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How Integrating Services in Schools
Promotes Student Success

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A brief documenting of the elev8 nm early implementation process.



“Integration is not a destination... It’s a journey.”

Armena Taylor

Court Youth Center,
Elev8 NM Extended Learning Provider

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Working Together to Stabilize a Family in Need

At Gadsden Middle School, a young lady who had previously been on the honor roll began showing signs of depression and disengagement in school. In response, Court Youth Center, an after school provider at the school referred her to Lucy (behavioral health) at the School Based Health Center. One issue was that her Dad did not have money to renew his passport, which impacted his work. Consequently, he was laid off. He is the sole provider in a family of six. Her mom also was experiencing health issues and was taking Dad's meds because she had no health insurance. Lucy uncovered these issues, and referred the family to Family Supports. Family supports got resources to the family to renew Dad's passport so he could continue work. In addition, the family got legal help to address the threats they had been getting about their trailer being removed from its current location. Family Supports also connected the family with home weatherization assistance for the broken windows in their home. By the end of December the student was back on the honor roll, and the family was stabilized.





Documenting the Story of Elev8 New Mexico

The purpose of this brief is to document the unique goals, characteristics, challenges and lessons learned in the early implementation of Elev8 New Mexico, a full-service community school initiative, launched in 2007. This brief can also function as a knowledge base to inform communities and professionals interested in this unique approach.

A full service community school is a partnership among schools, local communities, and public/private entities. It combines the best educational practices with a wide range of vital in-house health and social services to ensure that children are physically, emotionally, and socially supported to learn and succeed.

New Mexico was chosen, with three other locations nationally, in an initiative funded jointly by Atlantic Philanthropies, the New Mexico Community Foundation (NMCF) and other contributors. New Mexico was chosen as a pilot site based on evidence of high socioeconomic need; a rich diversity of populations; strong school leadership that could advance an integrated approach; existing school environments that could best support student learning; and existing best practices that could be adapted to different environments. Furthermore, a strong public/private partnership between the New Mexico Children's Cabinet and the New Mexico Community Foundation existed ensuring that state government and private philanthropy would work together to support the initiative.

The authors of this brief were contracted by the Elev8 NM Initiative Director to provide strategic planning support for the sites as they developed and implemented integrated services. Elev8 program staff played a critical role in convening service providers, developing a framework for integration, and guiding the strategic planning process. Together, Elev8 staff, school leadership, service providers and a team of facilitators worked to develop comprehensive, site-based plans to support school goals, community need and student achievement.

What is Integration?

Integration in the Elev8 context is a collaborative, on-site approach to support middle school students who are at risk. It brings together and synchronizes the efforts of educators, after-school staff, family advocates, health professionals and community-based organizations to address the needs of students and their families. Integration depends on a shared vision and goals, combined resources and unified processes among team members. Integration means that services are delivered without fragmentation or interruption. It also provides the means to follow up with families to evaluate interventions and determine if further support is needed.



Why Integration?

In the best of circumstances, middle school students face daunting challenges as they transition into adolescence, prepare for future careers and juggle social pressures and assumptions. In many New Mexico communities, these challenges are compounded by health problems, high dropout rates, poverty, unemployment and low expectations.

Schools and the communities they serve are pivotal in preparing students for the future, yet their assets are seldom fully utilized, coordinated or connected. Schools are often overlooked as resources that communities can tap into beyond the traditional school day. Vital services within the community can be maximized if they are linked to the school in a meaningful way.

Engaging students, parents and community resources is a very exciting change strategy. Integrating services into sites with existing resources provides access to those who need services most. At the same time, this process can improve student success and overcome many of the economic and social barriers faced by our communities.

Integrating services in schools provides economies of scale, cutting costs and developing greater efficiency. Communities don't have to build new community centers. Critical services can connect with populations that are difficult to reach. Service providers in the school and community can avoid duplicating services and maximize the scope and reach of their programs. Integration also creates opportunities to build new relationships and new connections among organizations and groups that otherwise might not work together. When community members are engaged in identifying and assessing services, then they can connect and build on services that support student achievement.

Integrating services also supports greater efficiencies at the state and local level. Government agencies are constantly exploring ways to improve outcomes for children and families at a reduced cost. Blending funding from public and private sources allows government agencies to maximize their investment in youth and families. Furthermore, integrating services fosters greater partnership between government agencies, school districts, private partners and community members as they work collectively to improve outcomes for youth and their families.



The Crucial Need: New Mexico's Demographics

New Mexico has a diverse population, with 44% Hispanic, 39% Anglo, 10% Native American, 2% African American, 1.4% Asian and Pacific Islanders and 3.2% multiracial. It has the second highest percentage of Native Americans in the country. Over one third of its population speaks a language other than English at home.

New Mexico ranks low in socioeconomic indicators of success. Poor socioeconomic conditions have had a profound effect on the academic success of New Mexico students.

