

# RESEARCH & EVALUATION

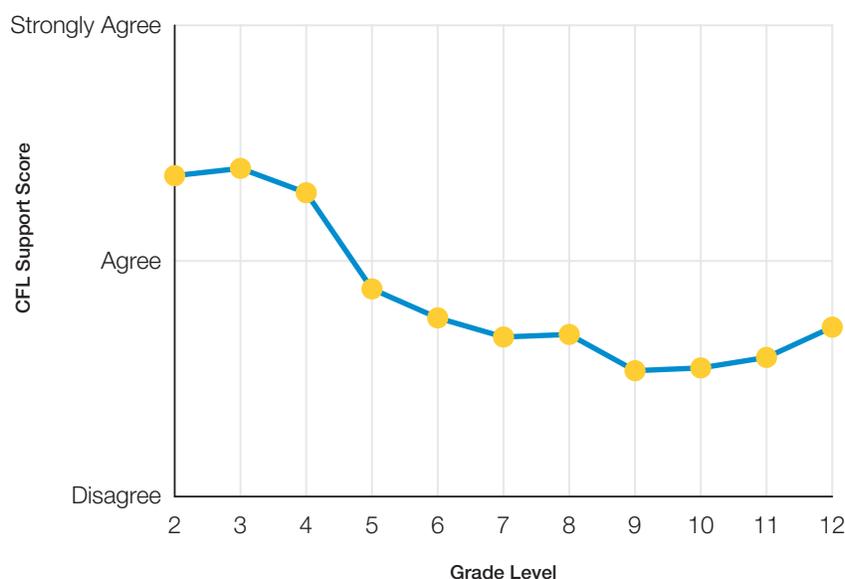
## Student Support Research Brief

This report describes new research on student support in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) and offers recommendations for how to make students feel better supported. Student support refers to how much students feel listened to, cared about, and helped by teachers and other adults in the school. Teachers make students feel better supported when they notice if a student is having trouble and provide extra help if needed.

### How Supported Do Students Feel At School?

In grades 2–4 (elementary), students in CMSD, on average, feel supported based on the support score on the Conditions for Learning (CFL) survey (Figure 1). In the middle grades and in high school, the average student response to questions about support falls between “disagree” and “agree” (on a 4-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). For example, one statement on the CFL regarding support is, “My teachers really care about me.” Students report feeling most supported in grade 2, with a decline across the elementary and middle grades and low point in grade 9.

