinators conduct in-home visits and host parent social events to build relationships with families and provide families with access to the wraparound services SEI offers. Parents stated that coordinators also facilitate communication between teachers and school administrators around, for example, disciplinary issues or academic struggles. Parents of children involved in SEI programming described how SEI and coordinators had supported their families through health issues, divorce, and financial struggle. One parent said that SEI was, "a huge web of support," while another said SEI was like "family."

SEI collaborates with a variety of external organizations. SEI's Community and Family Programming department has built a vast network of partnerships with government entities (e.g., Metro, Multnomah County, Portland Parks and Recreation, SUN schools), other nonprofit organizations (e.g., JOIN, Salvation Army, Urban League), businesses (e.g., Nike, Key Bank, US Bank, law offices), hospitals and other healthcare organizations, universities, and police departments. Students intern at or visit organizations, or hear speakers from these organizations to gain exposure to a wide variety of experiences, people, and potential future professions.

SEI provides professional development and support to their staff. SEI staff described their professional development program, called Career Potentials Realized, where staff receive regular, ongoing training in a variety of areas including the Relationship Model, trauma-informed care, implicit bias, and caseload management. Staff can also take classes at local universities on topics like nonprofit management and performance reviews. SEI has an incentive program for staff called *Caught You Being Great* where staff put names of other staff doing great work into a box. Next, names are drawn and winning staff receive gift cards for their efforts. One staff member said that weekly staff meetings rejuvenate their passion for SEI's work because of the positive energy meetings generate (e.g., shout outs to staff for doing great work and the use of Standard Number One "At SEI, we greet each other every day with a smile and a handshake in order to strengthen the relationship between us"). Staff also have retreats and routinely cross-train with other parts of the agency, so they are aware of all services SEI can offer to clients.

Portland Opportunities Industrial Center (POIC). Through House Bill 2016 funding, POIC provided services to 241 African American and Black students at its four campuses. Student support included programming, barrier reduction, parent engagement, and student advocacy. During the second phase of funding, POIC did not have a case manager – a role that was filled during the first phase of funding. POIC integrated the Kids at Hope[34] philosophy during Phase II of funding. Kids at Hope wants "every child [to be] afforded the belief, guidance, and encouragement that creates a sense of hope and optimism." This philosophy aligns with POIC's core values and has been woven into the POIC culture. One way the Kids at Hope philosophy has been integrated is by referring to POIC as a private school (positive framing) rather than an alternative school (negative framing). In addition, teachers and staff focus on students' strengths, use words of empowerment, and "stay in the positive." POIC staff attended the Youth Development Masters Institute where they expanded their strategies and approaches for developing and nurturing a transformative culture. POIC staff have also attended trainings on trauma-informed care and cultural competency.

POIC provides students with tiered levels of support. During Phase II of the grant, POIC shifted its implementation model to provide several tiers of support for students. Some students needed more intense support, although all students received some level of support to reduce participation in high-risk activities after school. Higher levels of support include intense support, more intense support, and high engagement that includes wraparound services. Support, based on individual student needs, includes connection to credit bearing courses, exposure to college, or rent assistance. POIC has also started working with 10 students at a middle school.

POIC provides students with academic and other support. POIC takes students on a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Tour, a one-week trip where students visit multiple academic institutions. This year's theme was connecting the Civil Rights movement to Black Lives Matter. Students on the HBCU tour also visited Selma, Alabama, on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's march. Students and coordinators described the importance of students spending time in places where African Americans are the majority, meeting African American administrators and others in leadership positions,

[34] http://kidsathope.org/

visiting key locations in the Civil Rights Movement, and being able to see successful African Americans. Other supports include a parenting program called Nurturing Parenting, teen nights every Tuesday, and Working Wednesdays for credit recovery. In addition, POIC exposes students to post-high school opportunities like college, internships, and the trades. Students also have opportunities to earn incentives for making the honor roll and attendance.

Addressing Student Barriers

Focus group participants cited students' families experiencing financial instability, students having difficulty traveling to school and to sites due to lack of efficient public transportation and sidewalks in East Portland, students experiences with discrimination at school, and parent engagement as the main barriers students face to academic success.

Students' families may experience financial instability. Some SEI families may not be able to pay bills and, as a result, students may be living in homes without heat, hot water, or electricity. Other stressors include not have a quiet space to study at home or not being able to pay for advanced placement credits or sports. Home visits can shed light on some of the barriers to student success. SEI mitigates these barriers by connecting families to SEI's Community and Family Programming department for wraparound support.

Students may have difficulty traveling to school due to East Portland's lack of efficient public transportation and sidewalks. Although districts pay for some students' bus passes, students may have a long ride to East Portland schools or SEI sites. For example, some students take three buses and the light rail to travel to school. If the district will not pay for students' bus passes because they live too close to school, POIC students may have to walk to school on streets in East Portland with no sidewalks. In these cases, POIC will buy a bus pass for the student. The goal is to proactively address students' invisible barriers and reduce their stress.

Students experience discrimination. Participants described how a school staff member had made racial slurs to students and how teachers had inaccurately accused students of not doing work. One parent described a situation where her son had advocated for himself, after learning self-advocacy from SEI, and met with school administrators after he received a bad grade.

> "My belief is because [my son] had mentorship [at SEI] he had the willingness and the courage to have this hard conversation, to actually gather at a table with his counselor and a vice principal, and to [get] the school [to do] a whole review of this teacher's grading record. He had that confidence in himself to singly go forward."
>
> SEI Parent Focus Group

Parent engagement can be challenging. Engaging parents begins with developing trust, particularly with parents who have had negative experiences with schools. For example, if a parent calls a teacher and the teacher does not return the parent's call, it is experienced as disrespect. This experience can then lead to lower parent engagement in school-related activities.

Adaptations

Project leaders and coordinators described two ways SEI and POIC have adapted since Year 1:

Identifying students who are a strong fit for SEI's programming. At the beginning of the project schools would only suggest students for SEI who were struggling academically and behaviorally. Over time, SEI has worked to change the way schools view the agency's work, which is not only support for struggling kids, but for kids who are doing well academically and want to realize their potential.

Serving more students and tailoring services to different student populations. POIC has experienced tremendous growth and has been finding ways to reach more students. POIC found that what worked with a smaller cohort of students in the first phase of funding was more challenging to replicate as the number of students increased.

Facilitators to Implementation

Building relationships with school staff and parents, allowing all families to qualify for SEI services regardless of income, and providing incentives to students has made project implementation easier.

SEI and POIC staff building relationships with school staff and parents. Building trusting relationships with school staff over time has facilitated SEI and POIC's ability to be successful with students. Students are more likely to work to improve their grades or change their behavior if the SEI in-school coordinator has a relationship with their parents. Likewise, teachers are better able to support students with an in-school coordinator who advocates for the student. However, the relationships with parents and students may not develop quickly – "patience and consistency is key." For POIC, it took "at least a year for the students to know who we were."

All families qualify for SEI services regardless of income. One parent described how she appreciated that, unlike other social service programs, everyone can be a part of SEI regardless of income. If families' income increases or social circumstances improve over time, they can still receive SEI services. If a family's income is above the income threshold for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), the family can also still receive services from SEI.

The SEI and POIC incentive programs keeps students focused on their goals. Coordinators, project leaders, and parents said that providing students with monetary and other incentives supports students in keeping focused on their academic and behavioral goals. One SEI coordinator said that students look forward to the incentive. In-school coordinators review goals with students monthly, which reminds the student of their progress toward reaching goals and receiving incentives. At POIC, the Historically Black College tour is large incentive for students that supports attendance at and participation in school.

Successes

Parents feeling supported by SEI; students succeeding personally, academically, and professionally; and staff receiving extensive training and opportunities for professional development were described as successes of SEI and POIC.

Parents feel supported by SEI. Parents described SEI's support through difficult life events as pivotal. One parent described being unable to care for their children during a major life event, and SEI called frequently to offer services and support to the family. Other parents described how SEI was responsive to parents' desire for less services once their families had made it through difficult periods. Parents felt supported knowing SEI is helping their child in school, and that if they had a concern about their child, they would call the coordinator first.

> "Knowing that there's somebody in the school that is going to support your child, whether it's talking about a grade, talking to a teacher, or even misunderstandings with their friends where they feel sad and misunderstood, there's a safe space where they can talk it out. Knowing the person that is helping them work through it equally loves the kids. That person has everybody's best interest in mind. To me, that's just an extension of parenting."
>
> SEI Parent Focus Group

Students are succeeding personally, academically, and professionally. Focus group participants described how students had found success in a variety of forms. Many students had become more excited about going to school, improved their grades, graduated from high school, and attended college. Project leaders and coordinators described students who graduated from top law schools and music schools, played basketball professionally, or pursued passions in the arts. Students have taken leadership roles at their high schools, have attended Math and Science Engineering Camps out of state, or have been invited to speak at government meetings. Other successes include better attendance, fewer discipline incidents, and credit achievement.

> "[POIC programs] make me more excited to come to school. I know there's something always to look forward to. Not just your regular go to class, get sent home, nobody really cares about you. You're just another student. It's more like a family."
>
> POIC Student Focus Group

Staff at SEI and POIC receive extensive training and opportunities for professional development. In-school coordinators received extensive training before starting employment at SEI and ongoing training from highly trained and experienced staff. One new coordinator described participating in 6 weeks of training before starting her coordinator role. Staff also discussed opportunities for ongoing professional development through SEI's Career Potential Realized track.

Challenges

Focus group participants stated that SEI and POIC face several programmatic challenges including East Portland being unprepared for the influx of students of color displaced due to gentrification, parents lacking trust in schools, a high need for in-school coordinators' services, and schools not having enough office space for in-school coordinators.

East Portland was unprepared for the influx of students of color displaced due to gentrification. Project leaders and coordinators stated that East Portland schools and transportation systems were unprepared for the influx of students, especially students of color, who moved to the region because of rising housing costs in gentrifying neighborhoods. Focus group participants described teachers and school security personnel who were unfamiliar with working with students of color and the challenges students of color confront. Project leaders also described students who struggled to travel to school without taking multiple buses; they attributed this to the inefficient and unprepared transportation system in East Portland.

Some parents have had negative past experiences with and do not trust school systems. Project leaders described parents who have been ignored and marginalized by school staff for many years and have therefore lost trust in school systems in general. For example, school staff do not return parents' calls or teachers only call parents when their child is struggling academically or behaviorally. POIC's CEO

has started to meet with parents of children with extreme absenteeism to inspire families to take advantage of the opportunities POIC is offering.

Schools and families have a high need for in-school coordinators' services. In-school coordinators discussed the high need for their services from students, families, and school staff. Another coordinator said they help students who are not on their caseload because all students need support, stating "We are expected to do our job for the agency and handling the school's other fires adds to the plate." In addition, there was only one in-school coordinator at Parkrose and an additional in-school coordinator is needed to support the growing number of students in East Portland.

Schools do not have enough office space for in-school coordinators. At some schools, in-school coordinators share office space that is often very small with other external organizations. Because of this, it can be difficult to have confidential conversations with students. This may result in students not receiving the support they need.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, project staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 9. Since its implementation in September 2016, the African American/Black student Success Plan of Multnomah County reached over **744 students**. Indicators targeted by the African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County include:

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Exhibit 9. SEI and POIC Program Data

Self-Enhancement, Inc.				
Target	**2016-2017**	**2017-2019**	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
110	139	126	Number of students at Parkrose and Grant High Schools engaged in culturally responsive system of support (e.g., students connected to an in-school coordinator)	8, 9, 11
110	126	110	Number of students with Individual Success Plans for personal, social, and academic goals	8, 9, 11
110	133	121	Number of students attending after-school programming	8, 9, 11
62	62	80	Number of students attending summer programming	8, 9, 11
—	—	30	Number of students enrolled in credit recovery and acquisition opportunities (e.g., Evening Scholars)	11
85%	59%	51%	Percentage of students with an attendance rate of 90% or higher (of 61 students with attendance data)[a]	9
—	—	90%	Percentage of students graduating	11

85%	97%	91%	Percentage of students participating in a minimum of 2 hours/week of after-school programming	8, 9, 11
85%	97%	85%	Percentage of students with 0–1 behavior referrals	8
—	—	10	Number of out-of-school suspensions	8
—	—	0	Number of expulsions	8
3	TBD	1,043	Number of contacts and quarterly events provided by parent coordinators	8, 9, 11
—	130	70	Number of attendees at events provided by parent coordinators	8, 9, 11
4	4	—	Number of cross-training events among SEI and POIC staff	8, 9, 11
—	—	11	Number of professional development activities	8, 9, 11
—	507	31	Number of case management meetings	8, 9, 11
—	462	879	Number of minutes per month students are in contact with in-school coordinator	8, 9, 11
POIC				
Target	**2016-2017**	**2017-2019**	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
80	238	241	Number of high-risk, disconnected, expelled/suspended, and out-of-school youth engaged	8, 9, 11
—	—	5	Number of out-of-school suspensions	8
—	—	22%	Percentage of students (enrolled) graduating	11
—	—	159	Number of students enrolled in credit bearing programs	11
—	—	8	Number of credit bearing programs offered (outside of class)	11
—	56%	67%	Rate of credits earned vs. credits attempted	11
—	46	—	Number of families engaged	8, 9, 11
—	60%	50%	Average attendance rate	9
—	81%	38%	Average retention rate	9, 11
—	—	8	Number of professional development activities for project staff	8, 9, 11

Note. Dashes indicate no target set, or data not collected due changes in data collection plan between funding periods.
[a]Only includes the students who had attendance data provided.

Summary and Recommendations

SEI and POIC utilized funding from House Bill 2016 to strengthen the safety net for African American/Black youth who have dropped out, been expelled, or are on the verge of dropping out or being expelled from five Multnomah County school districts. SEI connects students with in-school coordinators who provide academic, social, and emotional support to students. Both SEI and POIC provide incentives to students who achieve goals. SEI uses a variety of philosophies to guide their work (e.g., Relationship Model). SEI's in-school coordinators facilitate a relationship between parents, school staff, and SEI's wraparound services. SEI and POIC partner with a variety of external organizations and students conduct internships and site visits at those locations. SEI and POIC provide their staff with robust training and opportunities for professional development.

SEI and POIC also confronted challenges such as East Portland being unprepared for the influx of students of color, parents who lack trust in school systems based on their previous experiences, a high need for in-school coordinators' services, and schools not having enough office space for in-school coordinators. Based on these findings, RMC Research offers the following recommendations.

Offer more support to students after they finish high school. SEI parents stated that they would like to see SEI support students after they arrive at college. They indicated that SEI does a great job at supporting students until they arrive at college, but that students need more support throughout their college career. Students also said that POIC could provide more connections to employment opportunities after students graduate from high school.

