

## **Survey-Based Outcomes from the ELEVATE Evaluation**

### **2024–2026 Child Support Policy Research Agreement: Task 10**

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) provided funding via a waiver from the federal Office of Child Support Services (OCSS)<sup>1</sup> to five Wisconsin counties to test a new approach for serving families involved in the child support system. The focus of the new approach was centered around service provision rather than traditional enforcement-oriented models. DCF and the five counties implemented a program called ELEVATE (Empowering Lives through Education, Vocational Assessment, Training, and Employment) that provided case management, employment services, parenting services, and enhanced child support services to noncustodial parents (NCPs) behind on their child support obligations. ELEVATE also had a required evaluation component, which included an impact analysis focusing on relevant child support, employment, and parenting outcomes for participants. An earlier report (Shager et al., 2025) summarized child support and employment outcomes using administrative data. This report describes the ELEVATE participant outcomes measured using parent responses to a survey administered at baseline and 12 months after enrollment. The survey also captured service receipt prior to the time of enrollment and at the 12-month follow-up; these findings are also included in the report that follows.

### Wisconsin's ELEVATE Program

The ELEVATE program was developed by building on Wisconsin's experience with the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), an OCSS-funded national demonstration project which aimed to test services designed to improve payment of child support by unemployed or underemployed NCPs. Wisconsin was one of eight states in the

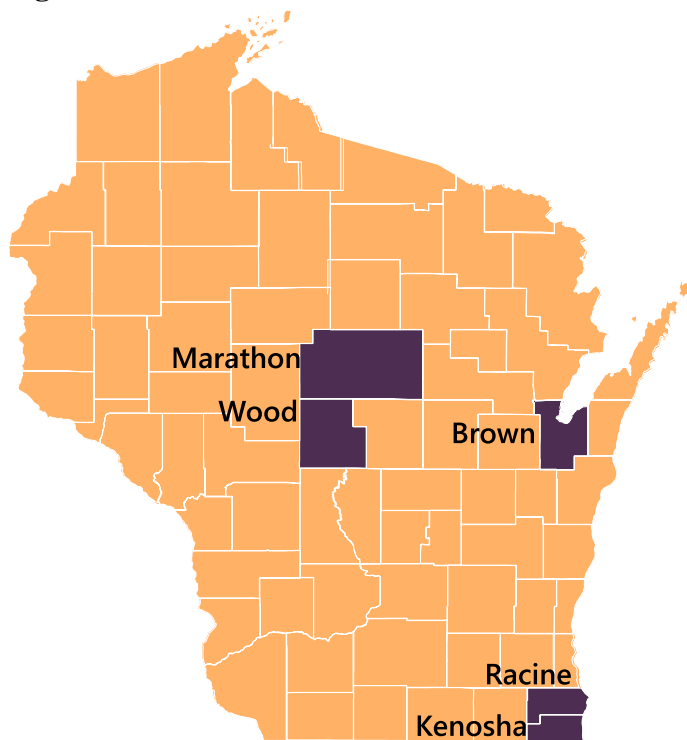
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<sup>1</sup>In 2019, OCSS was the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE); the agency became OCSS in 2023 (Information Memorandum, IM-23-02). See: <https://acf.gov/css/policy-guidance/name-change-office-child-support-services-ocss>.

study and implemented projects in Brown and Kenosha counties under the title Supporting Parents Supporting Kids (SPSK). Wisconsin’s experience with CSPED and findings that the program increased satisfaction with child support services presented the possibility of having child support agencies lead programs that provide a more comprehensive set of services than has been traditionally offered. While the CSPED evaluation indicated a modest increase in “right-sizing” orders, overall findings suggested that further innovation was needed to identify a service array that improves employment, earnings, and child support compliance.

Given Wisconsin’s experience with SPSK, DCF pursued and received a waiver from OCSS—as well as additional state budget funds—to continue operating programs in Brown and Kenosha counties and to extend programming to three additional counties under the new name ELEVATE. Marathon, Racine, and Wood counties applied and were selected to take part in the program (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Wisconsin’s ELEVATE Counties**



ELEVATE was intended to increase parents' compliance with child support obligations by increasing workforce participation; ELEVATE also aimed to support parents' increased engagement with their children. In addition, DCF was also broadly interested in shifting agency culture away from enforcement and towards supporting and engaging parents. The five child support agencies were tasked with ensuring that the core components of the ELEVATE program—case management services, employment services, parenting education, and enhanced child support services—be delivered to participants, either directly through child support agency staff, through a contract with third-party service providers, or through a combined approach (Figure 2). As designed, ELEVATE gave the five county child support agencies some discretion in developing and providing services for participants, resulting in some variation in implementation across counties (see final report: Shager et al., 2025).

