

3-23-2013

# The Rackspace Foundation Community Development Project: A Study of the Castle Community and the Magnificent 7 Schools

Holly Josserand

Trinity University, [hjossera@trinity.edu](mailto:hjossera@trinity.edu)

Hsin Ye Yeo

Trinity University, [hyeo@trinity.edu](mailto:hyeo@trinity.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/infolit\\_usra](http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/infolit_usra)



Part of the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

---

## Repository Citation

Josserand, Holly and Yeo, Hsin Ye, "The Rackspace Foundation Community Development Project: A Study of the Castle Community and the Magnificent 7 Schools" (2013). *Undergraduate Student Research Awards*. 13.

[http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/infolit\\_usra/13](http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/infolit_usra/13)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Information Literacy Committee at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Student Research Awards by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).



**MAGNIFICENT**



## **A Study of the 'Castle Community'**

**Completed by the Trinity University Urban Studies Program**

**For the Rackspace Foundation**

**September 2013**



## Executive Summary

The mission of the Rackspace Foundation is to become a catalyst for community revitalization in their neighborhood. To fulfill that mission, their strategy is to *create a learning community where education is valued, families and educators are engaged, and students strive to reach their fullest potential.* To do so, the Rackspace Foundation invests in enrichment programs in the ‘Castle Community’ schools, which they call the Magnificent Seven: Roosevelt High School, Ed White and Krueger middle schools, and Camelot, Montgomery, Walzem, and Windcrest elementary schools (RackspaceFoundation.com 2013). This vision of community development is a radical departure from more traditional modes of community development, often centered on job creation or the development of physical infrastructure. And to make that radical departure requires a deep understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the local community. This report is one step in the process. Over the past three years (2010-2013), the Urban Studies Program at Trinity University has collected both primary and secondary data in order to piece together a narrative describing the community, to help better understand the strengths and the challenges it perceives and struggles with, and to ultimately integrate the different voices and perspectives that share this place into a common vision.

Hundreds of community members were consulted during this process. Focus groups, interviews, and informal

conversations were amongst the forums used to try and capture different stakeholder’s experiences and perceptions of their community. Not only those who live in the community, but also those who serve it (including teachers and elected officials) and those who work in it (including ‘Rackers’ and local business owners) were included in the effort. But because the vision of the Rackspace Foundation is an education-focused one, it is the voice of educators, parents, and school administrators that is prioritized here.

As presented in the following pages, many harbor grave concerns for the youth in the area. But those concerns are matched by an optimism gleaned from the students themselves. This part of Bexar County, and the schools that serve it, is the one of the most ethnically-diverse sections of the City. An older, predominantly Anglo population has been joined recently by younger Latino families, and, as African-American families continue to move out of the traditional ‘eastside’ neighborhoods (south of Fort Sam Houston), many have settled in the area as well. Most recently, through the auspices of Catholic Charities, international refugees from numerous countries have been placed in the community as well. Students in the Magnificent 7 schools may be the most culturally and ethnically-‘comfortable’ students in our area – which is one of the most culturally and ethnically-‘comfortable’ places in Texas and the United States. This ethnic diversity has resulted in schools where over a dozen languages may be heard, yet students are at ease in the diversity. It has also created an environment and

opportunity for teachers interested in multiculturalism and social justice through education to practice and perfect their craft.

At the same time, students are faced with blinding obstacles. Family incomes in the area are in decline as the housing infrastructure continues to age and deteriorate. Fewer families with wealth are moving into the area and more houses are turning to rental. With the decline in family income levels come the pressures of poverty on the family. More and more young, and often single, parents struggle to raise children bereft of the resources that ensure equal opportunity through education. Few children have the social skills needed to begin kindergarten ready to learn; by the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, they have fallen significantly behind and then struggle with mandated tests after that. They reach middle school lacking the organizational skills to succeed, yet emerge in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade as more mature than 8<sup>th</sup> graders in more privileged settings. Many high school students lack any exposure to the multitude of career choices open to young people, and drop out of high school unable to envision a future in which a degree is necessary.

Each of these challenges opens the way for interventions. Interventions must be envisioned at various scales. Some emerge at the most micro scale, for instance, small-scale interventions in first and second grade aimed at behavioral-readiness for young elementary students and a summer orientation program for rising sixth graders preparing to begin middle school.