Provide more access to electives, independent studies, and sports at POIC. Some POIC students said that schools need more access to electives such as art and current issues, while other students stated they would like the opportunity to participate in more independent studies. Several students wanted a wider variety of sports and a common location to practice and have games.

Update available computers and classroom materials at POIC. Students related that some computers at school were outdated and require upgrading. Students also reported that the science classroom needs microscopes and other materials to enhance learning.

Provide more free time on HBCU tour. POIC students reported that the HBCU tour was an incredible experience, but that the tour had a schedule that was too rigid. Students said they would like more free time to explore places of their choice and to have a less packed schedule.

African American/Black Student Bonding Project

The African American/Black Student Bonding Project is a Phase II grantee that was first funded through House Bill 2016 for July 2018 through June 2019. This project is an extension of the Elevate Oregon program, which uses a culturally responsive model to provide in- and out-of-school programming to underserved children in the Parkrose School District. The main program components are delivered via Teacher Mentors. Teacher mentors provide support to students through: (a) an accredited curriculum focused on fostering seven character qualities (such as courage and respect) and six life skills (such as career-mindedness and communication); (b) consistent and caring 1:1 mentoring relationships; and (c) leadership opportunities through the Little Lift program where secondary students act as mentors to elementary students. Elevate Oregon places emphasis on both positive daily interactions with their student participants and focuses on key transition periods such as the middle school to high school transition (e.g., Ninth Grade Counts Program) and Elevate's elementary school to middle school transition (e.g., Grade 5 to Grade 6 Transition program), modeled on Ninth Grade Counts. Their partners include the Parkrose School District as well as other community-based collaborators such as SUN Service Systems, Self Enhancement Inc., Latino Network, and Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization.

The African American/Black Student Bonding Project was specifically funded to support Elevate Oregon's work with middle school students in the Parkrose School District; however, this report draws from focus group interviews with secondary students (Grade 6 to Grade 9) and teacher mentors more broadly.

Program Implementation

Project leaders (n = 3) and teacher mentors (n = 7) were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and implementation challenges. Findings also include feedback from two student focus groups (n = 9) about what worked well, what could be improved, and how programming is influencing their education experience.

Primary Activities

The African American/Black Student Bonding Project's main activities include (a) building supportive teacher mentor relationships with students, (b) bridging the gaps between schools, students, and parents, (c) providing accredited curriculum embedded in the school day, (d) facilitating out of school programming, and (e) intentional communication, relationship building, and social events for parents and families.

Building supportive teacher mentor relationships with students is a foundational element of the African American/Black Student Bonding Project. In fact, evidence derived from student focus groups suggests that the overall success of the in- and out-of-school programming rest on the strength of these relationships. For example, students reported that behavior was better in their Elevate classroom in comparison to other classrooms because students liked and felt understood by their teacher mentors. Teacher mentors were further characterized as caring, motivating, and fun. Another hallmark of these relationships mentioned by both teacher mentors and students was their consistent, daily contact. This consistency appears to be critical in building the strong bonds that are formed in the Elevate program. Teacher mentors articulated strong emotional attachments to their students. In turn, Elevate students clearly value their teacher mentor as adults who understand and care about them, are demographically

similar to them, and share a cultural understanding with them. One student even referred to Elevate as "a second family." Project leaders, teacher mentors, and students all emphasized individualized attention, attunement, and accountability as central elements of these relationships. These relationship elements are represented in the round the clock work of the teacher mentors who closely monitor each student with the goal of catching issues with attendance, grades, other teachers and peers, and families early so that they may intervene and advocate for their students.

> "Elevate keeps everyone in my class out of trouble so far. Your teacher mentor can tell when something is going on. Whether it's in class or outside of class, . . . they can figure it out really easily. It's kind of hard to get that past them. Elevate is usually there to be like, 'Hey, what's going on? Do I need to talk to someone? Do I need to talk to a teacher? Do you need to get your feelings out? What's going on?'"
>
> Student Focus Group

Bridging the gaps between schools, students, and parents is another key activity for Elevate staff because of the several divides between students, teachers, parents, and the school district. The **student-teacher divide** was brought up by all three types of focus group participants. Teacher mentors reported that they use their in-depth knowledge of students' backgrounds to advocate for students with tangible results. For instance, one teacher mentor shared that an essentially universal policy of 'no cell phones in class' was amended by a teacher after the teacher mentor informed her about a recent life trauma that had left the student feeling upset in class without access to her cell phone because that was her only communication she had with her father. The **parent-district divide** is another juncture where project staff bridge the gap for their students. Elevate staff have earned a voice in the district through their concerted investment in relationships and extensive participation in committees (e.g., district-level Equity Team, school-level Freshman Success Teams), which put them in regular collaboration with staff at all levels of the district. Teacher mentors reported that their voice in the district helps parents feel that they too can more easily connect with the district. One final divide Elevate staff help bridge the **student-parent divide**. Parents, at times, feel they don't understand what is happening while their children are in school. For example, one teacher mentor shared of his "pretty amazing" relationship with a student's father relating that he helps the father stay knowledgeable about what is going on with his child while she is at school and he is at work.

> "I think being a part of [the district] also helps put some of our parents at ease and feel like they're connected as well. Now they know they can touch somebody at the district if they have an issue or a problem."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Accredited curriculum embedded in the school day emphasizes social-emotional learning, academic support, and culturally relevant lessons and discussions. First, the Elevate curriculum addresses social-emotional learning by implementing lessons on 13 character qualities and life skills. For instance, goal setting lessons, particularly in relation to graduating high school and attending college, were frequently cited by project staff and students as an example of 'what goes on in the Elevate classroom.' Middle school teacher mentors reported striving to prepare their students to move from childhood to adolescence while high school teacher mentors reported seeking to prepare their students for life as adults. Second, the Elevate class supports students' academic endeavors by functioning as a study hall and by providing targeted lessons in areas of difficulty for students, such as math. Finally, students and teacher mentors mentioned culturally relevant lessons and discussions that occur in the Elevate classroom. For instance, films and culturally relevant news stories are used to stimulate discussions about real world issues that have bearing on students' lives such as racial disparities in police use of force.

> "We've taken them to see films that are culturally relevant to them. I think that's also part of the uniqueness of our program. . . . We're able to sit down and have good conversations with students and do [the] follow-up that a typical teaching environment does not afford you the time, energy, or even the resources to do."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Out of school programming is focused on exposure trips, engaging outings, leadership opportunities, and aiding transitions. Exposure trips typically focus on introducing college and career opportunities with the goals of broadening horizons and 'sparking interest.' Regarding engaging outings, students often cited fun outings they had participated in through Elevate such as bowling, canoeing, or going out to eat. These appear to serve the joint function of bonding among students and teacher mentors, and rewarding effort and progress towards goals. In terms of leadership programming, the Little Lift program both extends the Elevate curriculum down to elementary school students and offers high school students the opportunity to mentor younger students. A final emphasis underlying some of Elevate Oregon's out-of-school programming is an emphasis on transitions. Both the Grade 5 to Grade 6 Transition and the Ninth Grade Counts programs target key transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school. These transitions are known to be challenging for students so they are key intervention points for the program. Taken together, Elevate's out-of-school programming seeks to put students through a pipeline of academic engagement and success.

Intentional communication, relationship building, and social events for parents and families is an additional essential element of the Elevate program. Teacher mentor's communication goals are to inform parents about what the program is doing, to build trust with parents, and to thank parents for the opportunity to work with their children. Additionally, Elevate Oregon hosts Black Family Socials four times per year. Project leaders estimate that these events draw approximately 100 families on average. These social events function as resource fair and provide further opportunities for Elevate staff to communicate and build relationships with the families they serve.

> "It's pretty amazing the relationship I've been building with this young lady's dad. I think having a strong male presence in the building to be an example for her while he can't keep eyes on her is really important to him. It's kind of like creating a family atmosphere and having that other parent in the building that can report to you while you're at work."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Addressing Student Barriers

Focus group participants cited students' social-emotional and home issues and cultural misunderstandings between school staff and students as the main barrier students face.

Students' social-emotional and home issues were identified by project staff as barriers that must be understood and coped with prior to turning attention to academic concerns. Examples include life trauma such as the loss of a parent, lack of support from parents, demanding family roles such as caring for younger siblings, and transportation issues. Teacher mentors clearly see investing in trusting, supportive relationships with students as a necessary preliminary step in addressing this type of barrier because they are best able to advocate for students when they know about students' social-emotional and home issues. For example, a frequently cited issue by both students and teacher mentors was attendance early in the school day. Underlying reasons for these issues vary from situations at home, transportation issues, or struggles with student motivation. Because of their relationship with students teacher mentors able to understand and address the real barriers to students arriving to school on time. Teacher mentors also shared that they frequently solve attendance problem related to transportation issues by buying bus passes or personally providing transportation for students.

> "We deal with them emotionally. They bring us pain, . . . ,they are struggling with conflict, home issues, teachers, peer issues. We deal with a lot of that emotional piece that doesn't often get talked about."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Cultural misunderstandings between school staff and students were barriers that students face in their school. School staff are predominately Caucasian, and therefore, are not demographically matched to the student body in the district, nor especially to the students in the Elevate program. Because of this mismatch, students shared that they felt frequently misunderstood by their teachers, but they also indicated that their teacher mentors help them work through those challenges in ways they could not do alone. Relationships with students, teachers, administrators, and parents were necessary to successfully navigate barriers like cultural misunderstandings.

Facilitators to Implementation

Establishing an embedded presence in the school environment and investing in communication with and connection to the district and school staff made program implementation easier.

Establishing an embedded presence in the school environment. The Elevate program has established a strong, consistent presence in its partnered schools, which greatly facilitates the implementation of its programming. Elevate's in-school programming has been adopted into the formal school curriculum as an elective, which is offered five days per week putting teacher mentors in contact with their students on a daily basis. The Elevate program also has a dedicated physical space on both the middle and high school campuses. Project staff describe this dedicated space as actively used by students to seek out contact and support from their teacher mentor. Teacher mentors also have some scheduling leeway, which allows them time to walk the hallways providing an additional layer of accountability for their students. Finally, by design the Elevate program intends for teacher mentors to follow their students across grades. When project staff turnover is not an issue, this program design feature serves to further strengthen the bonds between students and their teacher mentor.

> "We walk them to class. We're like, I know where you're supposed to be. Or you catch them in the halls and you're like, you're not supposed to be out here. What class are you supposed to be in? Let's go. That's where that additional accountability comes in. A normal teacher cannot walk their students to class. They don't have that time. They're teaching class. That's a luxury and a gift that we are able to give our students."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Investing in communication with and connection to district and school staff. Teacher mentors emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining regular communication with teachers, which both facilitates understanding of the broader program and builds relationships between Elevate's staff and school staff. Teacher mentors report that they strive to be more "visible and vocal" about what the Elevate program does. Investing in these relationships is also key in teacher mentor efforts to advocate for their students and facilitate greater teacher understanding of the case-specific social-emotional and home issues that some Elevate students face. Project staff also shared an extensive list of meetings and committees that they participate in at the district-, school-, and grade-level demonstrating their deep involvement in the school system. Participation in these meetings and committees facilitates a variety of program goals such as positively influencing district hiring practices, further developing relationships with district and school staff, and monitoring and tracking student success.

Successes and Lessons Learned

Project leaders and teacher mentors were asked about the successes and lessons learned from implementing the African American/Black Student Bonding Project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Improving student academic performance. Elevate staff and students all mentioned improved academic performance as a result of participation in the Elevate program. Project leaders and teacher mentors cited multiple examples of individual students who made marked improvements in their overall GPAs (e.g., moving from 1.0 to 3.0 GPA). Students frequently mentioned getting good grades when asked how participating in Elevate impacts them, reporting that the individualized attention they get from their teacher mentors 'hypes them up' or motivates them to succeed in school. In addition to this individualized attention, an additional mechanism through which academic performance likely improves is teacher mentors intentional focus on problematic subjects during their Elevate class periods. For example, middle school teacher mentors reported implementing study halls focused on math in response to student struggles in the subject. They further attribute these study halls, which were held twice a week in their in-school classes, to students increasing their proactive test preparing and ultimately their math grades.

Improving student attendance. Project staff and students all noted that student attendance improved as a result of the Elevate program. Teacher mentors attribute this success in part to their in depth knowledge of and relationships with students and to their ability to make real-time intervention plans for students. These real-time interventions for students are facilitated by teacher mentor access to the district's student information system (the Synergy database) which enables them to monitor student attendance as well as other key metrics. Additionally, teacher mentors report using hallway monitoring and "walks to class" as other methods they use to hold students accountable for their attendance. Students themselves also shared that the Elevate program generally, and their relationships with teacher mentors specifically, drive and motivate them to attend school.

> "Elevate pushes me to get to school. . . . Usually, if you're not there, your teacher mentor is like, 'Hey, what's going on? Why aren't you in school today?' Elevate pushes me to go to school."
>
> Student Focus Group

Decreasing behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Project leaders mentioned decreased behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions for Elevate students regardless of whether they participate in only the out-of-school programs or both in- and out-of-school programs. Embedded in this metric of success is the work the Elevate program does around decreasing disproportional disciplinary rates. Teacher mentors shared that they "act as a bridge" to facilitate the discussion of behavioral issues and seek to repair the damage that past histories of behavioral altercations may have had on student-teacher relationships. Elevate leaders stated an explicit program goal of making discipline fairer. Elevate staff shared that by knowing and communicating about students' background and home lives, they are able to help school staff approach discipline from a more informed position, which often results in increased empathy for the student.

Increasing high school graduation rates. In comparison to the district average graduation rate of 75%, the Elevate program leaders shared that they have consistently exceeded their goal of attaining a 90% graduation rate. Drawing from their most recent year of data, project leaders shared that 100% of their high school seniors graduated. Embedded in these statistics are many stories of second chances and turning points for Elevate students. Most striking among these individual success stories is a student who was on the verge of expulsion. Elevate staff effectively advocated for her to be given a second chance, thus preventing her expulsion from school. Subsequently, project leaders shared that this same student is now actively involved in school sports and is on track to graduate high school.

Illuminating college opportunities. One final success which was brought up predominately by students was that the Elevate program illuminates college opportunities for students. Both middle and high school students shared that their participation in the Elevate program had taught them about the different options that were available to them in terms of college attendance specifically citing different financial options that make their college aspirations appear more attainable. Students also shared that they learned about college expectations of them and about what they should expect while attending college. Teacher mentors reported that a primary goal of Elevate's college visits are to put their student in contact with college students of color "to paint that picture for them so it's vivid and they can see that whatever it is they want to do is actually obtainable."