**Figure 2. ELEVATE Services and Providers**



As a condition of receiving program funds, ELEVATE counties were required to take part in the ELEVATE evaluation (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2019). All counties began enrolling participants into ELEVATE and providing services in January 2020. Enrollment into the ELEVATE evaluation continued through December 2022, with a pause in

2020 from March 17 to July 7, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that period, the University of Wisconsin–Madison required a cessation of all in-person research, including the ELEVATE evaluation, and counties’ ability to provide the full array of ELEVATE services was impacted by the global health crisis.

## **Evaluation Overview**

The ELEVATE evaluation has two main components: an implementation analysis and an impact analysis. The implementation of ELEVATE programs is described in two products: an early report summarizing ELEVATE program operations shortly after implementation (Vogel et al., 2021); and the final evaluation report, which describes ELEVATE programs at “full” implementation (Shager et al., 2025). The impact analysis is also described in two products: again, in the final evaluation report (Shager et al., 2025), which presents findings from the impact analysis that rely on administrative data; and this report, which describes findings from the impact analysis for outcomes measured using survey data from participants.

## ***Evaluation Research Questions and Overall Approach***

The ELEVATE evaluation addresses the following research questions, included below. Items 3, 4, and 5, in bold text, are the focus of this current report while findings for the remaining research questions are addressed in the final evaluation report.

1. Do NCPs who are enrolled in ELEVATE demonstrate significantly better change in child support outcomes than demographically comparable NCPs in counties without an ELEVATE program? (*Impact analysis*)
2. Do NCPs who are enrolled in ELEVATE demonstrate significantly better change in employment and earning outcomes than demographically comparable NCPs in counties without an ELEVATE program? (*Impact analysis*)

3. **Do NCPs who are enrolled in ELEVATE report changes in employment and earning outcomes? (*Impact analysis*)**
4. **Do NCPs who are enrolled in ELEVATE report changes in parenting and co-parenting behaviors and attitudes? (*Impact analysis*)**
5. **Do NCPs who are enrolled in ELEVATE report changes in attitudes toward the child support program? (*Impact analysis*)**
6. What were the program's key design features? How were programs implemented and how did they change over time?<sup>2</sup> What challenges did programs encounter, and what strategies did they use to address challenges? (*Implementation analysis*)

### ***ELEVATE-Related Research Products***

In addition to this report, the ELEVATE evaluation team previously released four ELEVATE-related reports (summarized in Table 1): the interim implementation report (Vogel et al., 2021); a report exploring custodial parent perspectives on programs and services for parents who owe and are due child support (Vogel et al., 2023); a report describing ELEVATE program participant characteristics at the time of their enrollment into the ELEVATE program and evaluation (Costanzo et al., 2024); and the final evaluation report (Shager et al., 2025).

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<sup>2</sup>This report does include analysis of service receipt during the time of ELEVATE enrollment, which provides some insight into program implementation.

**Table 1. ELEVATE Evaluation Products and Related Reports**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Status</b>
Interim implementation report	ELEVATE program operations at initial implementation	<a href="#">Complete</a>
Custodial parent perspectives report	Views of custodial parents residing in ELEVATE counties who do not receive full payments on programs and services for families served by child support	<a href="#">Complete</a>
ELEVATE participant profile report	Characteristics and circumstances of the participants enrolled in ELEVATE	<a href="#">Complete</a>
Final evaluation report	Impacts of ELEVATE on child support and employment outcomes; ELEVATE programs operations at full implementation; ELEVATE participant experiences	<a href="#">Complete</a>
Survey-based ELEVATE outcomes report	Impacts of ELEVATE on parenting, attitudinal outcomes, and service receipt	Complete

## CURRENT REPORT

This report describes the primary survey outcomes from the ELEVATE impact evaluation. Specifically, we report findings related to self-reported hours of employment; self-reported monthly earnings; parenting practices and attitudes; and participant satisfaction with the child support program. We have a measure of each outcome at the time of enrollment in ELEVATE and 12 months after enrollment, and we report on changes since the time of enrollment. In addition to the primary outcome measures, we also report changes in services received across ELEVATE core domains—including parenting, employment, and other services—from the time of enrollment to the 12 months after enrollment (i.e., the time of the 12-month follow-up survey). The changes in survey outcomes and reported service receipt supplement the administrative data outcomes and service receipt measures reported in the final evaluation report. Taken together, these two reports provide a comprehensive description of the potential role of ELEVATE on the confirmatory outcomes determined at the outset of the evaluation.

## Approach

### *Baseline and Follow-Up Surveys*

All obligors who enrolled in the ELEVATE evaluation were required to complete a baseline survey as a condition of participation (n=994).<sup>3</sup> The baseline survey was administered by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) over the phone at the time of enrollment. Participants provided demographic and family information and reported on a variety of life experiences, including questions that were used to construct confirmatory outcome measures for the evaluation that focused on employment, earnings, parenting, and experiences with the child support system. Table 3 details the survey measures used to operationalize these outcomes.