Figure 1. CMSD Students' Perceived Student Support, by Grade

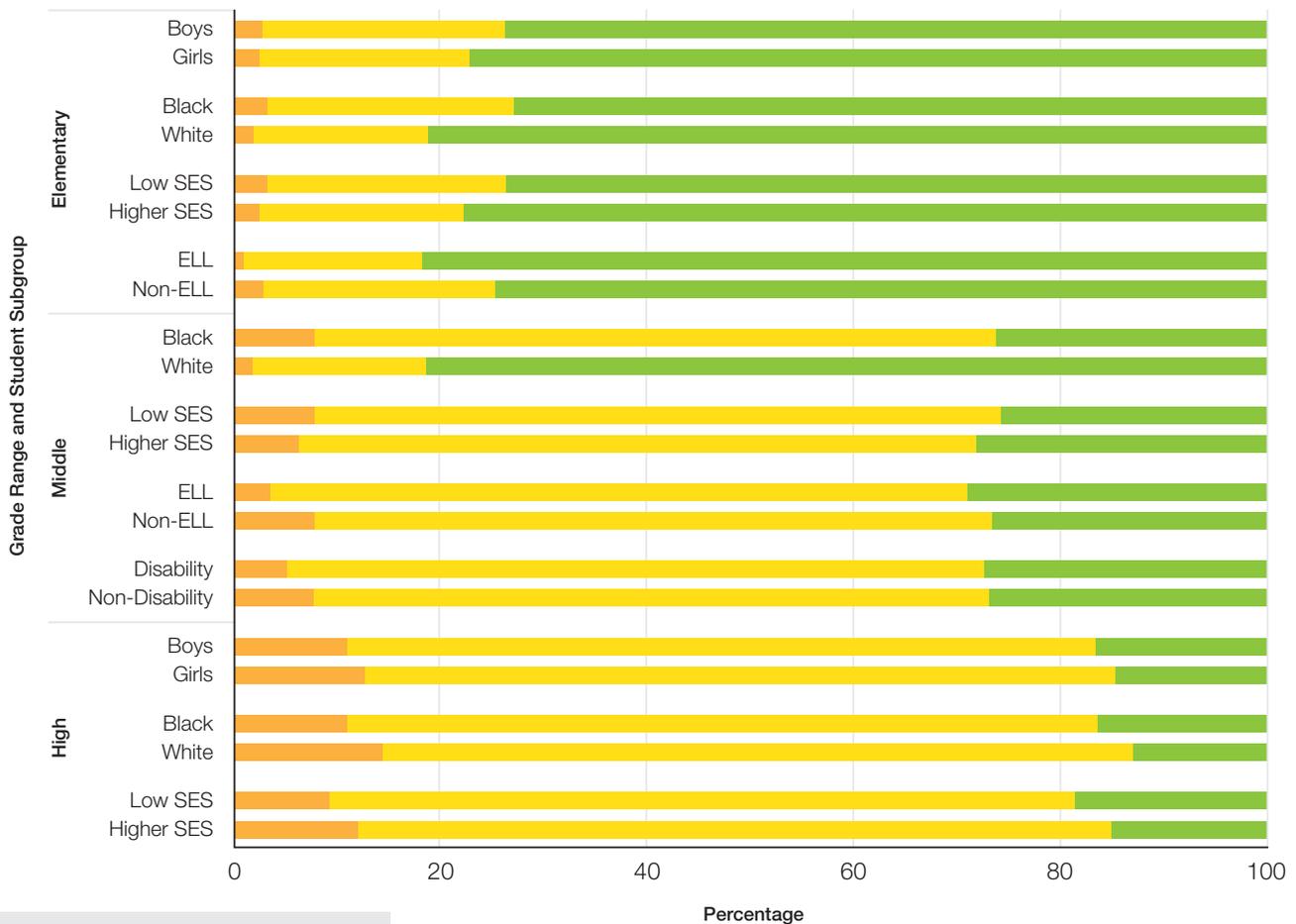


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Across CMSD's schools, there are some important gaps in perceptions of support among different student subgroups (see Figure 2). For instance:

- In elementary school, girls feel more supported than boys do, but in high school boys report feeling more supported than girls. There is not a significant difference in perceived support between boys and girls in middle school (grades 5–8).
- There are gaps in perceptions of student support between Black and White students: in elementary and middle school, Black students report feeling significantly less supported than White students do. In high school, the reverse is true.
- In elementary and middle school, students who come from lower-socioeconomic status (SES) neighborhoods (where the median household income is less than \$30,000 per year) report feeling less supported by adults at school than students from higher-SES neighborhoods. There is no gap between these groups in high school.
- In elementary and middle school, English language learner students report more support than their non-ELL peers.
- In middle school and high school, students with disabilities report feeling more supported than students without disabilities.

**Figure 2. Significant Differences in Perceived Student Support among CMSD Student Subgroups across All District Schools**



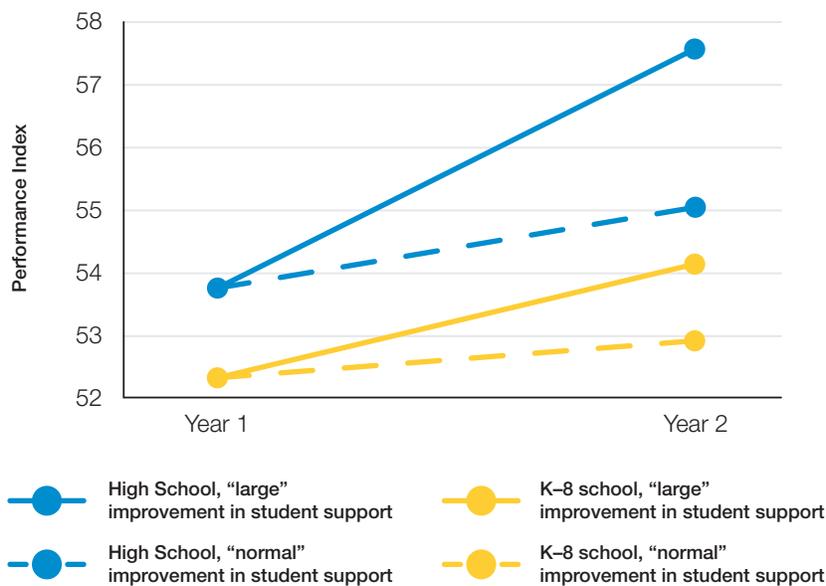
**Note:** Only statistically significant subgroup differences are shown;  
SES = socioeconomic status

Very Unsupported    Unsupported    Supported    Very Supported

## Student Support and School Performance

A CMSD school in which students feel more supported is a better performing school. For CMSD K–8 schools, support (the average of all CFL support scores among students in a school) is linked with performance index (PI) and attendance rate. Every school year, the typical CMSD school’s average support score goes up or down about a tenth of a point. A CMSD primary school that improves its support by this “normal” amount from one year to the next would expect its PI to improve 0.7 points (see Figure 3) and its attendance rate to improve 0.2 percentage points. However, if the same school improved its support score a “large” but reasonable amount (say three tenths of a point), its PI would be expected to go up 1.8 points and its attendance rate to go up 0.5 percentage points. These analyses accounted for any changes in schools’ demographics and enrollment.

