

January 2008

# JOHN W. GARDNER CENTER *for Youth and Their Communities*

## Examining the Impact of School-Based Family Resource Centers

### Background

Representatives from San Mateo County agencies used the Youth Data Archive to examine the impact of coordinated and comprehensive interventions on improving outcomes for youth and their families. In particular, the Redwood City School District launched a Community Schools Initiative in 2003, creating a network of four pilot Community Schools: Fair Oaks (K-5), Taft (K-5), Hoover (K-8), and Kennedy Middle School (6-8). The focal point of the initiative was the school-based Family Resource Centers (FRCs) that provided a variety of family support services, including child, family, and group mental health counseling, that bridge school, family and community. FRCs were intentionally placed at schools with student populations and families in the most need of supportive services.

### Youth Data Archive Analysis

The John W. Gardner Center (JGC) used the Youth Data Archive to answer two key questions regarding FRCs at the four Community Schools:

- (1) Were the FRCs serving the students in greatest need in the district?
- (2) Is academic improvement linked to receipt of mental health services through Family Resource Centers?

For the analysis, JGC researchers linked FRC enrollment information to school records and information from the San Mateo County Human Services Agency on social service receipt. By combining data from multiple agencies, the analysis generated a broad assessment of how different environments affect youth.

### Findings and Interpretation

The YDA analysis (Figure 1) found that students at the Community Schools, compared to students in other district schools, were more likely to have been:

- participants in the CalWORKs program;
- recipients of free and reduced-price school lunch;
- children of parents who did not graduate from high school; and
- English language learners.

These characteristics – along with others identified in this analysis – are all associated with students' higher risk for school failure. Figure 1 also illustrates some differences between students at the four Community Schools and the remaining twelve elementary and middle schools in the Redwood City School District. As the chart shows, the analysis found that students receiving FRC services were indeed those in greatest need of assistance.

To measure the impact of FRC participation, JGC researchers compared how well FRC participating students' test scores (California Standards Test) improved compared to those of students with similar backgrounds or circumstances at schools without FRCs. Using the Youth Data Archive, JGC researchers compared FRC participants receiving mental health services to a group of similar students at other schools in the district who would have been most likely to receive mental health services were they available at their school sites.

The analysis, as illustrated in Figure 2, shows:

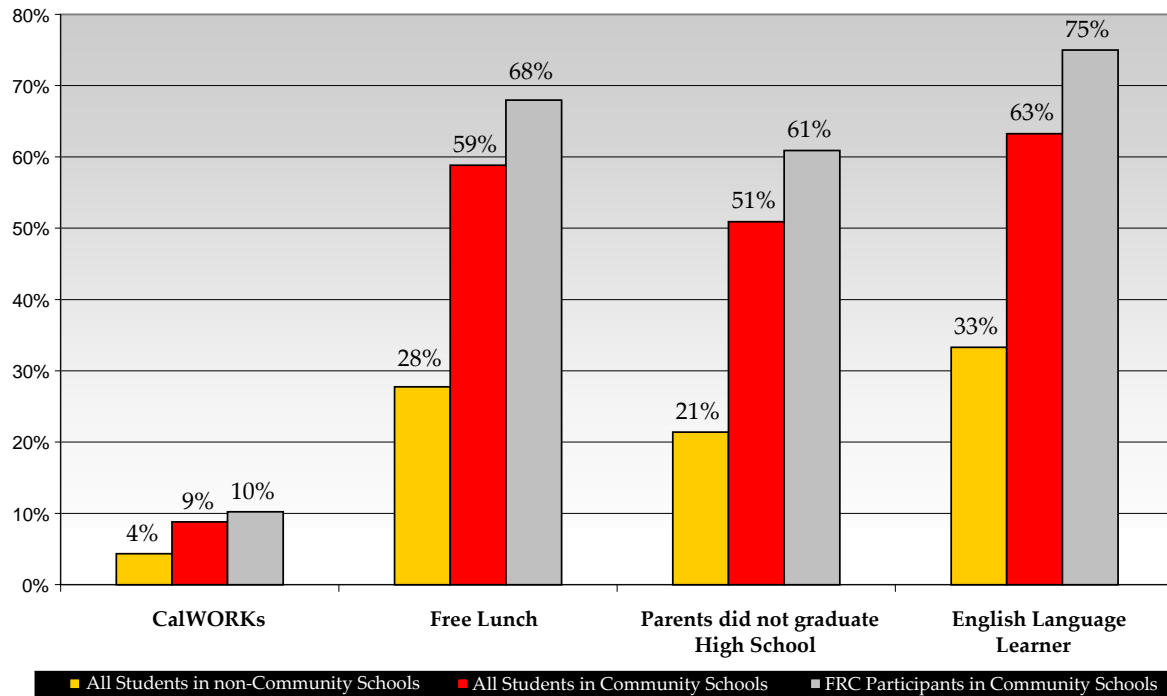
- Students who received FRC mental health services in 2004-2005 had English test scores that improved by 5.4 points more (a statistically significant difference) than their peers who did not have access to a FRC;
- Students who received FRC mental health services in 2004-2005 also had higher Math test scores, but these gains were not statistically significant.