In addition, because ELEVATE did not have a dedicated management information system to systematically collect data on service receipt, participants were also asked about relevant service receipt prior to ELEVATE in order to obtain a baseline measure of services with a focus on services provided by ELEVATE (i.e., employment, parenting, and child support).<sup>4</sup> Parents were asked whether they received any parenting, employment, or other services in the last 12 months and, if they had, the approximate number of hours of each service they had received. For employment, participants were asked about a variety of employment services, including help finding a job, creating a resume, or preparing for interviews; one-on-one help to assess job skills and interests; training programs; connections with specific job openings; and

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<sup>3</sup>Since the time of enrollment, two participants were found to have completed the survey twice. Therefore, though there were 996 baseline surveys completed, the sample represents 994 unique obligors.

<sup>4</sup>Detailed information about the design and implementation of the baseline survey can be found in the December 18, 2020, memo from IRP to DCF titled “Baseline Survey Administration Report” (submitted under Task 14 of the 2018–2020 Child Support Policy Research Agreement). Given the importance of the data collected via the baseline survey in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of low-income obligors behind on their child support, findings from the baseline survey are reported in “Experiences, Characteristics, and Service Needs of Noncustodial Parents with Challenges Meeting Child Support Obligations: Evidence from ELEVATE Parents” (Costanzo et al., 2024).



follow-up services once they had a job. For parenting services, participants were asked about any parenting classes, groups, or workshops they may have attended. Finally, participants were asked about other services they received, including high school or GED classes, services for anger management or domestic violence, services for mental health or substance use, expungement services, and any other assistance they may have received. Participants were not asked about the amount of time spent in these other services.

All evaluation participants were then contacted to complete a follow-up survey 12 months after enrollment. The follow-up survey was designed to provide a measure of change in the confirmatory outcomes since the time of enrollment by asking participants the same questions at follow-up as they had been asked at baseline.<sup>5</sup> The follow-up survey also included measures of service receipt in the core ELEVATE service areas, providing a supplemental measure of service receipt in the 12 months since ELEVATE enrollment. We note that participants were asked about any services received in these areas, and they were not prompted to respond about ELEVATE-specific services.

Of the 994 ELEVATE enrollees, 909 were determined as eligible to complete the follow-up survey.<sup>6</sup> Excluding the ineligible participants, 704 of the 909 completed the follow-up survey, resulting in a response rate of 77.4%. This response rate is relatively high; we note that it is higher than the CSPED response rate (Cancian, Meyer, and Wood, 2019) and nears the 80% threshold recommended by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as standard for federal

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<sup>5</sup>The July 31, 2022, memo “Follow-up Survey Administration Report” submitted to DCF as part of CSRA 2020–2022 Task 7 includes detailed information about the design and implementation of the follow-up survey.

<sup>6</sup>Participants were ineligible for follow-up if they were incarcerated, deceased, or found to be mistakenly included in the sample to begin with. Seventy-one participants were found to be incarcerated at the time of the follow-up survey, 12 were deceased, and 2 participants did not meet enrollment criteria upon review. Detailed information about the follow-up field operation can be found in the Appendix to this report.

evaluations (OMB, 2006). The Appendix of this report contains additional summary information about timing, fielding, and disposition of the follow-up surveys.

If participants who did not complete the follow-up survey were systematically different or had different experiences from the participants who did provide follow-up data, our analysis may be biased. Therefore, we examined whether participants who completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys had different characteristics at baseline than the full sample of participants (Table 2). We find some differences between the full sample of enrollees and the sample who completed both the baseline and the follow-up surveys. Participants who completed both surveys (i.e., those who completed the follow-up) were more likely to be female and provided a larger amount of informal support at baseline, on average, compared to participants who completed only the baseline survey. We also find some differences by county and that participants who enrolled in the first half of 2022 were more likely to be included in our follow-up sample compared to those who enrolled in the second half. It is important to note that we include these baseline characteristics in our models, therefore controlling for these observable differences and limiting the impact of non-response on our estimates.

**Table 2. Attrition Analysis**

Measures	Baseline Only Group Mean	Both Waves Group Mean	Diff	<i>p</i> -value
NCP is male	0.88	0.78	0.10	0.00
NCP age at baseline enrollment	35.33	35.32	0.02	0.97
NCP is Black/African-American	0.29	0.27	0.02	0.44
NCP is Latino/a	0.08	0.09	-0.00	0.89
NCP is White	0.48	0.48	0.00	0.98
NCP is another race	0.08	0.10	-0.02	0.33
NCP is of multiple races/ethnicities	0.06	0.07	-0.00	0.89
Number of custodial parents (CPs)	1.97	2.07	-0.11	0.15
All cases are non-marital	0.79	0.74	0.04	0.11
Age of youngest child	6.23	6.40	-0.17	0.62
Total amount of informal support provided by NCP	386.09	548.32	-162.23	0.00
PHQ-8 result	6.97	7.64	-0.67	0.11
Brown County	0.16	0.25	-0.09	0.00
Kenosha County	0.22	0.15	0.07	0.01
Marathon County	0.30	0.25	0.05	0.15
Racine County	0.17	0.20	-0.03	0.26
Wood County	0.15	0.15	0.01	0.75
Enrolled Jan-June 2020	0.07	0.09	-0.02	0.32
Enrolled July-Dec 2020	0.12	0.14	-0.01	0.55
Enrolled Jan-June 2021	0.20	0.17	0.04	0.12
Enrolled July-Dec 2021	0.22	0.23	-0.02	0.55
Enrolled Jan-June 2022	0.18	0.24	-0.06	0.02
Enrolled July-Dec 2022	0.21	0.13	0.07	0.00