Other interventions are less honed and more broad-reaching -- the consideration of multiple tracks through high school, including tracks that are vocationally-oriented, for instance.

Finally, some interventions may be community-wide, and serve to rally the community around its strengths. A brand, or theme, shared by all – students, educators, neighbors – could serve this purpose. For this, we return to the assets of the community, highlighting two of them: the youth and the Rackspace Corporation. These two assets share a fundamental and valuable skill we call *code-switching*. Students have developed the ability to communicate across cultural, ethnic, and often economic divides. Somehow, students develop an appreciation for and a comfort with the communication strategies – the *codes* – of numerous cultures, and thus are comfortable in diversity. It is a skill and way of life that is becoming increasingly prized in a globalizing world – and in our rapidly globalizing city. And these students go to school next-door to one of the most sophisticated information-technology companies in the world, where, through *code*, information is created, stored, and shared. We propose to begin a branding conversation with this notion of *code-switching*, as we seem to be surrounded by a population that is quite adept at it. For this, we offer a preliminary idea: *code-switchers*.

In the following pages the voices of numerous stakeholders are represented. Information is organized into ‘strengths’ and ‘challenges’. As in so many cases,

many were quite vocal when discussing challenges to and in their community, thus substantial space is dedicated to that. Often emerging in these conversations are themes and ideas that have been researched and debated in the academic literature, or tested in practice in other places. In those cases, we have included summaries of that research and/or practice. We have intentionally *not* reviewed all of the current educational programs available in our area, due to the plethora of them, but also to the threat that this might reverse the direction of our work and become ‘top-down’, or driven by local expertise rather than by community input. Some programs that are already present in the schools have been highlighted due to their relevance to this story.

The report begins with a brief history and the neighborhood, as the context is important in understanding the changes documented here that so many have described. Yet the history is brief; the focus shifts to the youth and the challenges they face. Once this report has been reviewed by the Foundation we recommend that it be presented to the stakeholders in the community whose voices are represented therein. Community development at the scale envisioned by the Rackspace Foundation must be accomplished in partnership, thus it will be necessary to determine if stakeholder’s voices are represented clearly and correctly. Following that, strategic interventions (such as those suggested here) may be suggested and pursued in partnership.

Christine Drennon, Ph.D.  
Holly Josserand  
Elly Yeo  
September 2013

## Introduction

In 2010 the Rackspace Foundation approached the Urban Studies program at Trinity University with a proposition: as a corporate citizen in this community, we [Rackspace] believe we can make a difference in our neighborhood, but we want to learn its strengths and challenges. Will you help us do that? This report details our findings.

The report was commissioned by the Rackspace Foundation, whose mission is to be a catalyst for community revitalization in their neighborhood. Their strategy to fulfill that mission is to *create a learning community where education is valued, families and educators are engaged, and students strive to reach their fullest potential.* The Rackspace Foundation invests in enrichment programs in the ‘Castle Community’ schools, which they call the Magnificent Seven: Roosevelt High School, Ed White and Krueger middle schools, and Camelot, Montgomery, Walzem, and Windcrest elementary schools

(RackspaceFoundation.com 2013). This education-centered strategy gives their work focus and energy; so many neighborhood revitalization efforts stumble for lack of either or both. The underlying assumption, that struggling urban neighborhoods can be revitalized through improving educational opportunities, is a novel one, as most revitalization efforts focus on job creation and infrastructure. Not only is it novel – it’s groundbreaking – as this sort of neighborhood revitalization would truly benefit *all* who live, work, and visit the community while creating a destination neighborhood for families



searching for the prized combination of interesting schools, accessible work, and loving community.

But not only does the Rackspace Foundation offer a new vision and strategy for neighborhood revitalization, so too are they re-conceptualizing corporate philanthropy and the role of the socially-responsible corporate citizen. As Graham Weston explains:

*“...Rackspace is a long term citizen in this area. ...the model of philanthropy that we are inventing - is the idea of a corporation being a citizen in a neighborhood and of course it’s a citizen in a city ...I think it would be a better way, a more effective philanthropy.” (Graham Weston, CEO, Rackspace Corporation April 2012).*

His vision differs from the traditional model of philanthropy, in which corporate giving is often funneled through a third party fiscal agent and redistributed across the metropolitan area. Weston’s model is *place-based*, and as such, necessitates a close relationship with the community in which they are located.