Lessons Learned

Adaptability in practice. In reflecting on their own practice and experience working with their students, teacher mentors report that they have learned of the importance of adaptability in practice. Teacher mentors shared that they quickly learned that they were not solely there to teach their students because their students also have valuable lessons to teach them. These lessons include patience, courage, and listening skills. Additionally, teacher mentors cited the need to differentiate based on the specific developmental and social-emotional needs of current groups of students or individual students. Thus, they find success in adapting from year to year and situation to situation.

> "They are honest with you. They taught me how to listen. When they're speaking you need to listen. They have something to say. That's what they've taught me."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Challenges

Staff turnover, emotional labor for teacher mentors, and difficulties collecting data and documenting work were implementation challenges.

Staff turnover. All focus group participants touched on the impact of recent staff turnover on relationships and consistency. Project leaders shared that teacher mentors leave their positions for variety of reasons including pursing graduate degrees and needing to earn a higher salary. Among the teacher mentors who participated in the focus group, five out of six counted their time with the Elevate program in months rather than years. New teacher mentors reported that students tested boundaries and even asked "Are you going to leave?" at the beginning of the school year. Similarly, students made reference to these staffing transitions by specially mentioning that they lacked connections with their teacher mentors at the beginning of the school year. Fortunately, students also often indicated that these staffing transitions were effectively overcome and that relationships were built with time. Interestingly, some staff transitions simultaneously result in a loss of continuity for students while also serving as a positive example for students because some teacher mentors left their position to pursue higher education such as master's or law degrees.

Emotional labor for teacher mentors. In describing the work of teacher mentors, both project leaders and teacher mentors describe extensive time and emotional investments in students. Teacher mentors spoke of lengthy time spent outside of formal school hours, being on call 24-hours a day (e.g., receiving text messages from students at 1 a.m.), and feeling the need for "more hours of the day." Additionally, teacher mentors frequently support their students through serious life trauma and home life issues. Taken together, this description of teacher mentors daily job requirements represents a form of emotional labor, which can be associated with high levels of staff stress and burnout.

> "It's difficult because sometimes with our work that we do, you can't just turn it off."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Difficulties collecting data and documenting work. Both project leaders and teacher mentors touched on the challenge of collecting data to document program work and successes; however, they each view this challenge from slightly different perspectives. Project leaders noted challenges with getting their busy, sometime overtaxed teacher mentors to collect data and potential limitations in teacher mentors view of what counts as data. Teacher mentors perceive much of their work to be unmeasurable. They view some of their work as unquantifiable or difficult to document. For example, their extensive time investments are viewed as often unseen and they feel that their day to day investments in building relationships with students simply cannot be measured.

> "I would also add it's very difficult to measure what we do. . . . Sometimes you can do the same thing day after day, week after week, and you're not going to see anything on paper that measures that. That doesn't mean you don't do the work and invest in the kids emotionally. But there's no way to measure any of that."
>
> Teacher Mentor Focus Group

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, Elevate staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 10. During its first year of implementation, the Elevate program provided **10 activities for the cohort of 25 middle school students** funded by House Bill 2016, and provided **one-on-one support to those students over 200 times**. The Elevate program also **held 15 parent/guardian activities which had 700 attendees overall**. Indicators targeted by the Elevate program include:

Indicator 5: Increase the # of Oregon school districts that recruit, hire, and retain African American/Black educators at a rate comparable to that of Oregon's African American/Black student population

Indicator 6: Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum in Oregon schools for African American/Black students

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 10: Increase the rate of freshman on-track for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 12: Increase the post-secondary enrollment rates of African American/Black students high school graduates and GED completers

Exhibit 10. African American/Black Student Bonding Project Data

School-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
21	Number of African American/Black staff hired by Parkrose School District	5
2	Number of hiring teams Elevate staff have participated in	5
150	Number of suspensions overall (all middle school students)	8
14	Number of suspensions of Elevate middle school African American students	8
--	Number of expulsions overall, middle school African American students	8

0	Number of expulsions of Elevate middle school African American students	8
19 4	Number of students meeting exit criteria for Grades 6, 7, 8, 9 Elevate students: 1. 85% or better school attendance rate 2. Grade of Meets Expectations or better in core subjects for 6, 7 and 8	9, 10, 11, 12
22	Number of students who received a credit via participation in '9th grade counts'	10
Program-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
10	Number of collaborative professional development (PD) activities hosted by Parkrose School District (school staff and Elevate staff attended)	5, 6, 8, 9
15	Number of parent/guardian activities provided	8, 9
700	Number of parents/guardians attending parent activities[a,c]	8, 9
10	Number of student-related activities offered[b]	9, 11, 12
154	Number of students attending student-related activities[a,c]	9, 11, 12

Note. Dashes indicate data not available.
[a]These numbers reflect the number of total attendees across activities, not unique individuals.
[b]These numbers represent the number of structured student-related activities, not 1:1 discussions or mentoring, which is over 200.
[c]These numbers reflect the number of total attendees across activities, not unique individuals.

Summary and Recommendations

According to student, teacher mentor, and project leader focus groups participants, the African American/Black Student Bonding Project, and the Elevate program more broadly, has succeeded in positively impacting its students by increasing academic performance, attendance, and graduation rates and by decreasing rates of behavioral referrals, suspension, and expulsions. Focus group participants also described students' social-emotional and home issues and cultural misunderstandings with teachers as barriers. The primary challenges cited included staff turnover, the emotional labor of teacher mentors, and difficulties collecting data and documenting work. RMC Research offers the following recommendations for the Elevate program based on the evaluation findings.

Invest in retaining and supporting teacher mentor staff. Given the combined challenges of staff turnover and the emotionally intensive nature of teacher mentors job responsibilities, the Elevate program may consider investing in professional development for its teacher mentor staff with the specific goals of supporting staff in coping with their stressful job demands. Fortunately, both project leaders and teacher mentors shared that the Elevate program already has professional development structures in place including one-on-one meetings and larger program meetings. These existing structures may be leveraged and extended to provide additional support around managing the time and emotional demands associated with the teacher mentors work. For example, mindfulness-based stress reduction programs or trainings focused on self-care and positive coping styles may help teacher mentors manage the stress associated with their emotionally demanding work and thus reduce teacher mentor turnover in the future.

Develop program-wide methods for documenting work with data. Project leaders and teacher mentors agreed that collecting data to document their work and their program successes was a challenge. Project leaders may find it useful to explicitly address this topic in a program-wide setting. Together, project staff may be able to work towards a common understanding of what counts as data, what kinds of data need to be prioritized, and what data collection is realistic given time constraints. Fortunately,

teacher mentors shared that there are already strong collaborative and “family-like” bonds among project staff, therefore, these existing relationships should facilitate work around coming to a program-wide strategy for documenting work and successes.

Building a SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County

Building a SPACE (Schools, Parents and Communities Engaged) for African Students' Success in Washington County (SPACE project) is a Phase II grantee that was first funded through House Bill from 2016 July 2018 through June 2019. This project is a collaboration between Early Learning Washington County, Beaverton School District, and the Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization (CAIRO) with the aim to provide services and support for Somali families in the Beaverton/Aloha area, which has the largest Somali population in Oregon. The overarching goals of the SPACE project are to (a) empower parents to develop skills, confidence, and knowledge in order to advocate for their children; (b) grow the pool of culturally informed educators in the Beaverton School District; and (c) support Somali students so that they can succeed in school and life.

The SPACE Project reaches students and families from Pre-K to Grade 12 in the Beaverton School District via SPACE agents, the direct service providers. SPACE agents provide both in-school support (e.g., providing tutoring services during class) and at-home support (e.g., supporting parents with hurdles at home which affect their children's school engagement). SPACE agents also serve as a bridge between families and schools by helping schools and parents communicate with each other, providing cultural consultations with school staff, and providing trainings for school staff around African culture and history. The SPACE project has also leveraged professional development services from another House Bill 2016 grantee, Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators, to increase the SPACE agents' capacity with ongoing professional development sessions.

Program Implementation

Project leaders (n = 6) and SPACE agents (n = 2) were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and implementation challenges. Findings also include feedback from nine parents and eight school staff members to gain insight about what is working well, what could be improved, and how programming is influencing students' education experience.

Primary Activities

The SPACE Project's main activities during their first year of implementation included (a) building relationships with schools and other community organizations; (b) mentoring students in academics, self-advocacy, and social skills; (c) serving as a communication bridge between schools and families; (d) providing support to parents and connecting them to resources; (e) increasing capacity of SPACE agents through professional development; and (f) providing trainings and cultural consultations to school staff.

Building relationships with schools and other community organizations was described at length by project leaders. Project staff reported going into schools at the end of the 2017-2018 school year to begin introducing themselves to school administration and school staff. Forming these relationships at the end of the school year was challenging due to the many activities going on like state testing, but project leaders noted that the relationship building helped facilitate a smooth transition once the new school year started. Additionally, connecting with a wide variety of community organizations helped

SPACE agents provide services to students. SPACE agents have been able to build connections with the Hillsboro-Beaverton public libraries by providing story times and parenting classes through the libraries, have partnered with the McKinney-Vento[35] program to establish a referral system for their homeless African students, and have organized presentations to project staff by IRCO (a Phase I grantee) and Impact Northwest[36] so that staff can learn how these organizations can help students and how they can begin referring students. Project leaders plan to build connections with the county juvenile justice department as well.

Mentoring students in academics, self-advocacy, and social skills is the main role of the two SPACE agents who work across the Beaverton School District. SPACE agents reported a variety of ways they work with students, including (a) providing in-class supports for reading and math and preparing for tests, (b) working with students to help them get engaged with extracurricular activities such as basketball, (c) helping students work through conflict resolution issues they are having with their peers or teachers, and (d) working with the Somali population to foster a sense of community (e.g., spearheading the formation of a girls group for middle and high school girls to navigate their identity and school experiences). In terms of post-secondary support, SPACE agents organize field trips to expose students to different career paths and are currently planning to have Somali community members come talk to students about how they faced and navigated through similar challenges.

> "Building up your vocabulary has a lot to do with advocating for yourself and that's what I try to emphasize to the children. We need to step away from saying, 'My teachers are weird' to what exactly is bothering you and how you can actually say, 'This is what it seems like…How about we try to meet with the teachers?'."
>
> SPACE Agent Focus Group

Serving as a communication bridge between schools and families was described by project leaders, SPACE agents, parents, and school staff as one of the most helpful services the project provides. Somali parents often are fearful and reluctant to communicate with school staff based on past negative experiences they have had. One way SPACE agents have been able to facilitate communication between parents and schools is via personal phone calls. SPACE agents call parents both when an issue arises that needs to be discussed, and when their children are doing well as a status report. SPACE agents also text message parents to ensure that they are aware of when school activities are scheduled. Another way SPACE agents have been able to bridge the divide between parents and schools is facilitating discussions on various topics, such as what Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are, why vaccinations are important, how to make sense of report cards, the logistics of being an ESL (English as a Second Language) student, and what FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) means. SPACE agents also bridge the cultural divide by facilitating discussions in the schools. For example, one SPACE agent reported facilitating a talk in a classroom around what a hijab is and why people wear them.

> "I talk to [SPACE agent] to communicate with the school. They help me out with anything I need, like if there is a school meeting, they notify me of the activities happening at the schools."
>
> Parent Focus Group

[35] https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/ESEA/McKinney-Vento/Pages/default.aspx
[36] https://impactnw.org/

Providing support to parents so that they can start to advocate for themselves and their children is something that SPACE agents reported spending a lot of time doing. The type of support varies widely, from helping a parent get the heat turned back on in their home to facilitating a computer literacy class for parents. Though some of these supports may initially seem unrelated to student academic achievement, they actually play a large role in how well a student does in school because without stability at home, it is more difficult for students to stay engaged at school. Other examples of support include offering parenting classes through the library and arranging for parents to attend the Portland Police Drivers' Education program. SPACE agents are also working to help parents advocate for themselves and their children within the school system by first learning each school's policies for parent and student rights and then sharing that information with parents so they are aware and can have informed discussions with school staff.

> "I'm trying to help the parents reach a point where they can self-advocate. Come into the space and not feel too intimidated to walk past the entry doors of the school or be able to request a meeting with broken English or no English at all."
>
> SPACE Agent Focus Group

Professional development is provided to SPACE agents and school staff. SPACE project leadership reported organizing new professional development opportunities and leveraging professional development services from another House Bill 2016 grantee, Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators, to increase the capacity of the SPACE agents. Training topics included understanding trauma and resilience from a collective perspective, eco-mapping around looking at the work from a cultural wealth perspective, how to navigate IEPs, and learning each school's parent and student rights policies. Additionally, upon learning that Resolutions Northwest had been doing restorative justice trainings in the schools, project leaders decided to have them do similar trainings with SPACE agents so that SPACE agents knew what to look for in classrooms since they had the same training teachers had around restorative justice practices. Three trainings for school staff were conducted in summer 2018: one on service equity and two on trauma-informed care. SPACE agents provided a training regarding Somali culture and education for the Beaverton School District and select teachers in Reynolds School District, and provided informal consultations to school administrators and staff on how to be culturally responsive.

Addressing Student Barriers

The two main barriers that keep students from thriving in school are a disconnect between the parents and schools and language/cultural differences.

A disconnect between parents and the schools was one of two biggest barriers described by project leaders and SPACE agents. Focus group participants reported a disconnect between school staff and parents, with the main issues being a lack of communication from schools and limited capacity to respond to issues in a culturally responsive way. SPACE agents reported a variety of reasons for the communication gap. For example, often teachers will ask SPACE agents to talk to a parent for them even though the parent speaks English. Instead of trying to communicate with the parents themselves and establish a relationship, the teacher will divert to the SPACE agent. SPACE agents also noted how some teachers do not have the capacity to implement restorative justice practices. For example, some teachers cannot handle stories shared during circle time or do not realize how important it is to call a parent because their child used racist language towards another student. Additionally, parents are fearful that they will be judged by school staff or that school staff will report them to DHS unnecessarily. SPACE agents shared stories of school staff contacting DHS before really trying to sit down with the

parents to discuss the issues they were seeing at school. Another contribution to the disconnect between schools and parents is that some parents think school staff are treating their children unfairly due to either their ethnicity or ESL status. For example, teachers dismiss students of color or do not challenge them at the highest level they need. All of the SPACE project activities contribute to mitigating this barrier. SPACE agents are in the schools consulting with teachers about how to address issues in a culturally responsive way, they are facilitating communication between parents and the school staff, they are working with students to help them get on track academically with in-school support, they are fostering a sense of community in schools so that students feel like it is their community too, and they are providing support for parents to learn how to navigate the school system so they can advocate for themselves and their children. It should also be noted that school staff interviewed were appreciative of the work SPACE agents were doing, and that they expected that with time, both groups would get on the same page in terms of shared goals for students.

