About this Report

These analyses are the culmination of months of work, which began in the fall of 2019. We’ve taken a comprehensive look at our organization, working closely with Dialogues in Action to learn as much as possible about Connected Lane County’s role in our community: what we’re doing well, how that success has impacted our partners, and what we need to improve.

We interviewed dozens—and surveyed over a hundred—of students, teachers, and community partners this spring, the results of which we’ve analyzed and condensed into this report. We hope you find it as helpful as we have. Thank you to all who participated—we couldn’t have done it without you!

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Description

Through our interviews with nine local students, we learned that Elevate experiences provide students the opportunity, the exposure and the confidence to choose their own career path. By taking students out of a traditional learning environment and showing them the robust industries that exist and excel in our county, students’ eyes are opened to all the local professional opportunities that await them after high school. For many, their Elevate experience confirmed a career goal they held prior to participating and showed them that they could stay local to live out that career goal. For others, their Elevate experience saved them from moving forward with a career that may not be a good fit for them. Chandra, a student at Mohawk High School, participated in a number of Elevate experiences, including internships, job shadows, tours, and our codeORcreate hackathon. These experiences led her to change her mind about her desired career:

“I originally wanted to go into the medical field, and then going on the tech tour...it showed me that I actually really like the law, the software, and computer industries because of the fact that they have a tendency to be really nice with their workers.”

Students like Chandra expressed gratitude for seeing that reality at the beginning of their career path, and still showed an interest in pursuing a different career in the same field. The exposure to—and new understanding of—the exciting careers that lay beyond graduation gives students a deeper purpose for education. More students we interviewed felt the same way—Skylar, a student at Willamette High School, said the following after participating in a tour of Eugene technology companies:

“I think that it’s made me feel more successful, and more directed. I think that prior to the tour and definitely prior to the classes I’ve taken, this idea that one day the kind of carpet was just going to get pulled and I’d be in the real world. Like I think part of the tour is like easing you into it and then part of the classes has really helped give me a staircase out into the real world instead of just a steep wall.”
Having a concrete career goal motivates students to stay the course and to be intentional about the classes they choose to best prepare them for their dream career path, as well as fostering engagement with their curriculum. Many students suffer from the feeling of “irrelevance” that outdated curriculum provides—the age-old question of “when will I use this in real life?” that so many disengaged students feel is something that Elevate seeks to alleviate. By providing concrete experiences that they can map their classroom learning onto, we hope to increase student engagement and graduation rates for Lane County students.

**Interpretation**

When coordinating our student interviews, we chose to over-sample historically underserved groups like rural students and girls. 60% of our interviewees are students in rural school districts and 60% identify as female. Of the nine interviews, we managed to speak with students from nine different districts. We also chose to intentionally capture student voices with varied levels of exposure to Elevate and our programs. We interviewed a range of students, from those with the most basic level of experience in our programs, like participation on an industry tour, to those who have participated in multiple Elevate events throughout their high school career, like job shadows, tours, and internships. We found that Elevate experiences helped change students’ perspectives on what careers were available to them in the Lane County area:

> “Through the tour I took with Elevate, I learned about a couple of local companies that were accepting people with my degree that I was planning on going into. I learned that there’s a wide variety of uses for my degree. I had actually planned on going to Lane for computer science before the tour. But the tour really solidified that like I could do it locally, I didn’t have to move somewhere else, I didn’t have to go to a big city.”

—Skylar

This was surprising to us as a team—we weren’t aware that students wished that their desired careers would be available locally, as so many seem to want to leave their hometowns and create their own lives away from what they’re used to. But it was somewhat uplifting to hear this isn’t the case—it could be partially motivated by financial restraints, as pursuing local careers allows students to live with their families and continue to receive support from people they already know. In addition, it’s a selling point to our industry partners that the experiences they provide to students will likely benefit them too in the long run, as (at least a portion) of the students they work with will return to work for them after they graduate.
Significance

The importance of what we heard from students in these interviews cannot be understated. Over the course of our interviews with them, we’ve learned that our Elevate program is doing exactly what it was designed to do—create meaningful career-connected learning opportunities for students. The foundational tenets of the program are to:

- **Expose** students to multiple industries and the career paths within them
- **Help** students experience multiple paths to find the one best suited to them
- **Build** confidence in students so they feel empowered enough to advocate for themselves
- **Guide** students to see the relevance of their education to their life after high school

Additionally, we heard from several girls and students of color who mentioned how impactful it was for them to see themselves represented in the professional world—interactions that they wouldn’t have had without first-hand experiences. We heard students confirm the new skills we want them to have as they shared about their experiences with Elevate and how their mindset, goals, commitment to school, and confidence evolved after being involved in our program.
Description

