ELEVATE
USA

THE COST OF PAYING ATTENTION

Every Kid is Worth it

IMPACT REPORT
2025-2026

OUR MISSION

Every Kid is Worth it

BUILDING LONG-TERM, LIFE-CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH, EQUIPPING THEM TO THRIVE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR COMMUNITY.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

DEAR FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF ELEVATE,

America's young people are telling us something. Too many are struggling with loneliness, disconnection and uncertainty about their future. **The question is whether we are paying attention.**

Years ago, as a Teacher-Mentor, I taught a student named Michael. One morning, he came into class visibly shaken. Because I knew him well, I immediately noticed. I stepped into the hallway with him and asked what was wrong. Michael broke down.

That morning, Michael's father had boarded the city bus and sat across from him. They had not seen each other since Michael was six years old. His father looked directly at him, but never spoke. "He looked right through me," Michael kept saying.

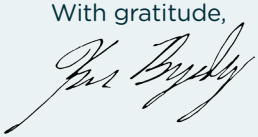
At first, it seemed like Michael was asking for something that cost nothing. He simply wanted his father to see him. But I've come to believe there is a reason we call it *paying* attention. **Truly seeing another person costs time and consistency.** It requires us to slow down, and care enough to notice when something has changed.

That is what Elevate Teacher-Mentors do every day. They show up. They learn students' names and stories. They celebrate their growth, challenge them toward their potential and remain present through the hard days.

None of that happens without you. Your generosity makes this kind of attention possible. Because of your investment, students like Michael are known, supported and reminded that their lives have tremendous value.

Thank you for paying attention with us. Every kid is worth it.

With gratitude,



Kevin Byerley
CEO, Elevate USA

The Reality We Cannot Ignore

Before we could measure whether young people were thriving, we had to understand what thriving actually looks like. So Elevate listened to thousands of students, parents, educators and community members in the places we serve.

THROUGH RESEARCH, FOUR AREAS EMERGED:

1 **EDUCATION**

2 **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH**

3 **CHARACTER**

4 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Together, they give us a picture of what young people need to thrive. But when we look at young people across our country through that same lens, the reality demands our attention.

THE REALITY

EDUCATION	**28%** of U.S. public school students are chronically absent, missing at least 10% of the school year.[1]
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH	**40%** of U.S. high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.[2]
CHARACTER	**1 in 4** young people say they have little or no idea what their life's purpose is.[3]
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	**45%** of U.S. high school students do not feel closely connected to people at school.[4]

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Program Delivery

HOW THE WORK HAPPENS

MENTORING
Trusted adults guide and support students, who then become mentors

ACCREDITED CLASSES
Curriculum on character qualities and life skills that counts toward graduation

ADVENTURE
Experiential learning that builds resilience and confidence

COLLEGE & CAREER
Exposure to college, careers, and possibilities after high school

IN-SCHOOL
OUT OF SCHOOL

Student Outcomes

HOW STUDENTS GROW

EDUCATION SUCCESS
Engagement and a Plan for the Future

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH
Confidence, Resilience, Belonging

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT
Integrity, Responsibility, Service

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Commitment to Support Others

ATTENTION AT SCALE

20	128	158	12,717
CITIES	SCHOOLS	TEACHER-MENTORS	STUDENTS REACHED

ATTENTION, PAID OVER TIME

SERVING STUDENTS FROM 4TH GRADE THROUGH GRADUATION.

ATTENTION THAT'S FELT

3/4 OF ELEVATE STUDENTS REPORT THAT THEIR TEACHER-MENTOR CARES DEEPLY ABOUT THEM.

1/4 OF STUDENTS NATIONALLY SAY ADULTS AT SCHOOL CARE ABOUT THEM "A LOT".[5]

DID YOU KNOW?

60% of Elevate youth have **held a leadership role** in the past 12 months.

“ELEVATE HAS TAUGHT ME TO TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MY ACTIONS AND NOT MAKE EXCUSES FOR MY MISTAKES.”

— ELEVATE METRO KC
GRADE 12

THE EVIDENCE

What Happens When We Pay Attention

We don't have to guess whether students are thriving. We can measure it. Across the four areas our communities identified as essential to thriving, Elevate students are showing meaningful outcomes. Comparing their progress with national benchmarks helps put those outcomes in context.