Language and cultural differences are a barrier for both parents and students. Students are automatically behind when they come into the school system if they are not fluent in English, and often parents do not speak English. This can be difficult for parents to know what is going on in the school or what issues their child is facing. In addition to language, cultural barriers were described by nearly all school staff interviewed. School staff shared that often students just do not know how to 'go to school.' School norms that teachers may assume are obvious, like not being able to roam the halls, are not known by children from refugee camps, for instance. Or parents may experience time in a way that differs from school norms. For example, the norm may be that a meeting with a teacher at 2:00 has to happen at 2:00 because the teacher has to get back to their class right after. One teacher noted how useful the newcomer program has been for students to learn how to 'play the game of school,' because that is the first thing that needs to happen in order for students to thrive academically. SPACE agents mitigate these barriers by providing culturally responsive consultations with school staff informally, providing trainings to school staff about African culture, and communicating to parents the rules and procedures of the school system.

Facilitators to Implementation

Forming relationships with students and working with teachers who are eager to help students thrive have facilitated project implementation.

Forming bonds with students. SPACE agents shared that working with students and forming relationships with them has been one of the easier aspects of the project. SPACE agents reported it only taking a week or two for students to open up to them, and felt that it is because youth do not have the same past experiences and background that their parents do.

School staff who are eager and adaptable. SPACE agents also reported that when teachers are eager to learn how to work with African children and are open to adjusting their existing approach, project implementation goes much smoother. For example, teachers often facilitate in-class activities around the holidays that parents of African children do not want them to participate in for religious reasons. SPACE agents reported that adaptable/open-minded teachers will find a way to work around these activities by finding another activity for students to do or find a way for them to go into their next class. Another example is when the African female students reported wanting a girls' group like The Chicas,[37]a youth development program for Hispanic/Latino girls, the principal at their school was on board with supporting the SPACE agents as they worked to form the program.

[37] http://www.adelantemujeres.org/youth-development

Successes and Lessons Learned

Project leaders, SPACE agents, parents, and school staff were asked about the successes and lessons learned that came from implementing the SPACE Project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Bridging the communication gap between families and schools. Project leaders, SPACE agents, parents, and school staff all provided examples of how having the SPACE project in their schools have helped communication between school staff, students, and parents. School staff and SPACE agents reported the project has empowered Somali parents to begin attending PTA meetings and coffee chats (morning meetings every other week between school staff and parents). Initially Somali parents felt intimidated attending these types of activities, but as they began forming relationships with the SPACE agents, they were able to communicate to the SPACE agents that they wanted to be more involved and have been able to do so with the support of the SPACE agents. Another example given by school staff was around immunizations. A student was behind on immunizations and the school was not able to communicate the importance of this to the parents. The SPACE agent reached out to the parents to explain to them what immunizations were and why they were needed, which enabled the child to get up to date and not have to miss school. Parents also told stories of how the SPACE agents were able to resolve issues. For example, one parent could tell something was wrong with their child and eventually, with the help of the SPACE agents, they were able to realize the issue was that another student was bullying her about her hijab. This incident was resolved when the SPACE agent spoke to both children and their parents.

> "[the SPACE agent] is very respectful in the classroom environment. It really just increases the ability to teach every kid in the classroom. The communication with families is something that I don't necessarily know what I would do without her with my Somali students and the large language and cultural barrier."
>
> School Staff Focus Group

Building relationships with parents. SPACE agents have been able to form relationships with parents. Parents shared they have someone who they connect to that is in the school with their children and that has helped them be more at ease. SPACE agents have been able to provide a wide variety of supports to parents, including them helping them get their heat turned on or getting a driver's license. These relationships have enabled SPACE agents to successfully facilitate communication between parents and schools.

Increasing school-engagement of students. School staff and project staff noted how the SPACE agents have been able to form strong bonds with the students, and that these bonds have resulted in students more engaged with school. School staff described the SPACE agents as mentors. For example, SPACE agents sit with a student at lunch and check in with students about life. Several school staff interviewed also noted how having adults in the building that look like the students and have similar life experiences has resulted in a shift for students. Parents echoed this sentiment, saying that their children have a mentor at the school that they trust and who can maintain confidentiality, which is important for their

> "I would say there's a lot to be said about kids having representation. Seeing a woman who is well educated, working, has a life experience that they can connect to and then they can start to see themselves as, 'Oh, is this something I want to do? What are my options' I think that's really important.."
>
> School Staff Focus Group

children. These relationships have led to a visible increase in school engagement, as well. School staff and SPACE agents shared numerous stories of students who were having difficulty in school but as the SPACE agents worked with them they began to overcome their obstacles. Parents shared that their children's grades have improved and they have started attending school more often. One school staff shared that a student who struggled the previous school year has increased confidence and has been beginning to take on leadership roles in the classroom after working with the SPACE agent.

Leveraging resources and providing training for project staff. Project leaders provided numerous examples of how they have been able to leverage services from two other House Bill 2016 grantees and have also been able to connect with other community organizations to serve the students and families they work with more efficiently. Project leaders also shared how they are using feedback from the SPACE agents to determine what type of trainings to organize. SPACE agents echoed this sentiment, saying how useful and applicable the trainings have been, citing examples of how they have used restorative justice circles with students, how they have been able to help parents navigate IEPs because of their IEP training, and that they were planning on facilitating eco-mapping with school staff and students because of how helpful it was to them.

Lessons Learned

Somali families are in need of a wide variety of supports. Project leaders noted the main lesson learned is that supporting families so that students can more easily thrive academically involves much more than in-school support for students and communication to parents. SPACE agents have found themselves spending more time than expected helping families with issues that are not directly related to academics; however, these issues affect the students' school engagement indirectly. Parents become more independent and empowered to meet their basic needs in their new country, which in turn makes it easier for students to concentrate in school.

Challenges

Late funding, implementing early childhood and post-secondary pieces, ensuring SPACE agents know what their role is, school staff's lack of culturally responsive communication, and mapping indicators to activities were the main challenges of the project in its first year of implementation.

Late funding and uncertainty of funding. Project leaders reported how difficult it was to get a late start due to not receiving funding until the end of summer 2018. Project leaders planned on building relationships the first year and then expanding on those relationships and really focusing on providing services to families in the second year. Instead, they had to implement both components simultaneously, which was a challenge. Additionally, project leaders noted how critical it was to continue to receive funding for a couple of reasons. First, it is difficult to make an impact in less than a year of implementation. To really be able to see change in student achievement, project staff need to be able to provide consistent support for more than 10 months. Second, project leaders shared that families are resistant to trust anyone because they are accustomed to programs starting and then ending due to a freeze in funding. Having to take a break from providing services due to funding issues will make it harder to re-establish trust at a later date.

Early childhood and post-secondary services. Project leaders shared that two pieces of the original project scope have been difficult to move forward. In terms of early childhood engagement, project leaders ended up providing these services through a different funding stream using different partners because of the late funding. Additionally, project leaders noted that increasing early childhood

engagement has been more difficult because it is not as straightforward as working with students in schools. There is no obvious entry point other than direct communication with parents. Now that relationships have been established project staff are working to implement the early childhood piece more fully. In terms of post-secondary support for families, SPACE agents reported that because of time and resource constraints, they have not been able to organize the events that they intended to. The SPACE project has helped engaged more Somali parents in the schools' FAFSA nights and are currently working to engage students in college visits, however they would like to do more in the future.

SPACE agents' role and workload. SPACE agents shared that it has been challenging getting a handle on what their role is and reminding school staff and parents of what services they can and cannot provide. It has been difficult when working with school staff that want services that SPACE agents feel they should be able to do. For example, staff ask SPACE agents to organize a way to celebrate Black History Month or ask them to speak to a parent who speaks English. In terms of parents, it has been hard to figure out when a service is within the scope of their role. For example, going to a court hearing with a parent for domestic violence or calling a school for a parent when they speak English. Parents also have children that go to school in other districts. Parents ask for assistance from the SPACE agents for their children in other districts, which makes it difficult for SPACE agents because if they say they cannot, it is going to hurt the relationship that they have built with the parents. SPACE agents reported doing as much as they can and that they often are working extra hours during the week and on the weekend to be able to provide the services that families need.

School staff's lack of culturally responsive communication skills. SPACE agents shared working with some school staff as challenging, citing their inability to have culturally responsive conversations, their perceived lack of wanting to try to have holistic conversations with families when issues arise, and their lack of follow-through when implementing restorative justice practices. Examples include (a) teachers asking SPACE agents to talk to parents who speak English instead of attempting to converse with the parent directly, (b) teachers not wanting to engage both sets of parents when students use racially charged language with a Somali student, (c) teachers quickness to defend themselves as 'not being racist' to avoid engaging in difficult discussions, and (d) schools/districts do not collaborate with SPACE agents to facilitate cultural presentations.

Mapping indicators to activities and data collection. Project leaders reported that the logistics of mapping their activities to specific indicators required by ODE and collecting data to show impact has been a challenge. As noted earlier, SPACE agents are finding that there are activities families need that do not necessarily map directly to an indicator. This has made charging time difficult, as project staff have to document their time and connect their hours to indicators. Additionally, determining what types of data project staff can collect that will show the effects of the project has been a challenge due to the short timeline. Project leaders noted that they have only really started working with students the second half of this school year because the first half of the school year the focus was on building relationships with schools, students, and parents. Showing impacts in terms of the indicators with quantitative data is not feasible without more time, and the opportunity/resources to collect baseline data.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, SPACE staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 11. Since its implementation in July 2018, the SPACE Project has **organized 20 student-focused activities with over 600 attendees**, has **distributed 200 early literacy kits in Somali,** and **provided professional development to 80 educators**. Indicators targeted by the SPACE project include:

Indicator 1: Increase access to high quality, community-based early learning programs focused on providing culturally specific environments to prepare African American/Black children for kindergarten

Indicator 3: Build a consistent approach and aligned pathway between early childhood and K-3 education to promote enrollment of African American/Black early learners

Indicator 4: Build a culturally and linguistically congruent newcomer program for African students who have had little or no formal schooling in Oregon

Indicator 6: Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum in Oregon schools for African American/Black students

Indicator 7: Increase literacy outcomes by 6.8% per year and numeracy outcomes by 6.8% per year for African American/Black students

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 10: Increase the rate of freshman on-track for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 12: Increase the post-secondary enrollment rates of African American/Black students high school graduates and GED completers

Exhibit 11. SPACE Project Program Data

School-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
0	Number of suspensions	8
0	Number of expulsions	8
4	Number of students referred to SPACE agents from early warning systems (attendance)	9
58	Number of students with increased attendance (baseline and follow-up)	9
—	Number of students considered freshmen on-track	10
44	Number of students served by Newcomer program (will include one-on-one services and activities)	4
43	Number of activities provided by Newcomer program	4
77	Number of parent/family/caregiver activities provided by Newcomer program	4
42	Number of families receiving home visits as part of the Newcomer program	4
42	Number of home visits conducted as part of the Newcomer program	4
4	Number of students referred to SPACE once they graduate from the Newcomer program	4
Program-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
3	Number of referrals made to preschool/early learning programs	1

0	Number of referred students enrolled in preschool/early learning programs	1
40	Number of hours providing technical assistance to BSD, Washington County, and other community partners to ensure development of culturally-relevant materials for Kindergarten	6
200	Number of early literacy kits in Somali distributed to families	7
300	Number of culturally-relevant books distributed to families	7
2	Number of professional development activities for school staff	1, 3, 8
80	Number of school staff attendees at professional development events	1, 3, 8
5	Hours of professional development provided to school staff	1, 3, 8
5	Number of referrals made to kindergarten transition programs	3
0	Number of referred students enrolled in kindergarten transition programs	3
16	Number of home visits conducted	1, 3, 9
10	Number of families receiving home visits	1, 3, 9
29	Number of students receiving academic support related to literacy/numeracy (applies to all ages)	7
20	Number of youth programming activities[a]	7-12
697	Number of attendees at youth activities[a, b]	7-12
5	Number of parent/family activities	7-12
39	Number of attendees at parent/family activities[b]	7-12
10	Number of African students receiving support around required credit attainment	10
—	Number of students connected or referred to credit recovery and acquisition opportunities	11
10	Number of students/families receiving support around college and career readiness planning	12

Note. Dashes indicate data not available.
[a]A portion of these numbers are also counted in the data for Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators because of overlapping services the two grantees provided.
[b]These numbers reflect the number of total attendees across activities, not unique individuals.

Summary and Recommendations

In their first year of implementation, the SPACE Project has begun building relationships with school staff, students, parents, and community partners in an effort to provide support to Somali immigrant families so that their students can thrive academically. The SPACE project has also been building the capacity of their staff so that they are equipped to provide the plethora of services needed. SPACE agents reported facilitating conversations between schools and families which has helped increase cultural awareness, providing support to parents so that they can begin advocating for themselves and their children, and providing both one-on-one and group support to students which has helped them improve their grades and engagement in school. Based on the feedback of project leaders, SPACE agents, parents, and school staff, RMC Research offers the following recommendations.

Continue to provide support for SPACE agents. Project leaders and SPACE agents noted how the amount of services Somali families need is diverse and sometimes overwhelming. SPACE agents do not

always know what is and is not part of their job description, have trouble defining barriers for school staff and parents, and work extra hours because of the many services families need. Project leaders have been successful in using a participatory approach to delivering targeted professional development to SPACE agents and should continue using this approach. During regular meetings with cultural navigators and SPACE agents, project leaders should ensure immediate concerns are addressed and tasks are prioritized in a way that does not lead to burn out.

Continue to work on building the cultural capacity of school staff. Project leaders and SPACE agents noted building relationships with schools; however, they also reported many challenges associated with working with school staff. Project leaders and SPACE agents should consider strategies to engage as many school staff as possible in trainings around cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, and restorative justice. For example, project staff noted that although some schools have had restorative justice training, it did not seem that they were implementing what they had learned in the trainings. Reaching out to the school to set up periodic meetings to discuss what implementation looks like, or certain scenarios that SPACE agents noticed could have been handled in a more restorative way may help mitigate this challenge.