A place-based model of community development requires an intimate knowledge and appreciation of the strengths and challenges in the community. This report is the beginning of the process of growing the knowledge and appreciation of their neighbors, and -- in sharing it -- of their neighbors with them. The report is a compendium of voices – neighbors, leaders, educators, workers – who live, work, and visit the neighborhood. In addition to their voices, secondary data has also been collected in order to compare some of the conditions of the community with other neighborhoods and schools in San Antonio.

In the end, the purpose of this report is twofold:





- To educate the Rackspace Foundation on the strengths and challenges present in their community;
- And to guide them in making strategic funding decisions that will enable them to fulfill their vision of neighborhood revitalization through corporate philanthropy.

The report closes with a preliminary set of strategies geared to very specific ‘intervention points’ that have been identified by stakeholders and then further studied in the published research literature. Those points are intended to catalyze the conversation around ‘next steps’. Finally, multiple stakeholders expressed a desire to ‘re-brand’ the area, as current messaging is dominated by the media and accentuates, if not exaggerates, the challenges of the area. We close with some ideas.

<p><b>List of stakeholders interviewed for this study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camelot Elementary (teachers)</li> <li>• Windcrest Elementary (teachers)</li> <li>• Krueger Middle School (teachers)</li> <li>• Roosevelt High School (teachers)</li> <li>• Principals of all schools</li> <li>• Camelot Neighborhood Association (residents)</li> <li>• City of Windcrest residents</li> <li>• City of Windcrest elected and appointed officials</li> <li>• City of San Antonio elected and appointed officials</li> <li>• City of San Antonio Police Department</li> <li>• Roosevelt High School alumni</li> <li>• City Year corps members</li> <li>• Communities in Schools</li> <li>• Rackers with young families</li> <li>• Rackers without children</li> <li>• Family specialist, Camelot Elementary</li> <li>• Family specialist, Roosevelt High School</li> <li>• Program director, City Year</li> <li>• Chairman of the Board of Rackspace, Graham Weston</li> </ul>	<p><b>Additional secondary data collected for this study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1990, 200, 2010 U.S. Census data</li> <li>• American Community Survey</li> <li>• Bexar County Appraisal District (2003-2013)</li> <li>• Texas Education Agency (AEIS data)</li> <li>• RefWorks (business data)</li> <li>• <i>San Antonio Express-News</i> (historic data)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trinity students involved in this study: (and class)</b></p> <p>2011: Sheila Castle (2012)</p> <p>2012: Victoria Gonzalez (2013)</p> <p>2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angela Chen (2015)</li> <li>• Ben Conway (2015)</li> <li>• Melissa Davis (2015)</li> <li>• Laura Fraser (2013)</li> <li>• Victoria Gonzalez (2013)</li> <li>• Holly Josserand (2014)</li> <li>• Anna Keene (2015)</li> <li>• Ashley Lai (2013)</li> <li>• Kayla Rae Mendez (2014)</li> <li>• Hannah Monroe (2013)</li> <li>• David Nikaido (2013)</li> <li>• Sal Perdomo (2013)</li> <li>• Elly Yeo (2015)</li> </ul> <p>2013 (summer): Elly Yeo and Holly Josserand</p>
---	---	---