EDUCATION SUCCESS

ARE THEY PREPARED FOR WHAT'S NEXT?

ELEVATE STUDENTS

69%

of Elevate seniors **plan to go to college.**

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

39% of urban high school students **plan to go to college.**[6]

Why it Matters:
More education is associated with higher earnings, greater employment stability and dramatically higher lifetime earnings.

DID YOU KNOW?

$1.2 million more in lifetime earnings for bachelor's-degree holders compared to high school graduates.[7]

"The greatest barrier I worked through with Elevate was the university application process and self-doubt, but with support, I overcame it, and was accepted into a private university with multiple scholarships."

— ELEVATE BRIDGEPORT STUDENT, GRADE 12

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH

CAN THEY NAVIGATE LIFE IN A HEALTHY WAY?

ELEVATE STUDENTS

84%

of Elevate students **take responsibility for their actions.**

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

67%

of U.S. middle and high school students **report accepting and taking personal responsibility.**[8]

Why it Matters:
Ownership and self-control in kids predicts adult health, financial stability, and lower risks of substance dependence and criminal offending.[9]

"Elevate has taught me the importance of taking responsibility for my actions and showing others you can be trusted and be a good example."

— ELEVATE ORLANDO STUDENT, GRADE 11

CHARACTER

DO THEY BELIEVE THEY CAN DO HARD THINGS?

ELEVATE STUDENTS

80%

believe they can achieve their future goals.

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

76%

believe they have a great future ahead.[10]

Why it Matters:
Self-efficacy, or "I believe I can do this," is a strong predictor of college performance and persistence.[11]

"My experience with Elevate has been positive. It has helped me grow and build confidence. It also pushed me to step outside of my comfort zone."

— ELEVATE SAVANNAH STUDENT, GRADE 11

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ARE THEY MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR OTHERS?

ELEVATE STUDENTS

73%

of students **participate in community action projects.**

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

39% of U.S. high school students **participate in community service.**[12]

Why it Matters:
Longitudinal research links youth volunteering with higher educational attainment and income, as well as better mental health later in life.[13]

"Elevate gave me the chance to lead and teach kids in elementary school and even in the summer kids from around the city."

— ELEVATE NEW ENGLAND STUDENT, GRADE 11

THE CURRICULUM

13 Character Qualities and Life Skills

Every accredited class in every city returns to the same thirteen throughlines — practiced, modeled, and taught back across grade levels.

01
LEADERSHIP
We can motivate others to accomplish a common goal.

02
DECISION MAKING
We can evaluate and make good choices.

03
INTEGRITY
We live out our values consistently.

04
GOAL SETTING
We can set deadlines for our dreams.

05
CAREER MINDED
We have a plan for what happens after graduation.

06
COMMUNICATION
We can clearly share our thoughts and ideas with others.

07
CARING
We meet others in their place of need.

08
PROBLEM SOLVING
We can recognize a challenge and create a positive solution.

09
RESPONSIBILITY
We fulfill our commitments faithfully.

10
POSITIVE WORK ETHIC
We work with all of our heart.

11
VISION
We plan for and commit to a better future.

12
COURAGE
We take a risk to do good.

13
RESPECT
We honor ourselves, others, and the world around us.

“ELEVATE HAS PREPARED ME TO BE A LEADER BY PUTTING ME IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AND TEACHING ME HOW I CAN BE A GOOD LEADER TO OTHERS IN MY COMMUNITY.”

— ELEVATE NAVAJO
GRADE 12

Paying Attention Beyond Graduation

For the first time, we're beginning to study what happens next. For years, we've measured what happens while students are in Elevate. Now, through the National Student Clearinghouse and a new longitudinal research model, we can begin following alumni beyond high school: where they go, whether they persist and what thriving looks like over time.

99.2%

of Elevate students plan to take a next step after high school — college, work, military service or volunteering.

There is more than one path to a thriving future. This first alumni dataset examines postsecondary education. Future studies will expand our view to workforce, trades, military service and other career pathways.