Through our interviews with eight local educators, we heard that Elevate programs are expanding horizons through the facilitation of educator and industry collaboration. Teachers named their externship experiences, the CTE advisory boards, and the connections to post-secondary education as some of the catalysts of this collaborative work and growth. Connecting to industry through externships provided important relationship building opportunities between teachers and specific community partners, as well as insight into different industries. The educators we interviewed also identified the importance of exposure to local industry for building relevant curriculum. Furthermore, they expressed this exposure to industry through a tour or a job shadow caused a snowball effect for students, as students who participated in the Elevate event would share their experience and what they learned with peers who did not participate.

Multiple teachers noted the importance of educator networks, whether the network connected educators to community partners or to educators at other schools and districts. They also highlighted how Elevate programs brought out student voice through hands-on activities, advisory boards, and showcases like the codeORcreate hackathon. Elevate’s commitment to making our experiences accessible to rural communities was of note to both our rural and urban educators. Overall, they expressed that Elevate was breaking down barriers for students and for educators.

“I was like, okay, what I’m doing is helpful. I mean, you’re guiding these kids to their future, and so many of them, especially being down here, they don’t even have a clear path of what they want to do. Those tours give me an opportunity to give them insight into things they might want to do for their life.” - Angela Dennis, Creswell School District

In addition to the successes, the educators expressed challenges as well. They brought up how difficult it is to access disengaged students, even with targeted outreach. They also discussed with us the conflict between time and resources - or lack thereof. Despite building community connections
and learning new skills and activities to bring to students, teachers face a lack of time and resources to accomplish everything they would like to achieve. Educators from Siuslaw High School in particular talked about the desire to support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and students in alternative education, but described the barriers to figuring out how to make career-connected experiences accessible for this demographic, such as the gap in communication between educators and industry partners when it comes to accessibility.

Interpretation

Our interviews with educators demonstrated that exposure to industry has various levels of impact. Not only did educators talk about the tangible effects that building relationships with community partners had on their students and curriculum, they also expressed that they had seen personal growth in themselves, whether through realizing that their math curriculum might need to expand to include relevant activities and examples, or realizing that their role as a counselor affected students in big, life-changing ways.

“And then coming out of those summer experiences, I could really directly talk to specific skills, which were really great. Not just about the tech experience or food and beverage manufacturing...but really talking about skill.” - Amy Stranieri, Thurston High School

Through speaking to both rural and urban teachers, we confirmed that Elevate’s mission to make our programs accessible to rural schools has been successful. Despite this success, we also gathered that there are still barriers to be broken down for teachers and students. For students, we still need to figure out how to make our programs accessible to disengaged students and students with disabilities. For teachers, we heard that many still struggle to balance time and resources, especially when it comes to collaborating with community partners and building relevant curriculums.

“I think I am in the process of growing as an educator, but it’s not visible from the outside yet. I can tell from the conversations I’m having with people in my school about, “hey this computer science class is going to be a good thing, this data science class is going to be a good thing, and it’s okay to let go of calculus for a little bit.” - Ken Best, Fern Ridge School District
While Elevate’s programs for teachers were named as removing barriers in this regard, the changing world of education is still a challenge for our teachers. They work within a system that is simultaneously very fixed (curriculum that is slow to change and financial constraints exist that keep it from being improved quickly) and very liquid (generational culture gaps change fast and without notice, and new approaches need to be adopted to address those gaps as student culture shifts). We want to help equip teachers with those tools and fill in the gaps that the broader school system creates.

**Significance**

In our interviews with educators we found that Elevate is doing exactly what is designed to do. However, we recognize that in order to continue to be effective, it is essential that local educators both buy-in to the program and feel supported by us in their own development. What we heard in the interviews with educators was further affirmation of the importance of our experiences for students, recognition and confirmation that our work with teachers providing networking opportunities and training is the correct path. We also heard that while our programs for students are effective they are not reaching all students. On one level, it is validating that the educators we interviewed recognize the value of Elevate experiences and want to ensure that they are accessible to all students, but more importantly it identifies a gap in our programming which we need to address.
Description

We conducted interviews with eight community partners, with representation from the economic development, construction, manufacturing, technology, natural resources, architecture, government, and social services industries. In these interviews, our partners expressed how important it is to them that Elevate experiences are well-planned and do not require a heavy lifting on the part of the business or organization. They also identified that Elevate is action-based and worth the time and energy contributed by the partner. More so, our reputation as an organization that is responsive and follows through on our commitments has helped build trust among our stakeholders.