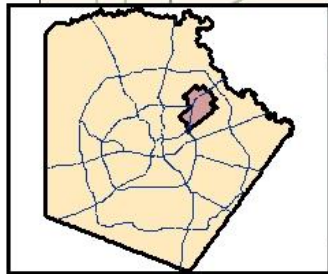
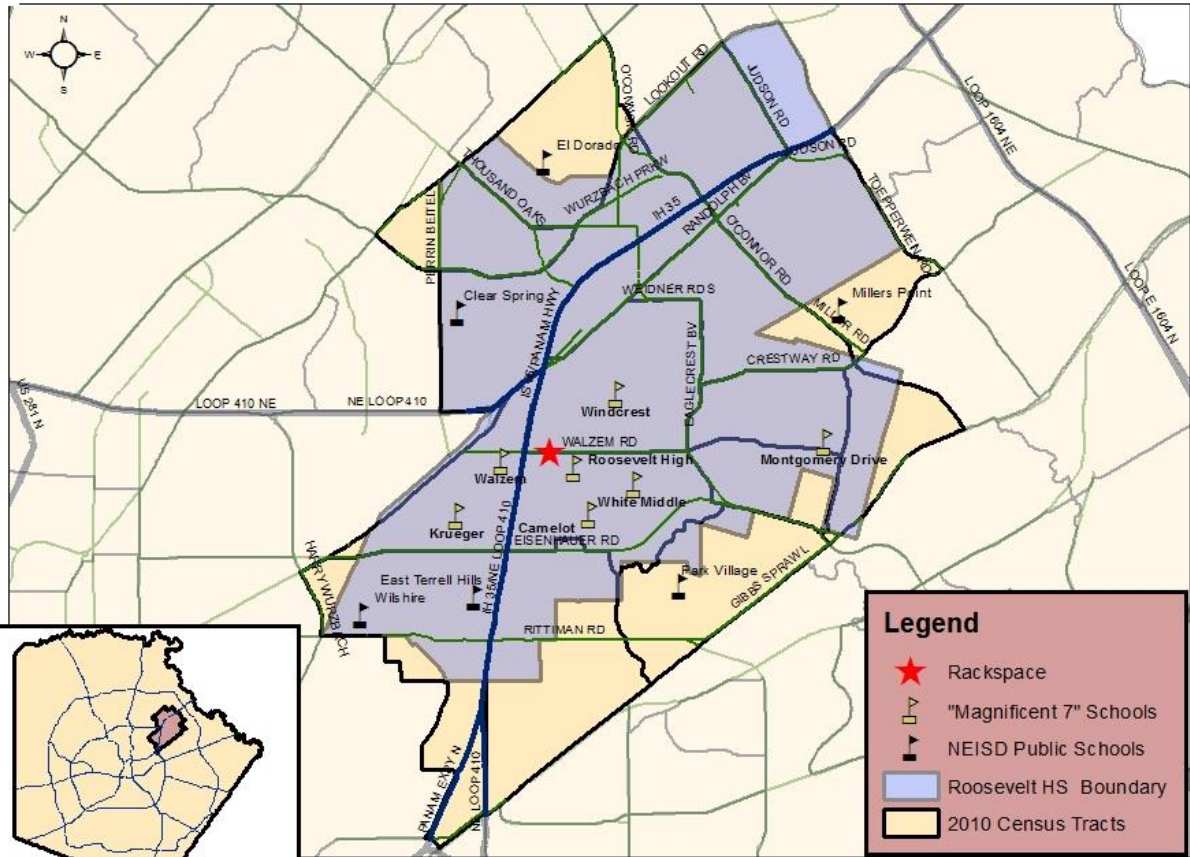
# The Neighborhood

## I. History of The Neighborhood

For the purpose of this report, the neighborhood and community surrounding Rackspace and the Magnificent 7 Schools is geographically defined by fifteen 2010 Census Bureau tracts (1205.02, 1212.03, 1212.05, 1213, 1214.03, 1215.01, 1215.04, 1215.06, 1215.07, 1215.08, 1218.03) and the Roosevelt High School attendance boundary.

The neighborhood was developed in the 1960s by suburban developer Ray Ellison Homes; the Windsor Park Mall was built in 1976 and transformed the area from a rural agricultural setting to a thriving, attractive suburb. **Windcrest Residents** describe the neighborhood:

*This is hard to explain to people who haven't been around here, but Windcrest glittered 40 years ago. It was absolutely beautiful.*