Building Capacity for Educational Equity

Building Capacity for Educational Equity is a Phase II grantee that was first funded through House Bill 2016 from July 2018 through June 2019. This project is a collaboration between academic institutions and CBOs in Southern Oregon with the aim to ensure equity for African American/Black students and to create a sense of community and welcoming environment for African American/Black families and educators. Partners include:

- Ashland School District
- Medford School District
- Southern Oregon ESD
- Southern Oregon State University
- Jackson County Juvenile Detention
- Oregon Institute of Technology
- Racial Equity Coalition
- Health Care Coalition of Southern Oregon

Building Capacity for Educational Equity reaches students and families from Pre-K to Grade 12 using a multi-pronged approach which includes

- meeting with parents on a regular basis to discuss their needs and concerns,
- working directly with students in the schools to provide support,
- organizing student-focused activities,
- providing trainings to district and school staff as well as parents and students around equity issues such as implicit bias and cultural agility,
- leveraging existing resources, and
- bringing different communities together to collaboratively address equity issues.

Most of these activities are driven by an equity specialist and an equity teacher on special assignment (TOSA) who is also a part-time high school teacher in the Ashland School District. The project has also gathered an advisory board of five prominent community members to assist in planning and implementing events.

Program Implementation

Project leaders and the equity specialist (n = 5) were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and implementation challenges. Findings also include feedback from three parents to gain insight from the parents' perspective about what is working well, what could be improved in terms of programming, and how programming is influencing students' education experience.

Primary Activities

Building Capacity for Educational Equity's main activities during their first year of implementation included (a) building a sense of community among African American/Black families; (b) serving as a bridge between African American/Black families, schools, and law enforcement; (c) working with students individually and as a group in schools; (d) providing professional development and trainings around equity issues to school staff, parents, and students; and (e) leveraging existing resources and partnerships.

Building a sense of community among African American/Black families was important for positive identity, empowerment, and group cohesion. Project leaders described three main ways they are building community among African American/Black families. First, the project leaders formed an **advisory board** that consists of five individuals who have strong connections with both the African American/Black community and with program partners such as Medford School District, Southern Oregon University, and Oregon Institute of Technology. The advisory board serves as a check to project leaders that they are implementing programming that meets the needs of the parents and families. The advisory board also was involved in direct implementation. Board members meet monthly but check in with each other informally two-three times a week. Second, the equity specialist reached out individually to parents of African American/Black students and invited them to **monthly parent meetings**. These meetings provided an opportunity for parents to get together and talk about their experiences in the school and community and what challenges they and their children face. Project leadership learns how the project could meet parent and youth needs. Monthly parent meetings are also a chance for school staff and law enforcement to come speak to parents in a safe and collaborative space. Third, project leaders, with the help of the advisory board, organized **student-focused activities** that bring African American/Black students together to foster a sense of community and engagement in school. For example, project leaders and advisory board members organized a Black Youth Leadership Summit that brought together African American/Black high school students to talk about post-secondary education options and logistics, the history of race in Oregon, healing through the arts, microaggressions, and tools students can use to navigate being a person of color in a white-dominated environment.

Serving as a bridge between African American/Black families, schools, and law enforcement was described as integral by both project leaders and parents. This bridge is built via the monthly parent meetings and by working directly with students in the schools. At monthly parent meetings, parents can share with the equity specialist incidents at school or with law enforcement in a safe space where they are heard. The equity specialist, in turn, will take parents' concerns to the school or to law enforcement to begin a conversation about how to address concerns. Solutions to concerns vary and can include visits to the parent meetings by school administrators or police officers or implementing a school staff training. The key piece is the collaborative and solution-based approach that the equity specialist facilitates.

Working with students individually and as a group is another role of the equity specialist and equity TOSA. These direct service providers are in the schools talking with students and teachers and advocate for students when they feel their teachers or other school staff are dismissing them. Direct service providers also work to establish a sense of community in the schools by inviting African American/Black students to group discussions around issues they are facing in school (e.g., how to navigate difficult conversations with other students). Additionally, the equity specialist established a mentoring program where Black Student Union students from Southern Oregon University come to the high schools to continue the discussions that began at the Black Youth Leadership Summit. The high school students, in

turn, visit the middle school students to support them the same way and to help them prepare for high school.

Providing professional development and trainings around equity issues like implicit bias, micro aggressions, systemic racism, and cultural agility is central staff growth. Trainings are sometimes planned formally ahead of time and others are implemented as specific needs arise, and are have been offered to project staff, school staff, parents, and students.

Leveraging existing resources and partnerships avoids duplicating efforts or wasting resources. Examples include sending direct service providers to an equity training opportunity through a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust[38], providing training around social justice and equity for two teachers through Title I-D dollars received because their juvenile detention facility is housed in the Medford School District, and attending the Oregon Department of Education's Social Studies curriculum for culturally responsive rubric training.

Addressing Student Barriers

The main barriers African American/Black students face were a lack of a sense of community and poor communication with schools.

A central community hub did not exist before this project. Project leaders shared that typically, in any city, you can find some type of central hub where the African American/Black community congregates and uses as a meeting place (e.g., barber shop, African American church). In Medford and Ashland, these options do not exist. Without a place to meet and congregate, there is little opportunity for African American/Black families to acknowledge shared experiences and work through the issues they face. Project leaders are tackling this barrier with the monthly parent meetings and are anticipating that with time the parents will begin to take ownership of and co-lead the meetings.

> "The closest black church was in McCloud. And unfortunately, that pastor decided to retire a couple years ago. So that place is not available. The church itself just kind of shut down ."
>
> Project Leader Focus Group

Poor communication with schools was noted as a barrier by both project leaders and parents. As the monthly parent meetings got started, the equity specialist had to build trust with the parents before they opened up about the various issues they face with the schools. Parents also noted that previously there was an 'us versus them' dynamic with school staff and they would have to go through two other people before being able to talk to the principal or instructor. Project leaders are tackling this barrier by utilizing the relationships the equity specialist has with school staff and the parents to organize collaborative discussions between parents and school staff.

[38] https://mmt.org/

Successes and Lessons Learned

Project leaders were asked about the successes and lessons learned that came from implementing the Building Capacity for Educational Equity Project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Successful collaboration across organizations. Project leaders shared how seamless it has been working across organizations, and how the advisory group was a key piece of that collaboration. Each person on the advisory group has a different connection and perspective which adds to the overall understanding of the experiences and needs of African American/Black families in Southern Oregon. For example, one advisory board member is affiliated with Southern Oregon University, and so they have a pulse on what is going on with the post-graduate students. Other board members work in the school districts, so they are able to provide the public school perspective and also have established relationships within the school they can leverage when the need arises. The equity consultant established a strong relationship with the schools and was able to work with various school staff such as the attendance specialist to address specific issues. Project leaders affiliated with the school districts echoed this sentiment, reporting that the equity specialist is 'always available', even if they are not on site.

> "Being able to have conversations about, 'What do you think about bringing this piece up with teachers?' And, 'Yeah, we've got this meeting and we really need to talk to the educational assistants and address this', and, 'Let's talk about white fragility at the beginning'. Just really being able to have somebody that I can bounce ideas and solutions off of."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Creating a sense of community among African American/Black families. Project leaders and parents shared how there is a sense of community among African American/Black families for the first time in Southern Oregon. Bringing parents together at monthly parent meetings has enabled parents to share experiences and validate each other, in addition to seeing other students and families being validated about what is going on in their lives and school experiences. Community is being built within the schools as well. Project leaders reported that after bringing students together within schools and via activities such as the Black Leadership Summit, that students have begun plans for starting a Black Student Union in one of the high schools.

> "[Students] are wanting now to do these things in the community and start building connections for themselves because they're really excited about this opportunity that was provided through this work and this grant."
>
> Project Leader Focus Group

Improving relationships between schools, families, and law enforcement. Project leaders and parents reported that the relationship between **schools** and families was more functional than it had been previously, and that this is outcome is largely due to the work the equity specialist has done with parents and students via the monthly parent meetings and working with students one-on-one. The equity specialist advocates for the parents and students in the schools, but is also seen as a partner from the schools' perspective. Having the trust of both parties has enabled the equity specialist to shorten the divide that has existed between parents and schools. In addition to advocating for families at the school, the equity specialist also brings school staff to the parent meetings. One parent shared that the equity specialists organized a meeting between parents, the chief academic officer, and the school human resources specialist and "gave parents the opportunity to make that direct line of contact with these people that they hadn't had before in our district…that absolutely changes the game." Another parent reported "the administration appears to be making a greater effort to partner with us and communicate." For example, some school staff were habitually not calling two African American/Black students by their correct name, which was negatively impacting the students. The equity specialist had a discussion with the principal during which he explained that this made the students feel dismissed and picked on. The equity specialist shared that "both parents came to me and were really appreciative how finally their kids were being called by their actual names." The equity specialist has provided similar services to bridge the gap between parents, students, and **law enforcement**. For example, one of the discussions at a monthly parent meeting was about how African American/Black young men were treated poorly by law enforcement, so the equity specialist arranged for members of the police department to come to a parent meeting to discuss the issue. This meeting gave parents and law enforcement an opportunity to interact with each other and explain their perceptions. The equity specialist also accompanies families to court hearings to advocate for the youth and make sure that someone is in the room that supports them.

> "Now there is somebody to turn to, to help with various issues that come in the school system. We had some things that have come up where we communicated directly to [equity specialist] and were able to go down to the school and speak with the staff and principal. It really helped a lot. I think having that person, having someone to turn to helped."
>
> Parent Focus Group

Lessons Learned

Lasting impact takes time. Project leaders shared that the main lesson learned is that working to improve benchmarks like graduation and attendance takes time. Working with families to build trust so that they feel comfortable sharing their experiences and barriers is a work in process, and though much progress has been made, it is still ongoing. Additionally, while the goal is both individual and systemic change, project leaders reported before getting to systemic change, they have to work to support the individual students and family members that need it in the short-term, which again takes time.

Challenges

Access to accurate demographic data, resources for professional development, limitation of having only one full-time direct service provider, and uncertainty of funding continuation were described as the main challenges of the project in its first year of implementation.

Access to accurate demographic data. Project leaders reported that it took three to four weeks to properly identify the African American/Black students in the schools, and that the number of African American/Black students who actually are in the schools is much higher than what is on record. This is

due to the ethnicity question on forms being optional. Project leaders also expect that in an area where there is no real sense of community and a feeling among African American/Black families that they are not wanted, they will be less apt to fill this item out on school forms. This barrier has many implications in addition to not being able to support African American/Black students if they are unknown. In terms of funding support, if a funder looks at public records and sees that there are only five African American/Black students in a district (while there are many more than five), they may not see the need for funding that district at a high level. Lack of consistent and accurate demographic data also makes it difficult to measure growth over multiple years.

Resources for professional development. Project leaders shared that finding the time to properly train school staff around equity issues has been difficult both in terms of time and money. In order to train staff without having to pay them extra, the trainings need to be conducted during work hours. This is difficult due to the nature of the trainings. Project leaders are working with the Racial Equity Coalition to set up trainings; however, they typically take three weekends and are three hours each day. Scheduling and providing compensation for staff's time becomes a challenge. Project leaders also shared that they would like to implement an ongoing course for staff and students that could potentially be partially online. This course could also feed into a credentialing or badging process for staff. Project leaders would need support getting this type of project off the ground.

> "You need those large chunks of time to allow people to get to a place where they're not just intellectualizing. Where they're actually feeling vulnerable in a situation where they're digging deep. You can't do that in a shorter period of time."
>
> Project Staff Focus Group

Limitation of having one full-time direct service provider. Project leaders and parents noted how unrealistic it is to have one full-time equity specialist serving two school districts. Parents shared that having someone on site at a school to help resolve issues that come up in real time would be a huge benefit for African American/Black students and parents, and that is not a possibility with the multiple sites and multiple roles the equity specialist has.

Uncertainty of continued funding. Project leaders reported how not knowing whether funding will be continued or not has inhibited program implementation and jeopardizes the trust that the equity specialist has built with the community. Project leaders noted that it is difficult to plan future activities not knowing whether funding will be continued. Additionally, a gap in funding has the potential to jeopardize the trust that it took so long to establish between project leadership and the community because without getting paid, some project leaders may need to move on and find employment elsewhere. Once funding returns, new staff will need to be hired and those relationships will have to be re-built.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, project staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 12. the Building Capacity for Educational Equity Project has **served 562 students, offered 62 youth activities, and facilitated 40 professional development activities of which 280 participants attended.** Indicators targeted by the Building Capacity for Educational Equity project include:

Indicator 1: Increase access to high quality, community-based early learning programs focused on providing culturally specific environments to prepare African American/Black children for kindergarten

Indicator 4: Build a culturally and linguistically congruent newcomer program for African students who have had little or no formal schooling in Oregon

Indicator 5: Increase the number of Oregon school districts that recruit, hire, and retain African American/Black educators at a rate comparable to that of Oregon's African American/Black student population

Indicator 6: Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum in Oregon schools for African American/Black students

Indicator 7: Increase literacy outcomes by 6.8% per year and numeracy outcomes by 6.8% per year for African American/Black students

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 10: Increase the rate of freshman on-track for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 12: Increase the post-secondary enrollment rates of African American/Black students high school graduates and GED completers

Exhibit 12. Building Capacity for Educational Equity Program Data

School-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
56	Number of suspensions	8
2	Number of expulsions	8
72	Percentage of students with an attendance rate of 90% or higher[b]	9
22	Number of freshmen students receiving support around required credit attainment[b]	10, 11
22	Number of students considered freshmen on-track[b]	10
—	Percentage of students graduating[a]	11
Program-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
562	Total number of students served	6-12
62	Number of youth activities	6-12
70	Number of parent/family/caregiver activities	6-12
2	Number of African American/Black teachers hired[b]	5
40	Number professional development activities for parents, students, and project staff	6-12
280	Number of parents, students, and school staff attendees at professional development events[c]	6-12
3	Number of students enrolled in Kindergarten transition programs	1

275	Number of students receiving support related to literacy/numeracy	7
240	Number of students with improved literacy levels[b]	7
240	Number of students with improved numeracy levels[b]	7
9	Number of students/families referred to culturally responsive mental health advocates and services	8-11
78	Number of students enrolled in credit recovery and acquisition opportunities[b]	11
55	Number of students/families receiving support around college and career readiness planning	12

[a]Data not yet available.
[b]Data shown for Medford School District only. Ashland School District was in the process of interviewing at the time of this report.
[c]These numbers reflect the number of attendees across activities, not unique individuals.

Summary and Recommendations

In their first year of implementation, the Building Capacity for Educational Equity Project has begun building a sense of community among African American/Black families, has worked to repair communication hurdles between families and schools, worked one-on-one with students to address obstacles they are facing in terms of their engagement in school, and has provided professional development and trainings around equity to school staff, parents, and students. Based on the findings of focus groups with project leaders and parents, RMC Research offers the following recommendations.