Here are the facts:

- 26% of children under 18 live below the federal poverty level
- 21% of its residents lack health insurance
- New Mexico ranks second in the nation children, ages 6-17, with no health insurance.
- While the national graduation rate is 70%, New Mexico's rate is 60%
- From 2004-2008, 40,000 high school students in the state dropped out.
- 73% of middle school students do not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) as designated by the US Department of Education
- In 2007, New Mexico ranked 48th among the 50 U.S. states in youth who come from single parent families
- Truancy, teen pregnancy, youth violence, and low-educational achievement are outcomes related to the state's poor socioeconomic conditions.

These barriers to academic success are not insurmountable. To improve academic success rates for New Mexico's youth, innovative approaches and strategic partnerships are needed to ensure that youth are healthy, supported and ready to learn. Increasing health equity and reducing health disparities are critical.

Elev8 Community Impact

Albuquerque police report that arrests of students dropped from 60 to zero in the Wilson Middle School Area after the Elev8 extended learning program was instituted.





Helping Communities Come Together to Improve Students' Success

Communities come together for one of three reasons: a crisis, funding or relationships. A community may have an underlying issue or crisis that inspires people to organize, such as gangs or high teen pregnancy rates. The community may bring together research, share concerns, find resources, or create plans and actions to address the crisis. As long as the crisis is acute, community groups have a “common enemy” that unites them. However, when the crisis abates or people burn out, the group will often disband.

The prospect of increased opportunity can also drive community cohesiveness. There are situations in which foundations or grant makers have a particular issue they want to address and provide a pool of funding to organizations or groups who address the issue. Funding can be a positive tool for aligning organizations that might not otherwise collaborate. In fact, nonprofit and educational organizations often compete for limited resources. This competition can inhibit partnerships. Funding sources can create new relationships and opportunities for organizations and groups that they might otherwise have missed.

If organizations and other community members work together and have opportunities to build and strengthen relationships, they are more likely to sustain their efforts. In fact, of the three main reasons organizations and communities come together--crisis, funding or relationships-- it is relationships that are most likely to last and to sustain collaboration and cooperation over time. Relationships can sustain initiatives and partnerships long after the crisis has subsided or the funding has dried up. It is critical that programs and partnerships develop and sustain relationships, as they address community issues.



The Elev8 NM Model

Elev8 has been implemented in four locations nationally to serve middle school youth and their families by providing a powerful combination of services and support to help schools and students succeed. Full-service community schools combine the best educational and youth development practices and partnerships. Elev8 connects vital services including school-based health care, extended learning before and after school and during the summer and family engagement and support services.

The model maximizes the use of public resources and existing space by providing a one-stop shop for support while generating cost savings for schools, families and communities. At the same time, these schools link learning experiences in and out of school to build knowledge, skills and competencies that young people need to succeed in school and in life.

The Elev8 NM model is comprised of complimentary services and supports that include:

- **School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs)** provide students with easily accessible, user-friendly, age-appropriate preventive, primary, mental and dental health care. SBHC services, like behavioral or nutritional counseling, are integrated with extended learning and family services.
- **Extended learning** before and after school, and during the summer offers a diverse choice of relevant, structured learning activities that are engaging, challenging, and connected to the classroom. Extended learning embraces family and culture and encourages creative thinking.
- **Family Engagement and Support** - Family support and resources on school campuses are designed to promote economic stability, good health and continuing education. Family engagement encourages parents to become full partners with the school and increase involvement with their child's education. Collaboration with the school's parent organization and community members provides opportunities to support school goals and advocate for issues important to families.
- **The Family Resource Center** provides a place within the school where parents, grandparents, other family members, and the students themselves can connect to Elev8 NM services and other school opportunities.
- **Policy** - Elev8 NM is based on the belief that all children have a right to an education, quality health care, safety and comprehensive support to help them reach their full potential. Elev8 focuses on changing public policy to close the gap between this vision and reality.



Where is Elev8 NM located?

Elev8 NM is located in urban, rural and tribal communities at five middle school sites in New Mexico: Laguna Middle School; Wilson Middle School; Native American Community Academy (NACA); Gadsden Middle School; and Grant Middle School. The total population served is approximately 2500 students. Each school is distinctive and unique, just like each its picturesque landscape.

Nestled within the Laguna Pueblo, Laguna Middle School is a rural, tribal school whose student population is exclusively (100%) Native American. While in a rural, southern part of the state, Gadsden Middle School is part of the third largest school district in New Mexico encompassing 1400 square miles. Bordering Texas and Mexico, the Gadsden Middle School student body is almost exclusively Latino (98%). Wilson and Grant Middle Schools are urban schools located in Albuquerque, the state's most densely populated city.