In each survey, parents provided responses about a broad range of experiences with parenting, child support, employment, and overall well-being. These included previously-identified primary outcome measures for the ELEVATE program such as attitudes towards the child support program, employment, earnings, as well as sense of responsibility for and in-person contact with children. Table 3 details the survey measures used to operationalize these outcomes.

**Table 3. Outcome Measures**

Outcome	Measure	Survey Item(s)
NCP employment	Change in total hours worked between baseline and follow-up survey Change in months employed between baseline and follow-up survey	Participants were asked about all jobs held since the time of enrollment (12 months prior to enrollment), including: month and year the job began and ended; hours worked per week; rate of pay. We use this employment roster to create baseline and follow-up measures of hours worked, months employed, and monthly earnings.
NCP earnings	Change in monthly earnings between baseline and follow-up survey	
NCP sense of responsibility for children/parenting	Change in attitudes toward NCP involvement with and supporting children financially between baseline and follow-up survey  Change in number of average days with in-person contact with children (averaged across all nonresident children) between baseline and follow-up survey	<p>Sense of Responsibility Index, comprised of the following 4 items:</p> <p>(1) <i>Even if the custodial [parent] has a new partner, a noncustodial [parent] should be required to provide financial support to [their] child.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>“Even if a noncustodial [parent] has a child with a new partner, [they] should be required to provide financial support for a child from a previous relationship.”</i></p> <p>(3) <i>How important is it for parents who live apart from their children to support their children financially?”</i></p> <p>(4) <i>How important is it for parents who live apart from their children to try to be involved in their children’s lives?”</i></p> <p>“In the past 30 days, how many nights did you and [CHILD] stay in the same place?”</p>
NCP attitude toward child support program	Change in satisfaction with child support services between baseline and follow-up survey	“You are satisfied with the experiences you have had with the child support program [since ENROLLMENT]”

### ***Analysis***

We employed a pre-/post-survey design to estimate changes in the levels of primary outcomes for participants 12 months after enrollment compared to the time of enrollment for attitudinal outcomes or 12 months before enrollment for employment and earnings outcomes. To do so, we estimate multivariate regression models that, following the CSPED evaluation, include covariates to account for participant characteristics at baseline in the following domains: NCP demographics (i.e., sex, age at enrollment, race/ethnicity); children and relationships (i.e.,

number of CPs, nonmarital vs. divorce cases, age of youngest child); child support measures (i.e., provision of informal support); and measures of health and well-being (i.e., PHQ-8 score) (Cancian, Meyer, and Wood, 2019). Additionally, we include county and enrollment-cohort fixed effects. County fixed effects control for differences across counties that we cannot observe but are stable throughout the study period, while the cohort fixed effects control for differences in the timing of enrollment that we cannot observe but that are stable for all participants.

The equation below represents our pre-/post- model:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PreEnrollment_{it} + \gamma X_i + \delta_c + \delta_q + \epsilon_{it}$$

in which

- $Y_{it}$  represents the confirmatory outcome for NCP  $i$  at time  $t$
- $PreEnrollment_{it}$  indicates whether the observation for NCP  $i$  was measured at the baseline survey
- $X_i$  represents a series of covariate measures previously shown to be correlated with child support payments, employment, and earnings outcome as discussed in the paragraph above
- $\delta_c$  represents county fixed effects
- $\delta_q$  represents quarterly enrollment cohort fixed effects

$\beta_1$  is our coefficient of interest and captures the difference in confirmatory outcomes for NCP  $i$  in the period before and after his or her enrollment in ELEVATE. It is important to note that we cannot interpret this coefficient as the causal impact of enrolling in the ELEVATE program on our confirmatory outcomes as we did not capture survey measures from similar parents who were not part of the program during the same time period. This approach differs

from that of the final evaluation report (Shager et al., 2025). In that report, a quasi-experimental approach was used to compare changes in primary outcomes for ELEVATE participants to changes over the same period for a comparable group of parents who were not enrolled in ELEVATE and lived outside of ELEVATE counties. Here, we are able to describe how outcomes change for ELEVATE participants, but do not have a similar group with whom to compare outcomes.