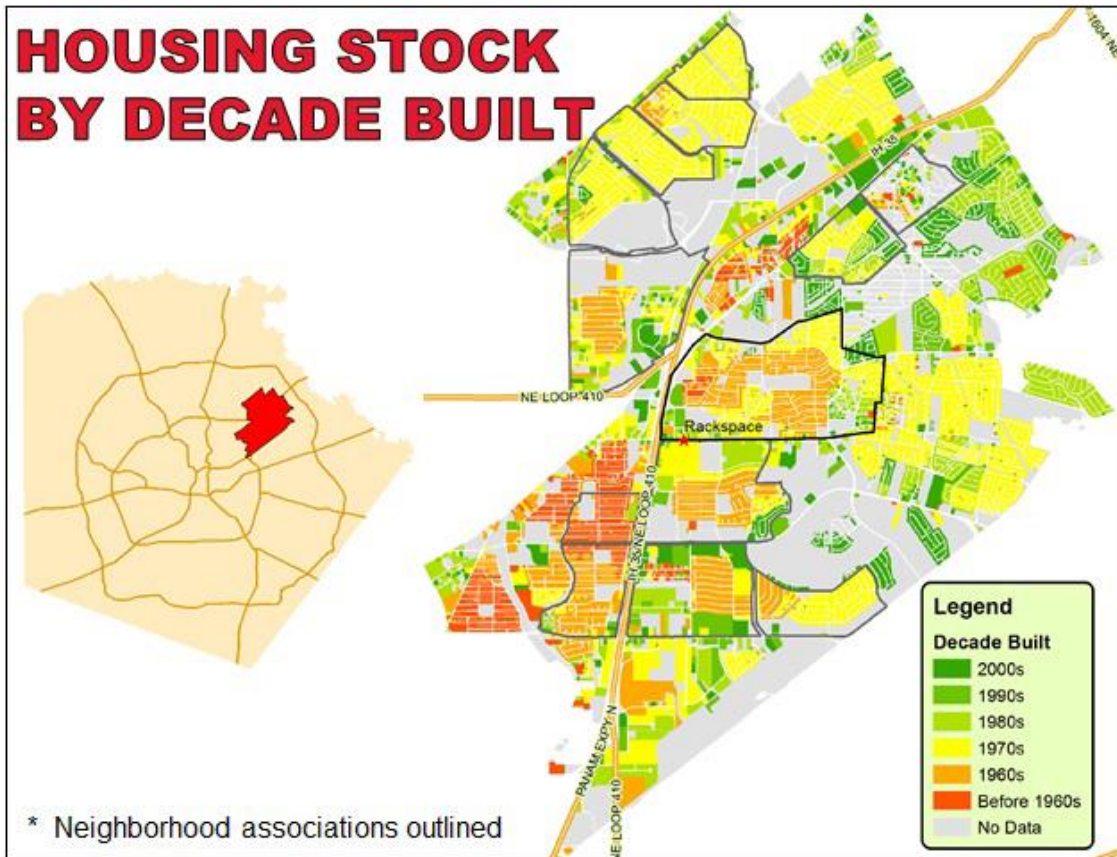
Victoria Gonzalez  
Trinity University  
Urban Studies Program  
Fall 2012



The neighborhood analyzed here is the yellow area located in northeast Bexar County. We understand that services and people are not confined to arbitrary boundaries, however, the data we have access to is divided by Census tracts and schools. Notice that our neighborhood crosses over Interstate 35 and Loop 410. In addition to the “Magnificent 7” schools that the Rackspace Foundation currently supports, we have included the NEISD public schools that also lie within the neighborhood. Rackspace is labeled with a red star as a reference point.

Camelot I residents talk about when their neighborhood was new, and the demand for the new houses there:

*“But, ya know though, when we bought our house here, like I said in '72-- that was a time when a house when a house would go up for sale in the morning and by night it would be gone. And the only way we got our house was, we were living in Austin, and I had a friend who lived next door to my house and she called and she says, "Al is fixing to come back to Austin. The house is going up for sale next door to me and he's going to put it up in the morning." My husband says, "Go and buy the house. I don't care what it looks like." So, I went and I bought it. He said, "Just buy it and if we don't like it, we'll look after we get here.”*