**Figure 3. Change in an Average CMSD K-8 and High School’s Performance Index from One Year to the Next Associated with “Normal” and “Large” Improvements in Student Support**



**Note:** A “large” improvement in student support is a 0.3-point improvement in the average CFL support score; a “normal” improvement is a 0.1-point improvement

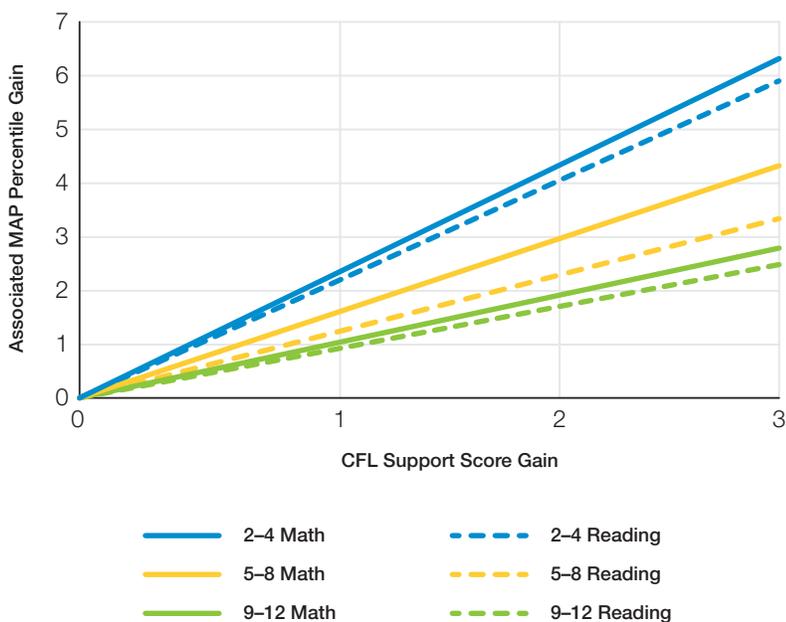
For CMSD high schools, the link between support and performance is even stronger. A CMSD high school that improves its student support by a “normal” amount from one year to the next would expect its PI to improve 2.2 points and its attendance rate to improve 1.8 percentage points. If the same school improved its support score a “large” amount, its PI would be expected to go up 3.8 points and its attendance rate to go up 3.1 percentage points. Such an improvement in PI from 2016–17 to 2017–18 would have moved two CMSD high schools from an F to a D grade on PI, one school from a D to a C, and three schools from a C to a B.

“ Improving students’ feelings of support at school may bring with it an increase in their academic achievement ”

## Student Support and Student Performance

Across all grade levels, CMSD students who view adults in their school as more supportive have higher math and reading achievement. From one marking period to the next, if a student's perception of support increases by one point on the CFL survey (for example goes from an average of "agree" to "strongly agree"), her achievement is expected to increase by between 1 and 2 percentile points on the math and reading Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests (see Figure 4). Student support matters most for the achievement of students in elementary and middle school, and math achievement relates more strongly to support than reading achievement.

Figure 4. Associated Gain in a CMSD Student's MAP Percentile for Gains in CFL Support Scores, by Grade Range and Subject



“ A CMSD high school that improves its student support by a ‘normal’ amount from one year to the next would expect its PI to improve 2.2 points and its attendance rate to improve 1.8 percentage points ”

If a CMSD student's perception of support were to move from the lowest to the highest value (a 1 to a 4), her achievement would be expected to improve:

- 6.3 percentiles in math and 5.9 in reading in elementary school;
- 4.3 in math and 3.4 in reading in middle school; and
- 2.8 in math and 2.5 in reading in high school.

In short, improving students' feelings of support at school may bring with it an increase in their academic achievement.

## Student Support and Student Attendance and Behavior

CMSD students across all grade levels attend school more often when they feel more supported by adults at school. In a 180-day school year, if a middle or high school student's perception of support increases by one point on the CFL survey (for example goes from an average of "agree" to "strongly agree") from the preceding year, she is predicted to attend about two additional days of school. An elementary student whose perception of support increases by one point is predicted to attend about one additional day of school. Furthermore, students across all grade levels receive fewer discipline referrals when they view their school as more supportive.

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## How to Improve Student Support

According to the Humanware department, there are a number of measures that school can take to improve student support. These include:

- Social and emotional learning curricula like the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program. These curricula have the strongest evidence for improving student support. Lesson may address such topics as problem-solving, conflict-resolution, bullying, and anger management.
- Connecting students with service providers in the surrounding community to help deal with more serious physical and mental health-related issues.
- Ensuring that school rules are fair and consistently enforced.
- Fostering more parent involvement at school.
- Encouraging school-based adults to be approachable, caring, and respectful toward students.
- Considering student perspectives on what they consider effective support at school.
- Contacting the Humanware team at CMSD for information about available resources and supports.

Given the student subgroup differences in perceptions of support noted above, schools should consider how these measures may affect different types of students. For example, if girls find their school to be less supportive than boys, it may be important to make connections with outside service providers that offers services to girls, in particular.

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