Professional development incentives for school staff. Project leaders shared that one of the challenges to providing professional development around equity issues to staff is a lack of time and/or money. Simultaneously, parents suggested that professional development should cast a wider net to include more staff and not just the staff that volunteer. Project leaders may want to brainstorm some ideas to increase school staff attendance such as providing incentives for teachers to attend trainings, or making them mandatory.

Structured system in schools for responding to incidents. Parents noted that since there is not an equity specialist in each school, it would be helpful for schools to have a system in place for reporting incidents, and protocols established to guide school staff in how to respond to things like discrimination, racism, and hate speech. Project leaders may want to consider bringing school and community partners together to brainstorm how schools can put a system in place district-wide so that school staff across the district are on the same page in terms of expectations and necessary steps to take when resolving incidences around equity.

Centralized data system. Project leaders reported how difficult it was to identify the African American/Black students in the schools due to a poor data management system at the district level. Project leaders should consider what, if any, changes they can help make for how demographic data is collected such as changing the wording so that students can provide open-ended responses if they are multi-racial.

More student-focused events. Parents shared the students who attended the Black Leadership Summit were greatly impacted in a positive way. Parents reported that students told them attending the summit was empowering and that they would like to have more opportunities to communicate with each other in that way. Project leaders may want to strategize on how to organize more student-focused activities that allow African American/Black students to congregate and discuss education and community issues.

Lane African American/Black Student Success Project

Lane African American/Black Student Success Project is a Phase II grantee that was first funded through House Bill 2016 July 2018 through June 2019. This project is a collaboration between academic institutions and community-based organizations in Lane County with the aim to align and leverage services to address priority gaps experienced by African American/Black students and their families. Partners include:

- Lane Education Service District
- Springfield Public Schools
- Eugene School District
- Bethel School District
- Eugene Springfield NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)
- University of Oregon
- Lane Community College
- African American Rights of Passage
- Blacks In Government (BIG)
- Centro Latino Americano
- Connected Lane County
- Start Making a Reader Today (SMART)
- Lane Early Learning Alliance

Lane African American/Black Student Success Project reaches students and families from Pre-K to Grade 12 through either connecting students/families to existing resources or providing new programming and services through the student success navigators. Student success navigators provide services throughout three school districts (Springfield Public Schools, Eugene School District, and Bethel School District) and work primarily with high schools to support African American/Black students, foster a sense of community, ensure students are offered the same opportunities as other students, help them learn how to advocate for themselves, and ensure students are aware of the existing services that exist through community-based organizations like the NAACP and Connected Lane County.[39] Lane African American/Black Student Success Project also provides professional development on implicit bias, trauma-informed and restorative practices, and culturally responsive teaching for both project staff and school staff, builds relationships between school districts and CBOs, and is working to ensure goals between school districts and CBOs are aligned.

Program Implementation

Project leaders (n = 4) and direct service providers (n = 5: two student success navigators, two NAACP representatives, and one SMART Reading Program representative) were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and challenges faced while implementing programming. Findings also include feedback from two parents and one student to gain insight about what is working well, what could be improved, and how programming is influencing students' education experience.

[39] http://connectedlanecounty.org/

Primary Activities

The Lane African American/Black Student Success Project's main activities during their first year of implementation included (a) building relationships and aligning services between schools and CBOs, (b) connecting students to existing services/opportunities, (c) fostering a sense of community among African American/Black students in schools, (d) conducting parent outreach activities, and (e) organizing professional development related to trauma-informed and restorative practices to both navigators and school staff.

Building relationships and aligning services between schools and CBOs is the first and most important activity due to the many partners involved and the need to ensure that existing services are leveraged so that funding is not wasted on duplication of efforts. Project leaders reported having liaisons serving to introduce the student success navigators to school staff to ensure everyone is on the same page and willing to work together. CBOs such as the NAACP have held presentations at schools to ensure staff are aware of the work the project is doing and how school staff are integral to its success. Project leaders are involved in ongoing discussions with various CBOs about how to collaborate and align services.

> "How would an employee who is housed at the NAACP truly interact with the local school districts when we haven't had those relationships in an official way? We're building that trust."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Establishing relationships and a sense of community in schools is the main role of the two student success navigators, who work mainly in the high schools. Student success navigators identify the students who are African American/Black/Mixed Race and invite them to be part of an Affinity Group like the Black Student Union. The affinity groups become a hub for enrichment activities around cultural identity, self-advocacy, African American history, and different strategies to overcome systemic issues and barriers and trainings such as Courageous Conversations[40] and Rites of Passage.[41] Student success navigators also partner with teachers and counselors at the schools to see if students are on track academically, which enables them to check in with students proactively and to work with them to catch up if necessary.

Connecting students to existing services and opportunities is another role of the student success navigators. Student success navigators promote different services such as the Back to School Saturday[42] tutoring at the NAACP, SMART Program,[43] Lane County's Elevate Program,[44] and the Regional Promise Program.[45] Additionally, student success navigators promote different classes and programs within the schools, such as STEM groups and higher level classes. Underrepresented students may not get involved because the school has not communicated with them about opportunities.

> "I try to provide that bridge to [opportunities] other communities enjoy just as a given."
>
> Direct Service Provider Focus Group

[40] https://courageousconversation.com/about/
[41] https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/programs/rites-of-passage-program/
[42] https://naacplanecounty.org/programs/back-to-school-stay-in-school-bts/
[43] https://www.getsmartoregon.org/what-we-do/program-overview/
[44] https://elevatelanecounty.org/
[45] http://www.lesd.k12.or.us/si/lrp/index.html

Conducting parent outreach was part of the first year of implementation. At one school the student success navigator partnered with the school to create a parent night for African American students. The parent night included various community resources and staff from the school. Project staff spoke with parents about how important it is to advocate for their children to ensure they are receiving the best education possible, provide information about the school so that they are more able to advocate, and linked parents with various community resources to support non-academic needs. Parent outreach was noted by project leaders and student success navigators as an important piece to the puzzle and one that they would like to focus on more in the future.

Professional development is provided to school staff and student success navigators jointly through the Lane ESD on topics such as implicit bias, trauma-informed practices, restorative practices, and culturally responsive teaching. Project leaders noted how beneficial it is for student success navigators to go through the same trainings as school staff because it enables them to familiarize themselves with the types of issues and work being done in the schools. Additionally, student success navigators are able to assess whether the strategies in these trainings are being implemented in the classroom through their relationships with the students. In addition to district-sponsored professional development, student success navigators also provide professional development to school staff by partnering with equity teams at different schools, bringing topics into those team meetings such as Courageous Conversations, and approaching students whose emotions may be escalating.

Addressing Student Barriers

Student barriers included lack of knowledge about and access to programming and poor communication from schools as the main barriers African American/Black students face.

Knowledge about and access to programming were described as a barrier by project leaders, direct service providers, and parents, citing the need for schools and CBOs to conduct more outreach so families know about the different services and how to access programming, particularly if the family has a need for transportation. Parents noted that the only way they knew about the Back to School Saturday tutoring was through a friend. Project leaders and direct service providers are aware of this barrier and are taking numerous steps to mitigate it such as (a) informing students of services via the student success navigators, (b) facilitating more parent outreach activities so project staff can inform parents about resources, and (c) exploring transportation options such as partnering with Boys and Girls club who might share their vehicles with project staff.

Poor communication from schools keeps students from being informed about programming like Regional Promise, or students might not be offered information about higher level classes. One parent interviewed shared that one of her children was falling behind academically but she wasn't informed until too late because he never got into any behavioral trouble, so he was not on the school's radar and slipped through the cracks. One parent also noted a lack of accountability by the school when racial issues come up, for example, responding to a student's use of racially charged language by saying the student did not mean anything by it. Project staff are working to mitigate this barrier using a variety of strategies. First, student success navigators are forming relationships with teachers which allows them to receive updates on students so that they can follow up with the parent or their guardian if they are academically behind. Second, student success navigators are engaging school staff in discussions around implicit bias, restorative justice practices, and courageous conversations. Lastly, student success navigators are reaching out to parents to ensure that they have the tools that they need to advocate for their children within the school system.

Facilitators to Implementation

Program implementation was facilitated by the existing state-wide initiatives and the willingness of schools and CBOs to collaborate.

Leveraging different services. Project leaders reported that existing programs such as Regional Promise and school climate work in one of their districts helped streamline the work for two reasons. First, having a variety of already-existing programs to help underrepresented students re-engage with school and graduate relieves some of the pressure of starting a program. Much of the project involves connecting students already-existing resources. Second, because some of this work has already been done in their schools, for instance school climate work, the student success navigator can go into the school and pick up where they left off rather than having to start from the beginning.

Collaborative attitude among partners. Project leaders, student success navigators, and program representatives noted that when the different organizations are open to discourse and collaboration, that makes implementation easier. Schools have been working with student success navigators to integrate them into their schools, which has been critical to working with teachers and navigating the school system in an efficient way.

Successes and Lessons Learned

Project leaders, student success navigators, and partner representatives were asked about the successes and lessons learned that came from implementing the Lane African American/Black Student Success Project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Collaboration across organizations. Project leaders, student success navigators, and program representatives spoke at length about how they were able to facilitate conversations across school districts and CBOs to align existing programming, create new programming, and brainstorm how to reach more families. One example of this collaboration is the SMART Reading Program collaboration with NAACP. NAACP has their longstanding Back to School Saturday Program where families can go on Saturday mornings to get help with homework and access computers. Through this grant, NAACP was able to start a SMART Reading Program in conjunction with the Back to School Saturday program. Not only has this increased parent and student access to the SMART Reading Program, but it also has prompted the SMART Reading Program to align their services with the grant by ensuring they used culturally-representative books (i.e., Black authors or Black themes). Other examples of cross-collaboration include (a) partnering with University of Oregon to bring in student interns to tutor at the Back to School Saturday Program, (b) partnering with the United Way to present and reach out to their partners in the early learning hub about the work the grant is doing, and (c) collaborating with NAACP and Regional Promise to hold the African American Parent and Youth Conference to foster community and to ensure families know about the different opportunities. These collaborations are the foundation of the grant, and a stepping stone to a cohesive streamlined approach to addressing the challenges facing African American/Black students and their families.

> "I didn't see us organized around this idea of supporting our African American group before. We had different people doing different pieces. This grant is actually allowing us to actually sit at a table, start talking, and think long term and not just this grant for this particular time."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Student success navigators established relationships with schools and students. Project leaders shared that the project has been successful at introducing and onboarding student success navigators to the schools. Project leaders were able to identify individuals that had good relationships with superintendents and administrators and utilized those relationships to introduce the student success navigators. One project leader said that this approach has "afforded an entry point for [student success navigators] to begin to build those relationships with students." Once these relationships were established, student success navigators could begin forging relationships with students via affinity groups, Black Student Unions, and circle sharing. Through these groups student success navigators reported seeing students building their own network, taking ownership of their own experiences, learning how to advocate for themselves, and finding camaraderie with each other. Student success navigators also reported their students are happier to be in school because they have a space where they feel comfortable and safe talking about their life.

> "Being a Student Success Navigator really translated my understanding into a Community Success Navigator partnering all up and down the ladder of different tiers of community. Creating cooperation between those tiers and seeing the overall understanding and acumen of the students first and then all the people that surround them radiating out their understanding about the situation for the students and how we got into this situation where we have to have a House Bill 2016. As that acumen raises, I think the overall cooperation and success for the students also raises."
>
> Direct Service Provider Focus Group

Strong skillset of student success navigators. Project leaders spoke at length about the strength of the student success navigators, describing them as 'amazing' and 'committed to the work.' Student success navigators filled a plethora of roles including professional development providers, mentors, parent outreach coordinators, and liaisons between schools, students, and parents/guardians. One project leader shared how important it was to have the student success navigators as "another set of eyes and ears" on the ground to provide school staff with information about student needs and what students are experiencing in school.

Lessons Learned

Building relationships with school staff is integral to success. Project leaders and student success navigators noted learning how important it is to build good relationships with school staff. Relationship building goes more smoothly with someone in the school system to advocate for and introduce student success navigators. Student success navigators reported without that "in-connection to the school….access is going to be pretty limited."

Parent outreach is critical. Project leaders and student success navigators reported that without parent engagement, efforts to increase student engagement will be minimal.

Challenges

Building the capacity of staff and schools, working within the school system, engaging parents, and finding mentors were described as the main challenges of the project in its first year of implementation.

Project staff and school capacity. Project leaders reported two main challenges around capacity during their first year of implementation. The first challenge was being able to build the capacity of and provide support to the student success navigators at the same time as starting implementation. It was difficult to 'hit the ground running' when leaders had to ensure that student success navigators had the tools they needed to fill the many roles that were part of their work. Project leaders also noted concern for the longevity and stamina of the student success navigators because there were only two working across three school districts, and the work was particularly taxing because navigators are often the only people of color pushing on the school system to enact change. Project leaders and student success navigators felt strongly that all of the schools in the district needed a more constant presence of student success navigators, and having access to both a male and female navigator would be more beneficial so gender-specific issues could be handled in a more culturally responsive way. The second challenge was supporting change within the school system to provide services to African American/Black students. Project leaders noted that systemic change is critical for lasting effects and to enact systemic change both the project partners and the state need to make a long-term commitment.

> "We need change within the normal [school] system. That means that they have to embrace cultural education. They have to embrace the fact that there needs to be change in how we look at our students and how we interact with our students. It can't be just that we hire Navigators and people of color and put them out there and make them do this work."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Working within schools. Student success navigators reported the challenges of working within the schools to provide services to students. For example, student success navigators reported the difficulty of implementing specific programs because school staff do not see the significance of those programs, despite an introduction from the superintendent. Another challenge is finding time in the school day for Black Student Union or affinity group meetings other than lunch time.

Parent engagement. Project leaders and student success navigators shared that parent engagement was one of the pieces of the grant that have been difficult to implement. One reason is that it takes time to establish relationships with the schools, which needs to be done before beginning outreach to the students and parents. Now that student success navigators have an established presence in the schools, they are beginning to shift focus to finding ways of engaging parents. Other challenges around parent engagement include (a) transportation for families living in rural areas that are far from where activities take place and (b) the complex identities of mixed-race families (e.g., letting mixed-race families know that their identity is supported). Parent engagement events have been implemented in this first year (e.g., parent night at one of the schools), however project leaders and student success navigators reported plans of spending more time on this piece in the future.

Finding mentors. Due to the small African/American Black population in the Eugene area, many possible mentors are already working on different projects making it difficult to find mentors who have the time to work with students. Student success navigators are currently working with University of Oregon, the Aspire Program, Central Latino, and Blacks in Government to overcome this challenge.