Another theme we heard was that industry partners feel like they were working more effectively as a community and communicating better with schools. Having connections to teachers and dedicated space and time to collaborate has also changed their thinking about the schools in Lane County and industry’s responsibility to invest in youth. Through Elevate experiences, community partners can see and talk to youth, and recognize the role of youth in the future workforce. They also explained that they are telling better stories about their organization and work through various levels of engagement with educators and students.

Furthermore, we learned that industry partners are not aware of and have not seen the embodiment of Elevate’s mission to provide opportunities for marginalized youth through our programs. We see this as an opportunity to bolster community awareness about the inequities that marginalized youth face, so that in turn, our business partners are inspired to shift their company culture and (re)write policies to promote diversity and equity. Elevate opportunities are available to all students, but adhering to our mission and focusing efforts on our most marginalized students will help increase representation in fields that are currently overrepresented by specific demographics (technology, construction, etc.).
Interpretation

From the interviews with our community partners, we were able to glean that our programs are filling a gap between education and industry. Historically, industry and education have worked in silos, with students failing to see the relevance of their learned curriculum to their postsecondary selves, and industry partners failing to see why students are arriving at these jobs ill equipped for the workforce.

Now that more of our partners are aware of why this disconnect exists, many commented on their greater understanding of the education system and their plans to increase their investment in youth:

“(We are) more passionate about student success. Because I hear about so many constraints, permissions, it has opened my eyes to the complexities of education. Instead of feeling beat down, it fires me up to do more. We need to be in it for the sake of the kids.”
- Avril Watt, JCI

By referencing programs such as job shadows, industry tours, and internships, we saw that having quality face-to-face interactions with students and educators has deepened the commitment of industry partners to youth. Moreover, our organizational skills and efficacy in collaboration have allowed industry to see value in working with us beyond just a financial gain for their companies. Ashley Espinoza, from Lane Workforce Partnership:

“Greatest thing ever. Efficiency- and action-based. We say we are going to do something and it happens. Once the group agrees on the actions, they do it. They do a great job setting expectations. It’s not just an idea floating in the area. You want to tell industry to participate because you can see measurable outcomes.”

Some of our questions inquired about any policy changes around diversity and equity in our partner organizations that they may have implemented as a result of working with CLC and Elevate. Our respondents did not indicate that they had changed or added any policies regarding this; one reason for this might be that they already had a diversity policy in place, but this reveals to us that we need to focus on making our messaging about centering marginalized youth clear in our programs.
Significance

Community partnerships are essential to our programs. In this context it is important that our partners recognize the gravity of community participation and find value in participating in our experiences. From our findings, our community partners find their collaborations with us to be worth their time:

“Closest thing we are going to get to a backbone for this kind of work. Elevate is leading the work of collaboration, the only org that has any hope that can actually do at least 10% of everything we need to do. Elevate is crucial. It needs to be a part of a longer organization and fully funded. It’s everything it was ascribed to be.” - John Stapleton

If we are to continue to incentivize partners to work with Elevate, we need to prioritize keeping our organizational efficacy as a selling point of our community partnerships.

As an organization, we want to continue prioritizing marginalized and underserved youth; however, what we heard from our interviews with community partners is that we must call that out explicitly. If we want to encourage and lead change in this area we need to do a better job of ensuring that our partners recognize and understand our approach. Businesses rarely make decisions that don’t benefit them materially, and we need our community partners to understand that prioritizing historically underserved groups is not philanthropy, it is a necessary part of building a future-proofed workforce.
Project Impact: Quantitative Data

In the Project Impact process quantitative data serves four purposes:

- Corroborates qualitative data,
- Add new features to the analysis,
- Reveals a separate idea,
- Or, contradicts qualitative data.

In our analysis, the results of the three surveys provided to three different stakeholder groups overwhelmingly tends to corroborate the data collected in the qualitative process.

Students (17 Respondents)

Elevate hopes to empower and help students to build confidence while learning about their options for the future. During our interviews with students we found clear evidence that these aims are being met. Our qualitative data is supported by the quantitative data collected via our student survey. The confidence level of students increased in multiple areas, suggesting they feel empowered to advocate for themselves, and see the relevance of their education to their life after high school.

Students indicated that their confidence in their post-secondary options increased significantly following their participation in Elevate. The percentage of our student respondents expressing that they were “very confident” or “confident” following their Elevate participation increased 18 percentage points (Table 1). While the mean confidence score increased by over 20%, from 2.81 to 3.38 (Table 2).

![Chart](chart.png)

Table 1: Effect of Elevate Participation upon Student Confidence in Their Post-Secondary Options
Students who participated in Elevate programs also indicated that participation had increased their belief in the importance of high school and their excitement about their future (Table 3).