97%

of Elevate alumni who enrolled in college persisted to their second year in the 2022 cohort.

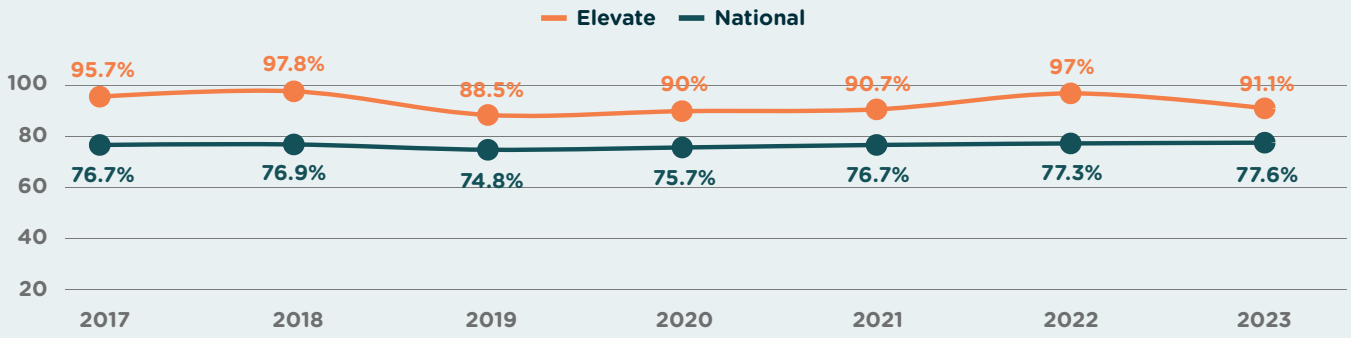
74.4%

of students from comparable high-poverty high schools persisted to their second year of college.

(The report uses high-poverty high schools, defined as schools where at least 75% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, as the best available socioeconomic comparison group for Elevate students.)