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, project staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 13. It should be noted that school-related data will not be available until summer/fall 2019, and program-related data is as-of December 2018. As of December 2018, the Lane African American/Black Student Success Project has **served 294 students**, **reached 30 families** during three visits to low-income apartment complexes, and **provided 25 students/families with support around college and career readiness planning**. Indicators targeted by the Lane African American/Black Student Success project include:

Indicator 6: Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum in Oregon schools for African American/Black students

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 10: Increase the rate of freshman on-track for African American/Black students

Indicator 11: Increase graduation rates for African American/Black students

Indicator 12: Increase the post-secondary enrollment rates of African American/Black students high school graduates and GED completers

Exhibit 13. Lane African American/Black Student Success Project Program Data[a]

School-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
—	Number of suspensions	8
—	Number of expulsions	8
—	Percentage of students with an attendance rate of 90% or higher	9
—	Number of freshmen students receiving support around required credit attainment	11
—	Number of students enrolled in advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, or college credit courses	12
—	Number of students considered freshmen on-track	10
—	Percentage of students graduating	11
Program-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
294	Total number of students served	8-12
9	Number of students served by Rights of Passage	8-12
25	Number of students served by NAACP	8-12
260	Number of students served by Lane ESD	8-12
3	Number professional development activities for student success navigators	6
2	Number of attendees at professional development events	6

30	Number of families receiving home visits	8-12
3	Number of home visits conducted	8-12
3	Number of students/families referred to culturally responsive mental health advocates and services	8-12
0	Number of students enrolled in credit recovery and acquisition opportunities	11
13	Number of students receiving additional job training/education	12
25	Number of students/families receiving support around college and career readiness planning	12

Note. Dashes indicate data could not be provided as of May 2019.
[a]Data provided in this table reflect the time period July 2018 through December 2018.

Summary and Recommendations

In their first year of implementation, the Lane African American/Black Student Success Project has begun building relationships and cohesiveness between several school districts, schools, and community partners in an effort to align and leverage services for African American/Black students and create new programming both within schools and via CBOs. Project staff reported providing outreach to students and parents to ensure they are aware of existing services and opportunities, providing one-on one support for students within schools, and providing professional development for both project and school staff. Based on the findings of interviews/focus groups with project leaders, direct service providers, program representatives, parents, and students, RMC Research offers the following recommendations.

Increase school buy-in for in-school services. Student success navigators reported that although being introduced into schools by school administration has helped relationship-building, they are still experiencing resistance to the student services they provide. Project staff should strategize alternate ways to increase buy-in by school staff so that student success navigators can provide services to students as efficiently as possible.

Collaborate on parent outreach activities. Parent outreach was reported as one of the more challenging aspects of the project, largely due to needing to establish relationships with schools before building relationships with parents. Project staff may want to collaborate on how schools can work with student success navigators to reach more parents. Relatedly, one parent interviewed reported having a parent council at the Back to School Saturday Program, however it was not structured or facilitated by a professional and at times did not feel inclusive. Project staff may want use parent councils as an entry point to creating a community of parents by creating more structure around it and moderating the meetings.

Continue school capacity building. Project staff reported starting a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) anti-bias monthly training that includes student success navigators to build capacity within the schools. Project staff should continue to find ways to leverage training student success navigators and school staff as a way to align philosophy and skillsets between school staff and project staff.

Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators

Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators is a Phase II grantee that was first funded through House Bill 2016from July 2018 through June 2019. This project is a collaboration between African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO), the Center for African Immigrants and Refugees of Oregon (CAIRO), and Portland State University's Graduate School of Education & Early Childhood Council with the aim to provide services and support for Black/East African immigrant families in Reynolds School District and those attending the CAIRO preschool.

The Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators Project has four main components: (1) providing professional development to CAIRO school staff and cultural navigators (direct service providers) using a participatory research approach, (2) creating culturally responsive pre-K curriculum for use at CAIRO using a participatory approach, (3) providing direct support to both parents and students in the Reynolds School District via the cultural navigators, and (4) serving as a bridge between families and schools by helping schools and parents communicate with each other and providing cultural consultations with school staff.

The Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators Project has also included direct service providers from another House Bill 2016 grantee, the SPACE project, in their professional development sessions to help leverage resources between the two grantees.

Program Implementation

Project leaders (*n* = 5), Cultural Navigators (*n* = 2), AYCO community engagement staff (*n* = 1), and the Director of CAIRO Preschool were asked to describe primary project activities, the barriers students face and how programming addresses those barriers, facilitators to programming, successes, lessons learned, and implementation challenges. Findings also include feedback from three parents and three school staff members to gain insight about what is working well, what could be improved, and how programming is influencing students' education experience.

Primary Activities

The Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators project's main activities during their first year of implementation included providing professional development to cultural navigators and CAIRO preschool staff so that they could (a) act as a communication bridge between schools and families., (b) provide academic and social support to students, and (c) provide support to parents so that they can advocate for themselves and their children in schools.

Providing professional development to cultural navigators using a participatory approach is one of the main project activities. Project leaders facilitate regular meetings with cultural navigators and SPACE agents (direct service providers from the SPACE project) to get a sense of the issues they are facing when trying to provide support for students and parents. Information from these meetings are discussed at regular project leadership meetings to determine what types of sessions would be most helpful for cultural navigators and SPACE agents. For example, cultural navigators and SPACE

> "We're designing these workshops from the input of the [direct service providers]. Rather than us just coming in and saying, 'We think you need to know this', we're listening really carefully to them."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

agents were having difficulty helping parents navigate Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) because they were unfamiliar with what IEPs are and how schools determine which students need one. Based on this need, project leaders set up a session on IEPs so that cultural navigators and SPACE agents could attend IEP meetings with parents and schools and have the language to be able to advocate for the families. In response to some of the difficulties cultural navigators and SPACE agents were having supporting families, project leaders led them through an eco-mapping process, which allowed them to see some of the connections between their experiences and to think about how that might help them think about families in isolation. As a response to bullying, project leaders facilitated a session with cultural navigators and SPACE agents on looking at policies in the school system and how to navigate re-thinking or even challenging policies that seem biased. Professional development sessions are facilitated with a strengths-based approach. Cultural navigators and SPACE agents are asked to participate fully in sessions and to draw on their own cultural capital to feel confident and clear about the support they are providing to students, parents, and schools. Other examples of professional development include providing restorative justice training through Resolutions Northwest and providing sessions on trauma and resilience.

Providing professional development to CAIRO preschool staff about implementing culturally responsive curriculum is another main project activity. Professional development focuses on (a) ensuring students see themselves in the environment using mirrors, art, displaying thoughts, and facilitating identity exercises, (b) ensuring the curriculum is driven by regular feedback from parents and students, and (c) decreasing implicit bias in the classroom. Project staff invite parents to the school on an ongoing basis to elicit feedback on what environment they would like for their children and concerns their children might have. Families are also encouraged to visit regularly and share stories with the students, which reinforces that parents are an integral component of their child's education and that their voice matters to school staff. CAIRO staff are also able to earn Portland State University credits through the professional development sessions they participate in.

Serving as a communication bridge between schools and families was described by project leaders, cultural navigators, parents, and school staff as one of the most helpful services the project provides. Somali parents shared that it can be overwhelming to try and navigate the complex school system, a system not like anything they are used to. Cultural navigators facilitate communication between parents and the schools to ensure that both parties are clear on expectations and processes. Cultural navigators attend IEP meetings with parents at the school, have attended parent-school meetings about behavioral issues as a support to the parents, and keep parents informed of the different activities that are happening at the school.

> "Not only are [cultural navigators] working with the child every day in the classrooms and outside of the classroom, they are the glue between the schools, the student, and the child."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Mentoring students in academics, self-advocacy, and social skills is the main role of the two cultural navigators who work across the Reynolds School District. Cultural navigators (a) provide in-class supports for reading and math and preparing for tests, (b) work with students to engage with extracurricular activities such as swimming and soccer, (c) help students work through conflict resolution with their peers or teachers, and (d) work with the Somali population to foster a sense of community. Cultural navigators also developed opportunities for peer to peer mentoring including the entire range of grades (elementary through college). In terms of post-secondary support, cultural navigators organize field trips to expose students to different career paths, help students with the necessary paperwork to apply for post-secondary schooling, and are currently planning to have Somali

community members come talk to students about how they faced and navigated through similar challenges.

Providing support to parents so that they can start to advocate for themselves and their children is something that cultural navigators reported spending a lot of time doing. Cultural navigators started by establishing relationships with parents at school family nights and accompanying the school staff during the summer to deliver books and lunches to families. One school staff person interviewed noted that the cultural navigator "got parents to come to those family nights that probably wouldn't have come otherwise without that relationship and her reaching out." Cultural navigators also provide ongoing family consultations to talk about any issues or concerns their children are having in school or in the community.

> "Put families in a position that they can self-advocate, that they are independent of you and can do the work. Empower them and give them the tools they need to do this so that they can support their child's academic success. If you're not there, what do they need to take care of their child's needs? What do their voices look like in the school? So really raise the family's capacity to self-advocate. I think is one of the biggest goals."
>
> Project Leadership Focus Group

Addressing Student Barriers

The two main barriers that keep students thriving in school are a disconnect between the parents and schools and language/cultural differences.

A disconnect between parents and the schools was one of two biggest barriers described by project leaders, cultural navigators, and parents. Focus group participants shared that schools often do not take the whole student/family into consideration when making decisions about whether a student needs special education services or what is causing their behavioral issues. School staff will equate language barriers with special education needs, which is often not the case, or they will label a student as having behavioral issues without getting feedback from the families about what is going on at home. One parent also noted that it is especially difficult for high school newcomers because students are placed by age If a high school age student comes to the school system without having any of the foundational education it is harder to catch up. Compounding this barrier is perceived rigidity on the part of the schools. Project leaders and cultural navigators reported that often schools will not budge from whatever decision they have made (e.g., putting a student on an IEP) and families feel backed into a corner. Some families actually move schools; however, their records move with them and so they often end up having the same problems due to the new school picking up from where the old school left off. Cultural navigators try to mitigate this barrier by providing support to parents in school meetings, teaching parents what the school policies are so that they can have informed discussions with school staff, and communicating with school staff on behalf of parents.

> "It's always difficult to be open with the teachers when they're constantly looking for something or searching for something wrong at home that could be the reason rather than seeing what it is."
>
> Cultural Navigators Focus Group

Language and cultural differences are a barrier for both parents and students. School staff shared that it is difficult to communicate with parents in a clear and productive way. Culturally, school staff may not

know what is important to communicate to East African parents. For example, sending a message about a FAFSA meeting without explaining that FAFSA is how parents can get financial help for school results in a low turnout of East African parents. This is an example of common assumptions school staff make about what East African parents know or do not know. School staff also shared that some students have trouble navigating the social scene of school and because they are not fluent in English, they will act out when they get frustrated and cannot communicate properly. Cultural navigators have been able to mitigate these barriers with their presence at the school. They have been able to help students navigate the social scene, communicate with their peers and teachers, and provide the support of someone who understands their life experience within the school.

Successes and Lessons Learned

Project leaders, cultural navigators, parents, and school staff were asked about the successes and lessons learned that came from implementing the Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators project. Successes include both implementation successes and student outcome successes.

Successes

Providing 1:1 and group support to students has led to increased engagement in school. Cultural navigators have been able to provide a wide array of services to students in schools such as (a) in-class support for reading and math, (b) support around gaining and sustaining employment, (c) help with transitioning from one school to another, (d) connecting students to activities they are interested in like soccer or swimming, and (e) helping students make friends and navigate social norms of the school. Parents and teachers shared stories of students who were having trouble academically, socially, or behaviorally, and with the help of the cultural navigators they were able to overcome the hurdles they were facing and thrive in school. One teacher shared, "The student specifically that [the cultural navigator] is working with this year, I can really see the changes in him. He started working with him kind of at the end of the first semester and he was failing some classes and wasn't showing a ton of motivation. He was able to get his grades up and pass some of those classes and then this semester he's been off to a much stronger start. He'll come in and say, 'Hey, what can I do? What do I need to turn in?'" Another teacher shared that one of the cultural navigators was able to help a newcomer student who was struggling to make friends. Parents also shared stories of student successes. For example, one parent shared that because of the cultural navigator, their child was able to not only obtain employment, but also sustain it because the cultural navigator helped him with increasing his skillset. Additionally, parents and school staff both noted how important it is for students to see and interact with staff that not only look like them but have shared life experiences. This has inspired students and opened their eyes in terms of what types of careers they can have one day.

> "I saw a lot of my Somali girls, they were so impressed that [cultural navigator] could work here. They were like, 'Oh, she can work here? I can work here?' Because most of our staff is white. To have a more diverse staff is something we're always working on doing. Having a cultural navigator provided that for kids and for parents."
>
> School Staff Focus Group

Supporting parents has led to feelings of empowerment and increased engagement in schools. Cultural navigators have been able to provide a wide variety of supports to parents, such as going with parents to a DHS meeting, communicating to parents what types of activities are happening in schools, explaining to parents what IEPs are, and speaking to school staff on parents' behalf. Parents shared they have someone who they and their students can connect to that is in the school which has helped them be more at ease. Parents also spoke about their female children, sharing that without the cultural navigators at the school they would not feel as comfortable with their female children participating in after-school activities. Project leaders and cultural navigators noted that parents are more eager to be involved in school activities now that they have a contact person they are comfortable with. For example, a group of parents reached out to the cultural navigators because they wanted to participate in PTA meetings. One teacher also reported that the project has "engaged some of our African parents more….especially our moms" in part due to the relationships they formed with parents over the summer during the book deliveries that cultural navigators participated in with schools.

> "[cultural navigators] empowered us in case we have a concern about the teacher, we have to say it so that we can discuss it."
>
> Parent Focus Group

Cultural navigators have increased cultural awareness in schools. Project leaders reported that cultural navigators have been able to mediate conflicts that were race-related in a way that did not allow schools to dismiss issues. For example, when some of the Somali girls were experiencing racism, the school labelled the situation 'teenage girls' drama.' Cultural navigators were able to point out that the label the school was using was incorrect and that it was racism. This allowed them to handle the situation in a more culturally responsive way and where the girls were heard and seen.

Professional development has increased cultural navigators' capacity. Project leaders and cultural navigators reported how important and effective the professional development has been. Because project leadership has been intentionally using a participatory approach when deciding what types of trainings to implement, the trainings have been relevant and immediately applicable. Cultural navigators noted how helpful learning about IEPs was to support parents in school meetings, and also reported that the eco-mapping training was so useful that they are now working on doing a similar activity with students. The strengths-based approach enabled cultural navigators to shift their perspective from what the community does not have to how they can leverage what the community does have.