## **Services**

We first report on our analysis of changes in the amount and level of service receipt during the follow-up period compared to the 12 months prior to enrollment in ELEVATE. Our analysis focuses on parenting, employment (defined broadly), and other service receipt. We examined changes in the proportion of participants who reported any service receipt in these domains from baseline to follow-up and the number of hours participants reported receiving. We note that participants were asked about service receipt generally. We anticipate that the follow-up period may include ELEVATE-specific service receipt, and it may also include services sought outside of the ELEVATE program during this time (whether via referral or self-motivated). Therefore, this analysis does not provide a measure of only ELEVATE-provided services, but rather the change in total amount of services received during this time, regardless of provider.

For all analyses in this report, we provide the unadjusted baseline and follow-up means (i.e., the raw means without covariates or other controls), the raw difference between the unadjusted means, and the regression-adjusted difference and its related *p*-value for statistical significance. The regression-adjusted difference reflects the regression analysis, and, specifically, the coefficient of interest, described above.

**Table 4. Service Receipt**

Outcome	Baseline	Follow-Up	Raw Mean Difference	Regression-Difference	p-value
<b>Employment Services</b>					
Any employment services	0.38	0.66	0.28	0.29	0.00
Total number of hours of employment services	1.35	4.41	3.06	2.97	0.00
<b>Parenting Services</b>					
Any parenting services	0.17	0.21	0.04	0.06	0.01
Total number of hours of parenting services	1.10	2.78	1.68	1.98	0.00
<b>Other Services</b>					
Any other services	0.47	0.54	0.08	0.10	0.00

**Note:** Proportion of parents who received services expressed as means in table

### ***Employment Services***

More parents reported receiving employment services following ELEVATE enrollment compared to the 12 months prior to enrollment and, on average, parents reported an increase in hours of service receipt. Specifically, at baseline, 38% of parents had received any employment services in the past 12 months, and at the time of the follow-up survey, 66% of parents had received employment services. This represents a statistically significant increase of over 70% (or 28 percentage points). Similarly, parents reported receiving an average of 4.4 hours of employment services in the 12 months following ELEVATE enrollment, compared to 1.4 hours before ELEVATE representing a statistically significant increase in the number of hours of employment services received. Overall, the period of ELEVATE enrollment was associated with an increase in the likelihood of having received employment services and an increase in the hours of services received.

### ***Parenting Services***

Based on survey responses, the number of parents who received parenting services and the number of hours of parenting services received increased during the period of ELEVATE enrollment, though the increases were small in magnitude. At baseline, 17% of parents reported having received any parenting services in the 12 months prior to enrolling in ELEVATE. At follow-up, the proportion was 21%, representing a four-percentage-point increase in the proportion of parents who received parenting services.

The total number of hours of parenting services received also increased during ELEVATE. At enrollment, parents reported an average of 1.1 hours of parenting services received over the last 12 months. At follow-up, the average number of hours was 2.8, which is statistically significantly higher than at baseline. Taken together, this suggests that ELEVATE enrollees did experience an increase in the likelihood of having received any parenting services and a slight increase in the hours of services received. Notably, though, more than three-quarters of survey respondents did not report receipt of any parenting services in the 12 months following their enrollment into ELEVATE.

### ***Other Services***

Parents also reported on other services they may have received, including employment training programs, high school or GED classes, anger management or domestic violence services, criminal record expungement services, or contact with a specific person from the child support program. Fifty-four percent of parents received at least one of these other services in the 12 months after enrollment in ELEVATE, representing an 8-percentage-point increase from the 47% who had received at least one of these other services prior to ELEVATE enrollment.



## ***Summary***

Taken together, survey responses indicate that the period following ELEVATE enrollment was associated with higher service receipt in the core domains of employment services and parenting services compared to the 12 months prior to enrollment. Even after enrollment in ELEVATE, however, less than a quarter of parents received parenting services, and the reported dosage of service receipt (i.e., total number of hours of services received) across all service categories was relatively low. Although the measures are not equivalent, the service receipt patterns reported by parents in the survey follow the service receipt reported by NCPs in interviews conducted as part of the implementation analysis and the services captured by ELEVATE program staff through a services-tracking spreadsheet designed by the evaluation team to roughly gauge levels of services received (Shager et al., 2025). In both interviews and the surveys, parents reported relatively low receipt of parenting services. Information from all three data collection methods indicate a higher proportion of parents received employment services compared to parenting services.

## **Impacts**

We next consider confirmatory outcomes measured by survey data. These include changes in hours worked, number of months employed, monthly earnings, measures of parenting attitudes and behaviors, and satisfaction with the child support system. We note that the final evaluation report (Shager et al., 2025) includes estimates of program impacts as measured by administrative data and includes some similar measures such as employment and earnings. The impacts reported here supplement those in the final evaluation report and include measures that cannot be captured by administrative data, such as attitudes and behaviors. One key difference from the final evaluation report is that our survey outcome measures are available only for

ELEVATE participants whereas the administrative data outcomes allow for a comparison between ELEVATE participants and comparable parents who were not enrolled in ELEVATE. Additionally, because the administrative employment and earnings data are based on Unemployment Insurance (UI) program data, we expect the survey report of employment and earnings to more robustly capture employment and earnings from gig work and other types of informal employment.