Table 2: Effect of Elevate Participation upon Student Confidence in Their Post-Secondary Options

Table 3: Effect of Elevate Participation upon Student Belief and Excitement
In our interviews with teachers they noted that there is value in students being able to explore a career and discovering that it is not for them. This is an unintended, but clearly important, consequence of our mission to help students experience multiple paths to find the one best suited to them. Interestingly, in this context, 47% of Students stated that their career interest had changed since participating in Elevate.

**Educators (41 Respondents)**

Elevate believes that the experiences of students are directly impacted by educator enthusiasm and participation. Meaningful and relevant experiences for all stakeholders are key to this process. The responses to our educator survey suggest we are succeeding in this mission, with 93% of our 41 responding educators indicating Elevate programs are “meaningful and relevant.” This is further supported by the wide range programs in which respondents have participated (Table 4) and the fact that 61% of respondents had participated in multiple Elevate programs.

![Table 4: Educator Participation by Elevate Program](image)

The likelihood of our respondents encouraging their students to participate in a wide variety of Elevate experiences (Table 5) also speaks to the perceived meaning and relevance of the programs. Importantly, 88% of educators indicated they had recommended multiple Elevate experiences to their students.

The educators we interviewed noted the importance of exposure and change in building a meaningful and relevant curriculum. Elevate is intentional in attempting to provide this type of experience for teachers. Our quantitative data suggests that we are being successful in this aim, with 80% of educators reporting that their perspective on relevant curriculum changed as a result of participating in Elevate.
Elevate believes that curriculum should be influenced by student needs and requirements. A significant number of our survey respondents noted the influence of student needs and input in their responses to our question as to how they have modified their curriculum to be more student-focused. Educators also reported an increase in their understanding of and connection to their students as a result of participating in Elevate events (Table 6).
The importance of Elevate in promoting and enhancing collaboration, both within the education and wider community was emphasized by the educators we interviewed as part of our study. This point is also confirmed by our survey responses, with 73% of respondents stating that since being a part of Elevate they have increased their community partner/educator partnerships. Elevate’s commitment to rural students and communities was mentioned by partners we interviewed and this is further emphasized by the fact that over 50% of our survey respondents were from the 13 rural districts, which hints at a positive connection between educators in these districts and the program.

Educators reported a “snowball effect” in relation to their students and Elevate events. They suggested participating students shared their experience with their contemporaries increasing interest and excitement in the program. Our quantitative data suggests that a similar effect is occurring within the education community, with 88% of educators indicating they had talked to non-participating educators about Elevate (Table 7).

![Bar chart showing number of educators sharing about Elevate](image)

Table 7: Number of Educators Speaking to Colleagues about Elevate and Number of Colleagues with which they have spoken

### Community (43 Respondents)

A key finding from our interviews with Elevate partners in the local community is that our partners felt they are working better as a community and communicating with schools better as a result of participating in Elevate. This is supported by the quantitative data, with 67% of Community respondents stating they have increased their community partner/educator partnerships. Partners also emphasized that Elevate events are well planned and worth their investment. While this latter assertion was not explicitly addressed by the survey the wide range of events in which respondents have participated, coupled with the fact that over 40% of respondents had participated in more than one experience, hints at the value they place in the program (Table 8).
A similar “snowball effect” as described by educators in relation to students and apparently present in our data around educators appears to also be present in relation to community partners, with 58% of respondents indicating they had talked to new partners about Elevate (Table 9). This phenomenon also points to the value placed in the program by these referring partners.

Elevate prioritizes working with marginalized youth in our programs, however, through our interviews, we learned that we have not communicated this well to our community partners. This discovery is also present in our quantitative results (Table 10) with respondents suggesting participation in Elevate programs has had little effect upon outreach to or awareness of historically marginalized groups. While interviewees indicated interactions with students had changed their attitudes around a number of issues related to education and the workforce this did not have a significant impact in re-
lation to marginalized students. Only 26% of Community respondents stated interaction with Elevate students changed how their organization values historically marginalized groups.

Despite these disappointing numbers, which suggest we need to do a better job of communicating this component of our mission to our community partners, it is worth noting that over a third of our respondents (37%) indicated that since partnering with Elevate their organization had shifted some policies around diversity and equity. The majority of these had shifted more than one policy. (Table 11)
Three Word Responses

Both educators and community partners were asked to provide three words which described how their partnership with Elevate has changed their feelings about opportunities for students. In both cases, the words selected, as shown in these “word clouds”, echoed many of those our analysis showed were used during the interviews.

Educator Response

Community Response