> "[Cultural navigators] have a voice, they feel like they can be present for their families in a really strong way…We're helping them to unravel what it is that they're facing [in schools]. That I think has been really helpful. They have grown a lot from it. I think they're doing some incredible work."
>
> Project leadership Focus Group

Lessons Learned

East African families need a wide variety of supports. Project leaders noted the main lesson learned is that supporting families so that students can more easily thrive academically involves much more than in-school support for students and communication with parents. Cultural navigators have found themselves spending more time than expected helping families with issues that are not directly related to academics; however, these issues affect the students' school engagement indirectly. Accompanying a parent to a DHS meeting results in the parent feeling less overwhelmed, creating a more stable home.

Parents become more independent and empowered to meet their basic needs in their new country, which in turn makes it easier for students to concentrate in school.

Challenges

Late funding, ensuring cultural navigators know what their role is, school staff's lack of collaboration and culturally responsive communication, and mapping indicators to activities were the main challenges of the project in its first year of implementation.

Late funding and uncertainty of funding. Project leaders reported how difficult it was to get a late start due to not receiving funding until the end of summer 2018. Project leaders planned on building relationships the first year and then expanding on those relationships and really focusing on providing services to families in the second year. Instead, they had to implement both components simultaneously, which was a challenge. Another piece of the project that has been difficult to implement due to late funding was creating a module or product that can be used as a guide for others who do similar work. Creating a system to collect data from cultural navigators and school staff, and then using that data to create the module, just was not feasible in such a short amount of time. Project leaders also noted how critical it was to continue to receive funding. First, it is difficult to make an impact in less than a year of implementation. To really be able to see change in student achievement, project staff need to be able to provide consistent support for more than 10 months. Second, project leaders shared that families are resistant to trust anyone because they are accustomed to programs starting and then ending due to a freeze in funding. Having to take a break from providing services due to funding issues will make it harder to re-establish trust at a later date.

Cultural navigators' role and workload. Project leaders and cultural navigators spoke about how complicated and difficult the role of cultural navigators is. Families' needs are more than just giving students academic support; cultural navigators are finding themselves providing parents with help navigating not just the school system, but other systems like DHS and the juvenile detention center. Additionally, at times cultural navigators find themselves in difficult positions with little support when facing school policies that seem biased or teachers who lack cultural awareness. This has been a challenge compounded by the shortened timeline of the project because training, relationship building, and providing services all started at the same time.

School staff's lack of collaboration and culturally responsive communication skills. Project leaders and cultural navigators shared working with schools as challenging. Schools have a tendency to expect the cultural navigators to fix problems without expecting school policies or school staff to change in any way. There is a perceived disconnect between the goals of the project and the goals of the school. The project has the goal of identifying the current school policies that are not working for the East African/Black community and helping schools re-design those policies so that they work for everyone; whereas the school would like the cultural navigators to come in and help the East African/Black students and parents conform to the existing school policies. For example, students being referred to special education services when it is not clear that there is an actual need, and when the referral is questioned, schools are not willing to budge or re-think their decisions. Project leaders also reported having to apply a lot of pressure on the district in order to negotiate space to use for student and family activities.

> "Yes, there has been some really, good, strong partnerships. But, a lot of times it's like, 'Be out of my way, don't be in my way. Do what you came to do, but really, give me the benefits and I don't want to do any work.' It's a challenge."
>
> Project leadership Focus Group

Mapping indicators to activities and data collection. Project leaders reported that the logistics of the mapping their activities to specific indicators required by ODE and collecting data to show impact has been a challenge. As noted earlier, cultural navigators are finding that there are activities families need that do not necessarily map directly to an indicator. This has made charging time difficult, as project staff have to document their time and connect their hours to indicators. Additionally, determining what types of data project staff can collect that will show the effects of the project has been a challenge due to the short timeline. Project leaders noted that they have only really started working with students the second half of this school year because the first half of the school year the focus was on building relationships with schools, students, and parents. Showing impacts in terms of the indicators with quantitative data is not feasible without more time, and the opportunity/resources to collect baseline data.

> "How do we actually raise a child's attendance? What does it take? I don't think that's captured in this work. It may take us doing a home visit for five hours with the family to get the heat back on to help that child's attendance. Then that five hours, this work doesn't capture it. The data that we're asked to provide doesn't capture it."
>
> Project leadership Focus Group

Short-Term Program Outcomes

To address Evaluation Question 7, SPACE staff provided RMC Research with outcome data presented in Exhibit 11. Since its implementation in July 2018, the Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators project has reached **113 students**, has **conducted 23 home visits with 10 families,** and **provided professional development to 88 educators and/or project staff**. Indicators targeted by the Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators project include:

Indicator 1: Increase access to high quality, community-based early learning programs focused on providing culturally specific environments to prepare African American/Black children for kindergarten

Indicator 3: Build a consistent approach and aligned pathway between early childhood and K-3 education to promote enrollment of African American/Black early learners

Indicator 4: Build a culturally and linguistically congruent newcomer program for African students who have had little or no formal schooling in Oregon

Indicator 8: Reduce the number of discipline incidents for African American/Black Students

Indicator 9: Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates for African American/Black students

Exhibit 14. Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators Program Data

Program-Related		
2018-2019	**Program Measure**	**Related Indicator**
113	Number of African students served	1, 3, 4, 8, 9
10	Number of families receiving home visits	1, 3, 4
23	Number of home visits conducted	1, 3, 4
14	Number of professional development activities for educators and/or project staff	1, 3, 8, 9

88	Number of attendees at professional development events[b]	1, 3, 8, 9
21	Number of program students enrolled in preschool/early learning programs	1
21	Number of program students enrolled in kindergarten transition programs (e.g. Transition to Kindergarten summer sessions)	3
9	Number of youth activities[a]	4, 8, 9
447	Number of attendees at youth activities[a,b]	4, 8, 9
2	Number of parent/family activities	4, 8, 9
11	Number of attendees at parent/family activities[b]	4, 8, 9

[a]A portion of these numbers are also counted in the data for Building SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County because of overlapping services the two grantees provided.
[b]These numbers reflect the number of total attendees across activities, not unique individuals.

Summary and Recommendations

In their first year of implementation, the Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators Project has provided professional development using a participatory approach to the cultural navigators and SPACE agents (direct service providers for the SPACE project) so that they could build relationships with and act as a communication bridge between schools, parents, and students. Cultural navigators also provide one-on-one and group support to students academically and socially, as well as provide support to parents so that they can advocate for themselves and their children in schools. Focus group participants reported students as more engaged in school and parents as more comfortable communicating with school staff as a result of working with cultural navigators. Based on the feedback of project leaders, cultural navigators, parents, and school staff, RMC Research offers the following recommendations.

Continue to provide support for cultural navigators. Project leaders and cultural navigators noted how the amount of services East African/Black families need is diverse and sometimes overwhelming. Additionally, finding themselves as the sole person pushing up against school systems can be challenging. Project leaders has been successful in using a participatory approach to delivering targeted professional development to cultural navigators and should continue using this approach. During regular meetings with cultural navigators and SPACE agents, project leaders should ensure immediate concerns are addressed and tasks are prioritized in a way that does not lead to burn out.

Work on building the cultural capacity of school staff. Project leaders and cultural navigators noted building relationships with schools; however, they also reported many challenges associated with working with school staff. Project leaders and cultural navigators should consider strategies to engage as many school staff as possible in trainings around cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, and restorative justice. This may mean building relationships and buy-in at the district level as well as the school-level, and framing trainings as something that will make their jobs easier and lead to increased student achievement in the long-run.

Appendix A
Indicators Targeted by Grantee

Grantees										
Indicators	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**Total**
1. Increase access to early learning programs						X		X	X	3
2. Increase educational and certification pathways for early learning providers									X	1
3. Build aligned pathway between early childhood and K-3 education						X		X	X	3
4. Build congruent newcomer program for African students		X				X		X		3
5. Increase the # of Oregon school districts that recruit, hire, and retain African American/Black educators					X		X		X	3
6. Increase the amount of available culturally responsive curriculum		X			X		X	X	X	5
7. Increase literacy and numeracy outcomes		X					X	X		3
8. Reduce the # of discipline incidents		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
9. Increase attendance and reduce absenteeism rates	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
10. Increase the rate of freshman on-track		X	X		X		X	X	X	6
11. Increase graduation	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	7
12. Increase the post-secondary enrollment rates		X			X		X		X	5
13. 90% of students in post-secondary education institutions complete at least half the # of credits by their degree certificate									X	1
14. Completion of associate degree or certificate within three years; completion of bachelor's degree within six years										
Total	**2**	**7**	**5**	**3**	**7**	**5**	**8**	**9**	**11**	

Note. Grantee numbers are as follows:

1. Bars to Bridges Project
2. Black/African Student Success Project
3. The REAP Expansion Project
4. African American/Black Student Success Plan of Multnomah County
5. African American/Black Student Bonding Project
6. Strengthening the Capacity of Cultural Navigators Project
7. Building Capacity for Educational Equity Project
8. Building a SPACE for African Students' Success in Washington County
9. Lane African American/Black Student Success Project

Appendix B
Considerations for Culturally Responsive Evaluation

Culturally Responsive Evaluation

Hood, S., Hopson, R., and Kirkhart, K. (2015). Culturally Responsive Evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In Newcomer, K. and Hatry, H (Eds.). *Handbook on practical program Evaluation (4th ed.)* (pp. 281-317). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Evaluation Phase	What you should consider . . .
Prepare for Evaluation	▶ The history of this place (community, neighborhood, organization, program). ▶ Why is evaluation desired at this particular time and by whom? ▶ Who are the stakeholders and where does the evaluation stand in relationship to each of them? ▶ What are the appropriate protocols for entering into conversation with different stakeholders? ▶ How is power held, exercised, and shared (or use oppressively) in this context? Whose values are marginalized and whose values are privileged? **Assembling Evaluation Team** ▶ Who brings relevant life experiences and professional experience? ▶ Who is fluent in the languages spoken in this site? ▶ Who has the technical expertise required to design and carry out an evaluation? ▶ Who has the cultural competence in areas relevant to this site? ▶ Will a cultural insider be required to guide the evaluation in their interactions and understandings?
Engaging Stakeholders	▶ The pace at which it is appropriate to move. ▶ The protocols appropriate to respectfully enter a community or other context ▶ Spending time in the context to appreciate its ways of doing business, getting things done. ▶ The order in which stakeholders should be contacted, reflecting formal and informal hierarchies ▶ How to create meaningful roles for stakeholders in the evaluation process ▶ How program participants or recipients can be involved in the evaluation ▶ Diversity within and among stakeholder groups ▶ How is respect communicated and trust established in this context?
Identify Evaluation Purposes	▶ Is the evaluation required as a condition of funding? ▶ Is the evaluation being initiated to gain knowledge for program planning and development? ▶ Is the evaluation intended to inform decisions about future action, such as restricting or downsizing? ▶ Is there a political controversy behind this evaluation ▶ Have concerns been raised about the program that led to a call for more information? ▶ Is this evaluation part of a philosophy of ongoing program reflection and improvement?

Evaluation Phase	What you should consider . . .
FRAME THE RIGHT QUESTIONS	▶ Whose values and interests are presented in the proposed questions? ▶ Who participates in developing and refining the questions? ▶ What will be accepted as credible evidence in answering each question? ▶ Do the questions address issues of equity of opportunity/outcome? ▶ Will the evaluation explore who benefits most and least from the program? ▶ Are the questions broad enough to permit more than one way of studying the question? ▶ Will the evaluation be attentive to unintended consequence of both program processes and outcomes?
DESIGN THE EVALUATION	▶ Who *owns* the information that is relevant to this evaluation? ▶ What protections are built in to assure ethical treatment of participants and appropriate guardianship of their information? ▶ Have non-traditional sources of information been respected? ▶ What quantitative methods of data collection might be available and appropriate in this context? ▶ What qualitative methods of data collection might be culturally congruent? ▶ How does the pact and timing of the evaluation fit the time frame of this community? ▶ How might qualitative and quantitative methods be integrated to form more complete answers to the evaluation questions?
SELECT AND ADAPT INSTRUMENTATION	▶ The literacy level and language proficiency of the persons from who you are gathering information. ▶ Whether oral or written communication is more culturally congruent. ▶ Whether an existing tool or a more culturally-specific tool is the method of choice. ▶ Whether a culturally-specific method of communication in this context might be used in data collection. ▶ Whether non-verbal communication will be included or excluded from consideration. **Using an existing tool?** ▶ Who participated in the original research that developed and validated this instrument? ▶ Where was the instrument developed and in what time frame? ▶ Are the assumption and theoretical foundation of the instrument congruent with the context of your evaluation? ▶ Is the instrument available in languages appropriate to your context? ▶ Are relevant norms available to assist you in interpreting data correctly for this context?
COLLECT THE DATA	▶ Have you made clear the purpose of the evaluation and how it is ultimately intended to benefit persons in this community/setting? ▶ Is the voluntary nature of participation well understood? ▶ Have appropriate assurance been communicated and followed regarding safeguarding the information shared?

Evaluation Phase	What you should consider . . .
	▶ Have you allowed adequate time for introductions before beginning data collection? ▶ Is the pace of data collection appropriate for this respondent? Have you made provisions to have more than one interaction rather than rushing through your agenda? ▶ If an interpreter is needed, has that person been vetted by the community? ▶ Will non-verbal communication be documents in your procedures? ▶ How will you conclude the interaction and express appreciation for the gift of information that you have been granted?
ANALYZE THE DATA	▶ A cultural interpreter may be needed to capture nuances of meaning. ▶ Involving stakeholder in interpretation can support the validity and understanding of actions. ▶ It is often useful to examine program operations or outcomes in relation to subgroups of participants; the program may not be received by all persons in the same way. ▶ Pay attention to outliers and unexpected results. Successful or positive outliers may offer especially valuable clues to the resilience of a community. ▶ Notice how the evaluator lens (values, experience, expectations) shapes the conclusions, especially with regard to what information is given the most and least weight in coming to answers.
DISSEMINATE/USE RESULTS	▶ Create opportunities for key stakeholders to review and comment on drafts. ▶ Be clear about ownership of findings. What information is culturally restricted and should not be shared? ▶ How to communicate with each stakeholder audience in the most culturally appropriate ways. ▶ Notice who will benefit from sharing the results. ▶ Do the actions taken reflect an accurate understanding of the findings? ▶ Are positive changes created by actions taken? ▶ How to involve stakeholders in the dissemination of findings. Now all results come directly from the evaluator; who holds a position to insure that the results are taken seriously?