As with service receipt, we report the unadjusted baseline and follow-up means, the raw difference between the unadjusted means for reference, and the regression-adjusted difference (i.e., the coefficient of interest described above) and its related  $p$ -value. We consider the regression-adjusted estimates our main results but note that regression adjustments make relatively little difference.

### ***Employment***

Parents reported an increase in the average number of hours worked per week since ELEVATE enrollment. On average, parents worked 22.5 hours each week in the 12 months following their enrollment in ELEVATE compared to 17.3 hours worked per week in the 12 months before enrollment, representing a statistically significant increase of 5.2 hours per week on average. When we limit the sample to participants with any employment, the statistically significant increase in hours worked remains, indicating that the increase in employment hours is not solely a function of an increase in the number of parents who were employed.

**Table 5. Employment**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Follow-Up</b>	<b>Raw Mean Difference</b>	<b>Regression -Adjusted Difference</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Average Weekly Hours Worked	17.32	22.50	5.18	5.19	0.00
Average Weekly Hours Worked – Participants with any employment	24.50	28.67	4.17	5.96	0.00
Average Number of Months Employed	5.23	6.45	1.22	1.36	0.00

In addition, parents reported an increase in the number of months employed since enrollment. On average, parents were employed for 6.5 of the 12 months following enrollment. This is an increase, on average, of 1.3 months from the 5.2 months of the 12 months prior to enrollment.

These findings suggest that the period following ELEVATE enrollment was associated with an increase in employment for participants as measured in both the number of hours worked per week and the number of months employed. This follows findings from the final evaluation report which found an increase in the proportion of quarters employed by ELEVATE participants in the formal labor market (Shager et al., 2025); however, the comparison group also increased their employment at a similar rate.

### ***Earnings***

ELEVATE enrollees increased their average monthly income in the 12 months following their enrollment in ELEVATE. On average, ELEVATE participants had \$1,168 in monthly earnings in the 12 months prior to their enrollment; this increased to \$1,677 in the 12 months following ELEVATE enrollment, which is equivalent to going from an annual income of \$14,016 to \$20,124. When narrowing down the sample to ELEVATE participants who had any income, the magnitude of the increase was similar, going from \$1,700 in monthly earnings in the

12 months before enrollment to \$2,185 in monthly earnings in the 12 months following enrollment. When we use annual income (which is the survey measure from which our monthly earnings outcome is derived), we find that ELEVATE enrollees increased their average annual wages by \$6,825 from an annual income of just under \$14,000 to just under \$20,000 annually.

**Table 6. Earnings**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Follow-Up</b>	<b>Raw Mean Difference</b>	<b>Regression-Adjusted Difference</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Average Monthly Income	\$1,168	\$1,677	\$509	\$581	0.00
Average Monthly Income – Any Income	\$1,700	\$2,185	\$485	\$589	0.00
Average Annual Income	\$13,977	\$19,933	\$5,956	\$6,825	0.00

These findings are consistent with findings in the final evaluation report using administrative data, which also indicated that ELEVATE participants increased their wages in the four quarters following enrollment, though by a smaller magnitude than the comparison group (Shager et al., 2025). It is important to note that although survey results indicate that ELEVATE is associated with increased employment and earnings for participants, the earnings level—while above the poverty threshold for a family of one—remains relatively low.

### ***Sense of Responsibility for Children***

ELEVATE enrollees' sense of responsibility for their children did not statistically significantly increase after ELEVATE participation. The primary measure of sense of responsibility is an index, which was constructed by averaging the level of enrollees' agreement (1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree) across four statements that detail various responsibilities of a noncustodial parent to their child. Parents reported a high average sense of responsibility at the time of enrollment, averaging 4.17 on the five-point scale. At follow-up, the

average was 4.22. The lack of a statistically significant difference after enrollment may be a result of having a relatively high baseline measure.

**Table 7. Sense of Responsibility for Children**

Outcome	Baseline	Follow-Up	Raw Mean Difference	Regression-Adjusted Difference	<i>p</i> -value
Sense of Responsibility (index)	4.17	4.22	0.05	0.03	0.30
Average Days with Contact (with nonresident children)	7.92	7.17	-0.75	-0.58	0.16

The average number days of contact with nonresident children, which can be considered the behavioral measure of sense of responsibility for children, also did not increase after ELEVATE enrollment. On average, parents reported having contact with their nonresident children 7.17 days in the 30 days prior to the follow-up survey, which is not a statistically significant change from the time of enrollment.