The Native American Community Academy is an urban charter school that serves Native American youth from tribal communities throughout the state. In Albuquerque, there are approximately 5,500 Native American Students in the local school system among a total of 80,000 students. NACA offers an integrated curriculum that promotes Native language and culture and supports the growing urban Indian population in Albuquerque.





Building Blocks: Preparation for Integrated Services in Schools

At each middle school site, organizations were selected to provide services for the three essential components:

- After school/extended learning
- School-based health services
- Family supports

The organizations were selected for their expertise and experience in their field. Each organization had its own staff, unique culture and terminology associated with their profession. Most of the organizations were unfamiliar with each other and some had not worked in a school setting. In each school, existing staff including school nurses, counselors and after school workers, provided related services.

With support from the New Mexico Community Foundation, which serves as the project intermediary, team meetings were held to understand the mission and values of each organization and define roles and responsibilities in the program. School leaders and staff were included in this process. Team-building activities built participation and supported the development of personal relationships. At times, school district leadership participated.

Through a facilitated planning process, action plans were developed by component (school-based health, extended learning, family supports) to provide information about essential tasks to initiate and maintain services. Cross-component needs for space, training and data collection were identified and coordinated. District leadership helped to address facility and infrastructure needs.

After the initial planning, site managers were hired to coordinate integration at the school-level, convene providers and school leadership, support each Elev8 school in meeting its goals and objectives and foster team building. Site managers also provided additional capacity-building support in the areas of professional development and budget management.

Project Funder: Intermediary Support

At the systems-level, the intermediary developed action plans to address policy, communication and infrastructure needs. The plans delineated overarching essential tasks needed to support all the school sites and to advance systemic reforms. Overtime, the alignment of systemic goals became more integrated with the goals at the site level.

An integration framework was created based on the initial learning and experience of integration at the local level. The visual was used at site meetings as a reminder about the steps taken thus far to promote integration in schools.

An Advisory Council was created to support and guide this complex initiative, with representatives from state agencies, school districts, and national organizations.



Integration Highlights

Successful integration takes time, perseverance and a shared commitment to meeting the needs of students, families and the community. While there have been many growing pains, several promising practices helped to foster integration. Some of the most notable include:

- **Connecting Elev8 services to school goals.** Through site-based strategic planning, Elev8 NM successfully linked its services to support school goals. Stakeholders developed a shared understanding of how each component can contribute to meeting the school's goals. School leaders gained a better understanding of how Elev8 NM promotes student success. In a sense, connecting Elev8 NM services to school goals provided the anchor that was needed to institutionalize the initiative within the school and community.
- **Technical assistance for facilitation, coaching & documentation.** Elev8 NM made a strong commitment to leverage resources to support integration through facilitation, coaching and the documentation of the integration process at all five Elev8 NM sites. Experienced facilitators helped all the partners build relationships, work through site-level and system-level challenges and fostered equal participation in the decision-making process. Prior to using independent facilitators, site meetings were facilitated by Elev8 Site Managers which put them in the unenviable position of being a driver as opposed to a partner in the decision-making process. Documentation of all facilitated meetings has provided a record of key decisions, strategy and measurable progress towards integration.
- **Cross-site meetings.** Cross-site meetings were implemented in the second year to promote information sharing, share promising practices across sites and address implementation challenges. The meetings are organized by practice area—extended learning, school-based health and family supports—and are comprised of practitioners, school leaders, Elev8 staff and other key stakeholders. The cross-site meetings provide a perspective on what is happening and allow participants to share experiences, relevant data and lessons learned with their peers. The meetings also foster critical thinking and problem solving skills as participants collectively work through challenges experienced in the implementation of the initiative.
- **Site-Based Plans.** Integration happens at multiple-levels, in several places and in distinctive practice areas. To unify goals and objectives, Site-Based plans were developed to provide a coherent vision for student success at each Elev8 school. Within each plan, measurable goals, objectives and actions were linked with school goals. The Site-Based Plans provide a shared accountability system that ensures that all parties are working towards a common vision of student success.



Lessons Learned

Through the planning and implementation process, lessons emerged. They include:

- **Building relationships takes time.** Successful integration depends on building trusting relationships between service providers and the host school. Each sector had its own language and organizational culture and bridging these differences takes time and effort. An insufficient planning period resulted in interpersonal and partnership challenges. Many of these challenges could have been mitigated if there was more time for planning and team building allocated at the beginning. In response, Elev8 NM sites have implemented fun, creative activities, such as a bowling night out, where staff can develop relationships outside of the school structure. Also, shared leadership at site team meetings has allowed each provider to lead discussions and share ownership of the initiative.
- **Well-understood quality indicators are needed for each program.** Full-service, integrated community schools are a fairly recent movement and examples of quality integration are not plentiful. Elev8 NM is implementing quality assessments for each of its three practice areas and is seeking to define what quality integration looks like. In other words, the initiative seeks to answer the question: “what integration processes generate quality integration outcomes?” Greater emphasis on quality service provision increases the likelihood that Elev8 NM meets the targeted needs of its population and establishes a framework to continually assess and refine services.
- **Blending organizational missions into a comprehensive integration framework.** Elev8 NM service providers were chosen for offering “best practices” in their area. Moreover, not a single Elev8 NM provider was born out of the initiative, which basically means that each organization enjoyed varied levels of autonomy in meeting their organizational mission. Many of the Elev8 NM providers have served the local community for 25 years or more. Organizations with long-standing histories tend to have deeply ingrained cultures and traditions that make them slower to adapt to change. In response, Elev8 NM developed an integration framework to facilitate the process of blending individual organizations into a broader framework focused on collaborative effort to achieve student success. The movement from “me” to “we” has been incremental and challenging. However, the combination of quality integration indicators and enduring relationships have helped move the needle towards greater integration.

Eight Key Ingredients to Successful Integration

- **Services are coordinated not just co-located.** Having services co-located within a school is merely a first step towards integration. Successful integration is achieved when services are aligned to core values and emphasize a shared commitment to meeting well-defined outcomes. Coordination of services in schools provides the clarity and commitment of providers in meeting the goals of the school and the surrounding community.
- **Shared ownership, responsibility and accountability.** Developing site-based plans was a strategic step towards sharing ownership and responsibility in meeting school goals. Before taking this step, providers' individual plans were not necessarily aligned with the school or with other provider objectives. The plans also added a level of shared accountability towards meeting school goals that was previously missing.
- **Tie services to support school goals.** When new service providers land in a school, they often focus their efforts on the delivery of their own services. To foster a climate of integration, providers need to focus their efforts on supporting the goals of the school. One simple activity for encouraging this shift is to ask providers to list how they can support each of the school's goals. This activity serves two key purposes. First, service providers become aware of and better connected to the school and its goals. Second, the school can see how services are not peripheral or extracurricular, but support the school to achieve its outcomes.
- **Provide opportunities to develop and strengthen relationships.** Strong relationships help the partners in a full service community school come through the challenges and conflicts that can arise in the integration process. Sometimes dismissed as fluff, relationship-building is a critical component. Relationship building might be common sense but it is not always common practice. Formal and informal opportunities to build relationships, such as regular relationship and team building activities at the beginning of meetings, lunches and potlucks after a meeting, and shared events are critical for creating, strengthening and sustaining integration.



- **Ensure quality service indicators.** In a full-service community school, standards and benchmarks ensure that services provided to the school and community are of the highest quality. Integrating services promotes economies of scale, cutting costs and providing efficient delivery of services. However, if services do not meet sufficient levels of quality, their impact will be minimal.
- **Provide intermediary support.** An intermediary organization provides support to address needs that are common to all sites. Utilizing one organization provides efficiency, maximizes resources and can create a greater impact. Examples of intermediary support may include: group facilitation, strategic planning, communication, professional development, training/technical assistance and aligned policy work.
- **Incorporate community resources and parent assets.** Integration with existing community resources and parent skills and strengths, helps sustain services and create greater ownership and commitment to the school. Incorporating existing resources helps provide a low cost or no cost effort to bring in needed services and a shared ownership to student outcomes.
- **Engage School and District Leaders.** When school and district leaders are engaged, services are better aligned to support school goals. With greater engagement, it is also clear that service providers at a site have a better understanding of the school and the challenges leaders are facing. This understanding helps providers focus their services to support school leaders in their efforts to meet their challenges.





Author Profiles

Carol Pierce has twenty-five years of experience working in the health field in the public and private sectors. She has spent the last eight years providing consultation services to improve organizational performance, conduct qualitative analysis and develop plans to strengthen health status in local communities. Through her work with a wide range of government, private and nonprofit organizations strategic plans have been developed and assessments completed to build on the strengths of people and communities. Prior to her consultation work, Ms. Pierce served as New Mexico Department of Health District One Public Health Director.

Frank Mirabal specializes in research, policy and organizational development work in the areas of education, health care, workforce development and youth development. He has worked with nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, private foundations and private corporations throughout the United States. Frank has authored several publications ranging in topics such as youth civic engagement, career pathways, educational support and youth leadership.

John Linney specializes in services and training in communication, positive youth development, school climate, and organizational development. He has worked with several hundred educational institutions, community partnerships, community and health foundations, and not for profit organizations throughout the United States and Mexico. John has developed numerous publications on the subjects of youth and community development and is co-author of a book focused on reducing bullying and violence in schools to improve school climate and academic achievement.





Elev8 is an initiative of the New Mexico Community Foundation. NMCF helps women, children and families, improves education, provides access to healthcare, and promotes diversity. We help people in every county and grow resources for thriving communities.

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