7 YEARS OF PERSISTENCE

COMPARISON OF PERSISTENCE RATES

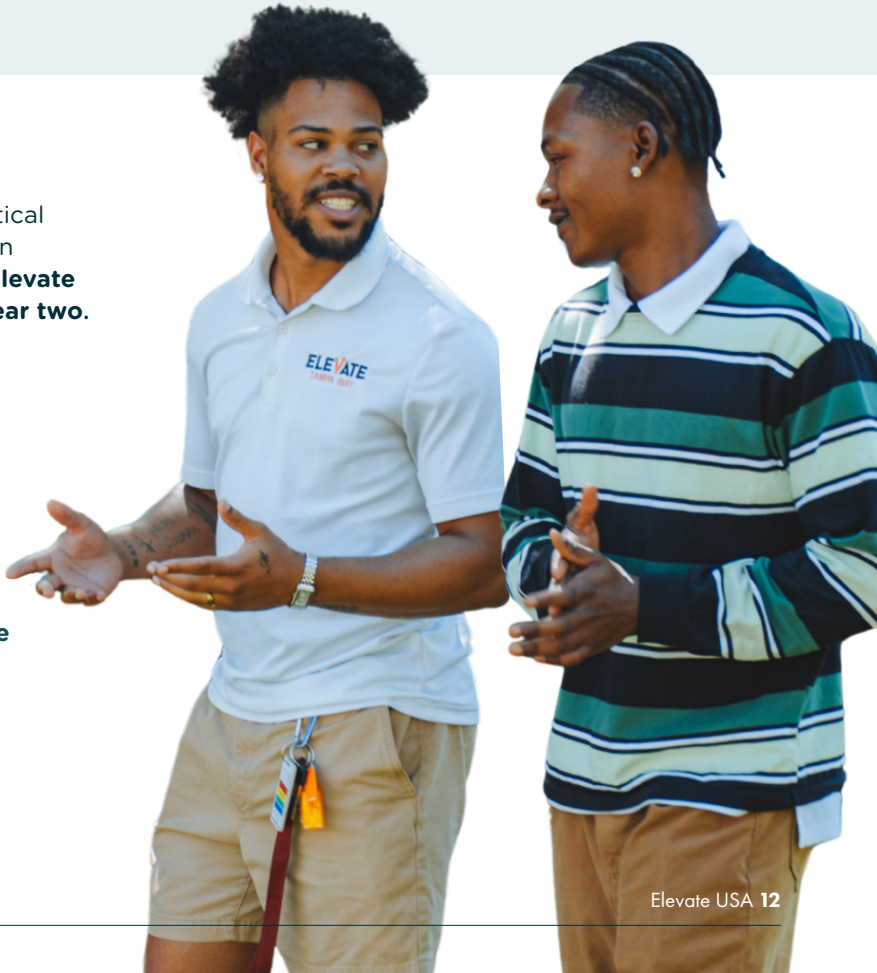


NOT A ONE-YEAR RESULT

Persistence means returning for year two, a critical milestone on the path to a degree. Across seven consecutive cohorts, **roughly 9 in 10 or more Elevate alumni who enrolled in college returned for year two.**

65.2% **of Elevate alumni in the 2017 cohort earned a postsecondary degree.**

24.9% **of students in the comparable high-poverty cohort earned a postsecondary degree.**



A NAME TO BUILD ON

An Elevate Birmingham Story

Before Charles Edwards was born, his mother was already telling him who he could become. She spoke to him while he was still in the womb, telling her son that he would accomplish great things. She gave him his grandfather's name, a strong name belonging to a man remembered for his kindness and goodness. It was a name she hoped Charles would carry forward in his own way.

And then, as he grew, she kept saying the words. She said them through move after move as their family made its way around the country. There were so many places that today, Charles can't remember them all. Eventually, they landed in Birmingham. Ten years later, it is the longest he has ever called one place home.

By the time Charles arrived at Wenonah High School as a freshman, though, there was still a lot about himself he hadn't discovered.

"I didn't really smile," he remembers.

He was quiet. Shy. The kind of student who could easily move through a school without drawing much attention to himself.

Then Charles walked into an Elevate classroom. There, he found Teacher-Mentors who paid attention. They saw his intelligence, but they also saw more than that. They challenged him, encouraged him and gave him opportunities to lead. Over time, Charles began to see in himself some of what the adults around him had been seeing all along.

By 10th grade, something had shifted. He was more confident. He was thinking seriously about his future. He was beginning to understand that the abilities he carried could take him somewhere.

Today, Charles describes himself simply:

“I’m a problem solver.”

It makes sense, then, that he chose civil engineering. Charles graduated from Wenonah with honors, finishing in the top 10 of his class. Now a first-generation college student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, he is studying civil engineering, learning how to solve problems by understanding how things work, where they fail and how they can be built better.

And he is already leading.

At just 18 years old, Charles is a manager at AutoZone. He finds himself responsible for leading people much older than he is, including employees who have spent years with the company. It would be easy to look at his age and find that surprising. Spend time with Charles, and it makes more sense. He is smart, certainly. But his story is also one of growing into responsibility: learning to speak up, make decisions, solve problems and carry the weight of other people depending on him.

That growth did not happen alone.

His mother is still speaking encouragement over him, just as she did before he was born. His Teacher-Mentors became additional voices in his life, helping him develop and steward the intelligence, leadership and potential that were already there. And Charles, in turn, has become someone his own family can depend on. He works. He helps his mom. He goes to college. He leads. And he is building toward dreams much bigger than where he is today.

There is something fitting about a young man named to carry a legacy choosing a profession built around what lasts.

Civil engineers think about foundations. They study structures and systems, anticipating the weight something will need to carry long before that weight arrives.

Charles is still at the beginning of his story. There is much yet to be built.

But the foundation is strong. And all those words spoken over him for all those years?

He is beginning to speak them for himself.

SCAN TO WATCH CHARLES’ STORY

THE ENGINE BEHIND THE NETWORK

Paying attention to students requires paying attention to the organizations that serve them. Elevate USA builds the infrastructure behind a healthy national network, equipping local affiliates with the people, systems, tools and resources they need to thrive.

Build new affiliates on a strong foundation.
We help communities move from interest to launch with the leadership, funding, school partnerships and organizational foundation needed to build something that lasts.