### ***Child Support System***

ELEVATE parents did not report a statistically significant increase in their satisfaction with the child support system following their enrollment in ELEVATE. Parents were asked at baseline and then again at follow-up the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “You are satisfied with the experiences you have had with the child support program.” On the five-point scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree, parents averaged 3.02 at baseline and 3.07 at follow-up. This is a slight increase but is not statistically significant. When parents were asked specifically about whether they knew who to contact at child support and if there was someone who understood their case, the average response value was higher, though it also did not increase statistically from baseline to follow-

up. This may indicate that parents are satisfied with their specific child support experience but that may not have translated to the overall system.

**Table 8. Child Support Satisfaction**

Outcome	Baseline	Follow-Up	Raw Mean Difference	Regression-Adjusted Difference	<i>p</i> -value
Satisfaction with Child Support	3.02	3.07	0.05	0.09	0.18

## CONCLUSION

In this report, we describe findings on the service receipt of ELEVATE participants and survey-based confirmatory outcomes for the ELEVATE evaluation. These findings supplement those previously reported in the program’s final evaluation report (Shager et al., 2025) by reporting on outcomes measured using participant survey data, specifically changes in: self-reported employment, self-reported earnings, sense of responsibility for children, and satisfaction with the child support program. Findings from the survey largely triangulate the findings reported in the report but also provide additional insight.

We find that the period of enrollment in ELEVATE was associated with increases in employment, parenting, and other service receipt, which is consistent with findings from the services data collected by counties and reported in the implementation analysis. However, the level of parenting service receipt reported was relatively low and, on average, participants reported receiving less than 5 hours of employment services. This follows the previous evaluation findings, suggesting that ELEVATE’s discretion in service receipt may have resulted in a light-touch intervention for at least some participants.

We also find that ELEVATE enrollees reported an increase in employment, as measured by both weekly hours worked and months employed. ELEVATE enrollees also experienced an

increase in monthly earnings. These findings somewhat mirror the outcomes measuring employment and earnings using administrative data. Estimates from the administrative data suggested a pattern of overall increase for ELEVATE participants, though this was not statistically significant (and did not differ from the comparison group). We note that the administrative data measured the proportion of quarters employed, a much broader measure than the granular measures used in the survey, and that it is limited to capturing employment in the formal labor market. The survey measures, however, capture a more robust measure of employment as it includes self-reported informal employment and gig work. As with the increase in earnings measured by the survey, we also reported a statistically significant increase in earnings for ELEVATE participants using administrative data (but this increase was not as large as the increase in the comparison group).

Lastly, we do not find a change in parenting measures or measures of satisfaction with the child support system. For the parental sense-of-responsibility index measure, we note that the baseline measure was already quite high, and it may be difficult to move the needle much further, regardless of the intervention. Additionally, the amount of time a parent can spend with a child is driven by a variety of factors, including many that may be outside the parent's control. Given this context, combined with the fact that ELEVATE was not designed to provide assistance with parenting time orders or visitation, it may not be surprising that participants did not report an increase in time spent with children.

### **Study Limitations**

Using survey data provides the opportunity to measure outcomes that would not be possible with administrative data alone. However, it also comes with important limitations. First, we have measures only for ELEVATE participants. Though this allows us to examine the change

in measures for participants, we do not have measures for a comparable group of parents who did not participate in ELEVATE. This limits our understanding of the impact of the ELEVATE program because we cannot determine whether the observed changes can be attributed to participation in the program. For example, we find increases in earnings in the survey data. Because we have administrative earnings data for participants and a comparison group, we discovered that, though ELEVATE participants increased earnings (as measured by the administrative data), earnings increased for the comparison group as well, suggesting that the increase in earnings may be driven by factors other than program participation. With survey data alone, we are missing important context for our outcome measures.

Additionally, because we were not able to survey all eligible participants for the 12-month follow-up, we must account for potential attrition bias. Our attrition analysis suggests slight differences between the follow-up sample and full sample. We note that our follow-up sample is more likely to have provided a larger amount of informal support to children at baseline, which may indicate that our follow-up sample has a higher average sense of responsibility for their children. Since we do not see an impact overall, this is less of a concern. Though we were able to control for observable differences, we note that there may be unobservable differences. Future work using both the baseline and follow-up measures may wish to include weighting adjustments to allay this concern.

### **Considerations for Future Work**

Findings from the survey, combined with the overall findings from the final evaluation report, offer several considerations moving forward. First, there are additional opportunities to successfully provide services to parents across service types. Parents reported receiving an increase in services, but still, on average, the intensity of service receipt was relatively low. In



addition, a large proportion of parents did not receive many services as one-third of parents reported that they did not receive any employment services in the 12 months since enrollment and nearly 80% reported they did not receive any parenting services. Given the challenges that parents have both with employment and parenting as indicated in the baseline survey (Costanzo et al., 2024), this suggests that more intensive services may be needed.