It is important to note these findings only measure one year's change and further analysis will be needed to assess whether or not the improvements are sustained over a longer time frame.

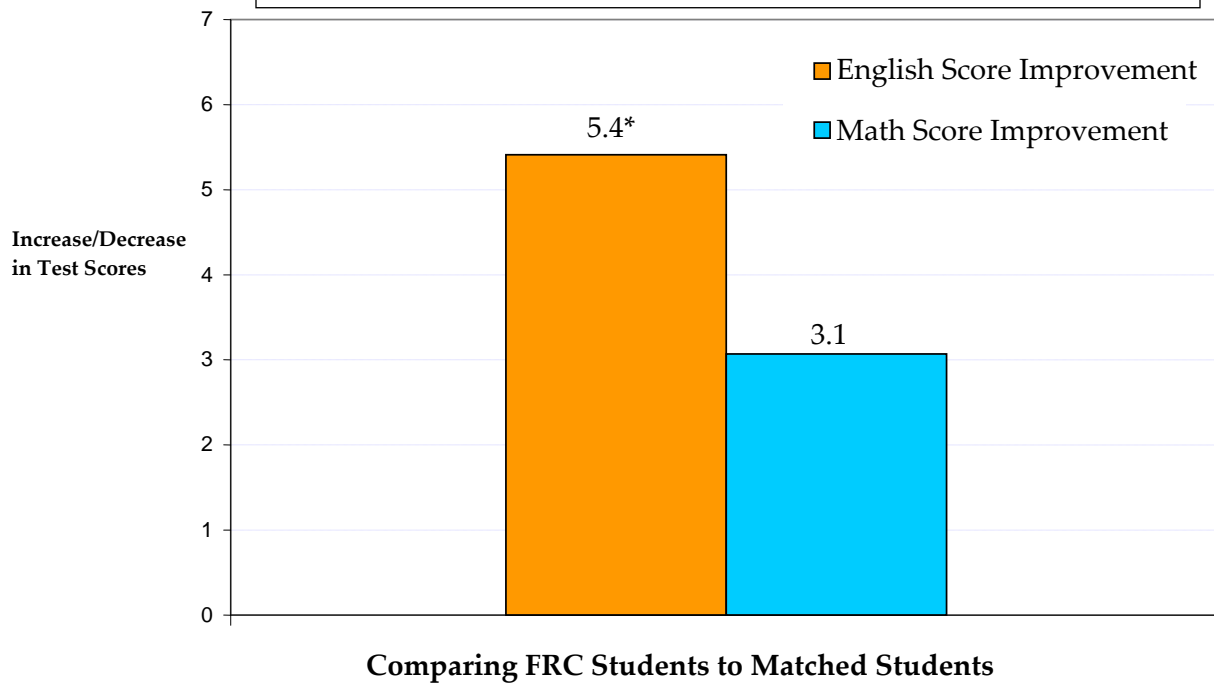
### **Next Steps**

This preliminary analysis indicates that helping at-risk students through FRC services is associated with improved school outcomes, as measured by their test scores. Although FRC students performed better than their comparison group in 2004-05, the John W. Gardner Center plans to use the YDA to continue to follow the progress of these students to understand the long-term effects of FRC interventions on students' academic progress.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Students Classified by Various Categories at Community Schools, Schools Without FRCs, and FRC Participants (2004-2005 School Year)**



**Figure 2 - FRC Mental Health Participation: Estimated Effect on CST Score Changes 2003-04 to 2004-05**



\*Indicates that the change is statistically different from zero at the 95% confidence level.