01
LAUNCH STRONG

Equip affiliates to develop students who thrive.
- Train and develop Teacher-Mentors and leaders
- Provide and continually improve Elevate curriculum
- Strengthen program quality and consistency
- Provide measurement, evaluation and data

02
STRENGTHEN THE PROGRAM

03
BUILD HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONS

Help affiliates become strong and sustainable organizations.
Coaching and support strengthen executive leadership, boards, fundraising, financial management, branding, marketing, and essential practices for long-term organizational health.

04
MULTIPLY WHAT WORKS

Build a national network that makes every affiliate stronger.
We connect leaders across cities, share resources and learning, strengthen the Elevate brand and protect and continually improve the model as the network grows.

Join the Movement!!!

THE CITIES WE SERVE

OUR AFFILIATES

Colorado UpLift began in Denver in 1982. Now Elevate has expanded the program model to cities across America — each one independent, locally led, and connected through a national network.

EVERY KID IS WORTH PAYING ATTENTION TO

Throughout this report, you've seen what that attention can make possible: students graduating, persisting through college, growing into leaders and investing back into their communities. It's our mission in motion.

But paying attention has a cost. It asks something of us: our resources, our relationships, our influence, our willingness to keep showing up and investing what we have for young people. **There is a place for you in that work.**

INVEST

Help more students experience Elevate.
Your generosity puts Teacher-Mentors in schools, equips them with world-class curriculum and makes long-term relationships possible.

OPEN A DOOR

Help bring Elevate somewhere it's needed.
Introduce us to a school, community leader, funder or city that should know about Elevate.

USE YOUR INFLUENCE

Put the right people in the room.
Share the story. Make an introduction. Invite others to see what is possible when a community invests deeply in its young people.

STAY CLOSE

Keep paying attention.
Follow the stories of Elevate students, visit an affiliate, attend an event to see the work firsthand. Sign up for our newsletter at elevateusa.org.

No One Gets There Alone.
Neither do we.
elevateusa.org/donate

THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER WE CAN AFFORD TO INVEST IN EVERY CHILD; IT IS WHETHER WE CAN AFFORD NOT TO.

— MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

- Education Success - Elevate USA, Education Success Report across 5,769 students
- Thriving Youth Survey - Elevate USA, Spring 2026 Thriving Youth Survey, 1,963 class-enrolled Elevate students across 19 affiliates. 3 or more semesters.
- Affiliate Pipeline - Elevate USA, Spring 2026 Affiliate Pipeline dataset, surveyed across 19 affiliates
- Alumni study - QREM, Elevate USA Model Development Report: Elevate Impacts Method and Research, April 2026. National Student Clearinghouse data

RECOGNITION AND BADGES

ANNOTATIONS

1. U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express, EDFacts, 2022–23. U.S. public school students.
2. CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2023. Nationally representative U.S. students, grades 9–12.
3. Springtide Research Institute, Making Sense of Vocation, 2025 survey. U.S. young people ages 13–25.
4. MENTOR, Who Mentored You?, 2023. National study of 2,600+ Americans.
5. SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, March 2024.
6. American Student Assistance, 2024 national survey of middle and high school students.
7. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, The College Payoff: More Education Doesn't Always Mean More Earnings, 2021. Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data, 2009–2019; full-time, full-year workers ages 25–64.
8. Search Institute, surveys of 89,000 U.S. middle and high school students; Developmental Asset #30: Responsibility.
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10. Walton Family Foundation & Gallup, Voices of Gen Z: Perspectives on U.S. Education, Wellbeing and the Future, 2023. Nationally representative survey of 3,114 U.S. Gen Z respondents ages 12–26.
11. Robbins et al., Psychological Bulletin, 2004. Meta-analysis of 109 studies examining predictors of college performance and persistence.
12. 50CAN, The State of Educational Opportunity in America, 2024. National survey of 20,090 parents/guardians; high school subgroup, page 109.
13. Ballard, P. J., Hoyt, L. T., & Pachucki, M. C. (2019). "Impacts of Adolescent and Young Adult Civic Engagement on Health and Socioeconomic Status in Adulthood." Child Development, 90(4), 1138–1154.

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TO LEARN MORE:

elevatetheusa.org

info@elevatetheusa.org