Next, we find an increase in self-reported employment (across measures) and earnings. Additional context from the final evaluation report indicates, however, that these did not result in increased child support compliance. Understanding how and why employment increases can translate to increased resources for children is crucial to designing effective programming. Future work could attend to job quality and job stability. This may also indicate the need for longer-term follow-up to allow for additional time for employment changes to translate to child support outcomes. Another potential factor is the role of formal and informal employment. Our survey results indicate—both through direct responses from obligors (not reported here) and compared to administrative data measures from the formal labor market—that informal employment plays a relevant role in understanding obligor’s earning and employment. Income withholding is successful in increasing payments but is only available when parents are employed in the formal labor market, which can make enforcing orders for obligors with informal employment challenging (Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010; Vogel et al., 2025).

We found no increase in the overall sense of responsibility for children and, as indicated, this measure was relatively high at baseline for parents enrolled in ELEVATE. Given this relatively high measure at baseline for parents who were behind on child support, future services may wish to reconsider the role in parental sense of responsibility in driving desired child support outcomes. This may indicate an area where resources could be redirected.

As the child support system continues to focus on engagement and considers how best to serve families, understanding the role of satisfaction with the child support system is important. Though we do not find an increase in overall satisfaction for all families, it may be that satisfaction matters more for engaging certain families or that satisfaction with a specific facet of the program may be particularly important. The general level of satisfaction at baseline may also suggest the importance of outreach to parents who may be less engaged with child support overall.

Finally, in addition to the outcome findings presented here, the ELEVATE surveys provide rich data on an often-overlooked group of parents. Future work using these data could provide important insight into how the child support program can better serve this important group of parents. These include analyses focused on the needs of specific groups of interest, such as obligors with specific employment barriers and examinations of the employment, housing, health, and wellness of all parents. Though this report focuses on the confirmatory outcomes for the ELEVATE evaluation, there is much more to be learned from the survey data about the experiences of, and opportunities to engage with, noncustodial parents who are behind on their child support obligations.

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## APPENDIX – ELEVATE FOLLOW-UP SURVEY FIELDING DETAILS

This appendix includes tables excerpted from a memo titled “ELEVATE Follow-up Progress Report” delivered to IRP by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) on March 4, 2024.

**Table A1. Current Disposition of All Cases Fielded, (N=996)**

<b>Disposition</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total Completed Interview</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>70.7%</b>
Completed by phone	200	20.1%
Completed in-person	504	50.6%
Partial Complete	1	0.1%
Interview appointment scheduled	0	0.0%
Informant refusal	13	1.3%
Respondent refusal	44	4.4%
Incarcerated	71	7.2%
Deceased	12	1.2%
Other non-completes	147	14.8%
Not yet worked	0	0.0%
Out of Sample	4	0.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>996</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Response Rate Calculation:

Completes / (Total Fielded) – (Incarcerated + Deceased + Out of Sample)

**Current Response Rate:** 704 / (996) – (87))

704 / 909 = **77.4%**

**Table A2. Response Rate by Batch (N=996)**

<b>Batch</b>	<b>Month Fielded</b>	<b>N</b>	<b># of Completes</b>	<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>Non- Complete</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
1	January 2021	31	23	3	5	82.1%
2	February 2021	35	27	2	6	81.8%
3	March 2021	20	15	1	4	78.9%
7	July 2021	14	12	1	1	92.3%
8	August 2021	31	21	4	6	77.7%
9	Sept 2021	28	17	1	10	63.0%
10	October 2021	20	16	1	3	84.2%
11	November 2021	13	10	1	2	83.3%
12	December 2021	26	19	3	4	82.6%
13	January 2022	25	19	3	3	86.4%
14	February 2022	32	22	5	5	81.4%
15	March 2022	38	29	2	5	80.5%
16	April 2022	22	11	4	7	61.1%
17	May 2022	26	17	3	6	73.9%
18	June 2022	31	18	3	10	64.3%
19	July 2022	29	18	3	8	69.2%
20	August 2022	43	32	6	5	86.5%
21	September 2022	50	37	6	7	84.1%
22	October 2022	37	26	2	9	74.3%
23	November 2022	40	31	1	8	79.5%
24	December 2022	31	22	4	5	81.5%
25	January 2023	34	25	4	5	83.3%
26	February 2023	42	30	6	6	83.3%
27	March 2023	34	25	1	8	75.8%
28	April 2023	34	25	5	4	86.2%
29	May 2023	34	28	3	3	90.3%
30	June 2023	42	35	0	7	83.3%
31	July 2023	28	21	3	4	84.0%
32	August 2023	34	24	0	10	70.6%
33	September 2023	23	14	3	6	70.0%
34	October 2023	29	15	1	13	53.6%
35	November 2023	22	9	2	11	45.0%
36	December 2023	18	12	0	6	66.6%
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>996</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>202</b>	