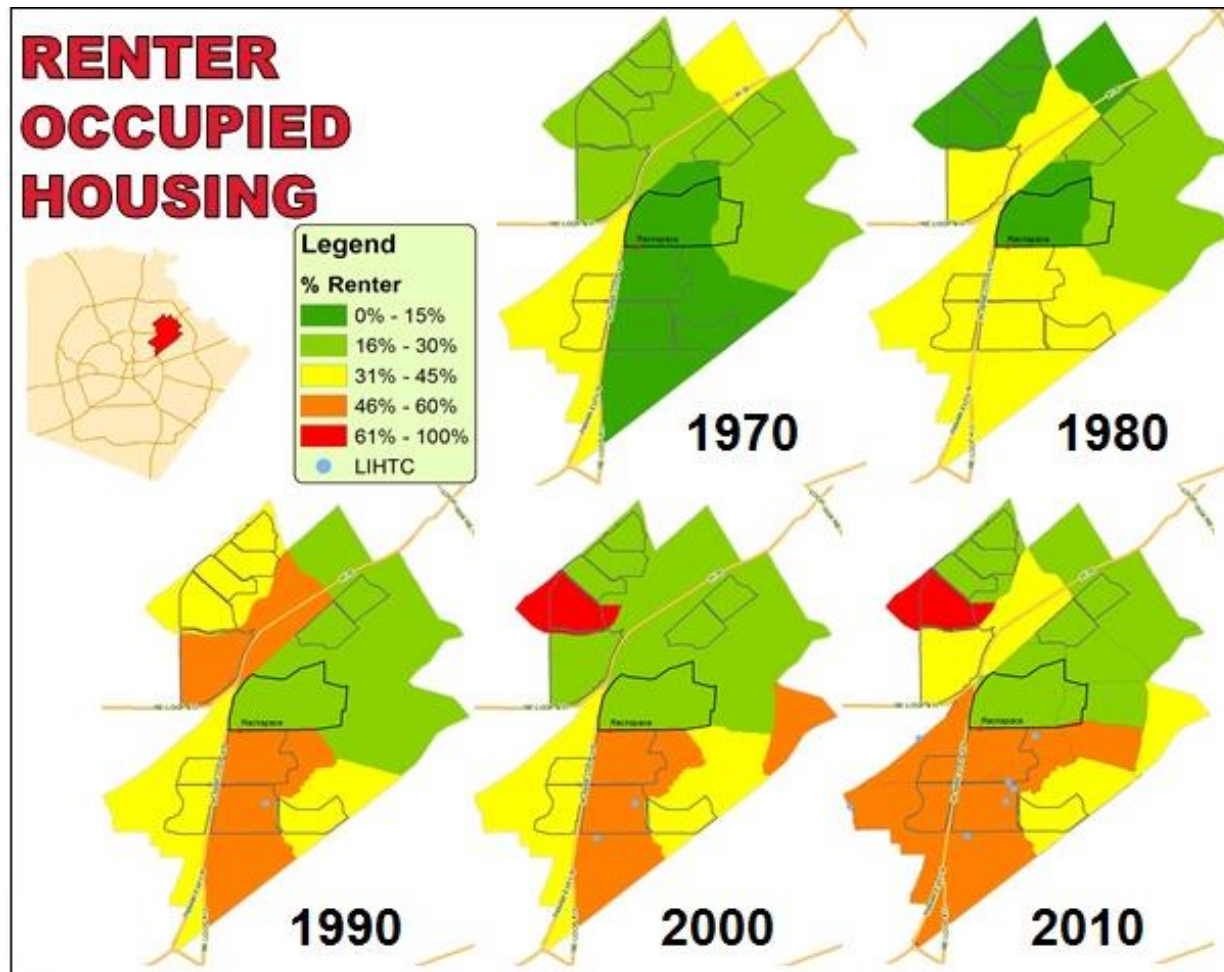


*“But since the 1970s when it was built and populated, the neighborhood, like so many inner-suburban neighborhoods, has been in decline, marked by decreasing income levels of its residents, a greater percentage of people renting than owning their homes, and a slow deterioration of the housing stock that signals to outsiders that home prices may be comparably slipping and housing no longer a safe investment.*

**Windcrest Residents** describe the deterioration when they talk about the changes in quality of the local housing stock, a decreasing average income, and an increase in renter occupied vs. owner occupied housing from 1970-2010:

*The quality of life, the way it looked, the safety, the pride that everyone had at that time...That's all gone.*

This map shows the age of the neighborhood's housing stock. The green areas have been built since the 80s, while the yellow, orange, and red areas are more than 40 years old. Notice that the Camelot, Krueger, Terrell Hills, Park Village and East Village, south of Windcrest, neighborhoods as well as the Park North and Sungate, west of I-35, neighborhoods have much older housing and are now mostly occupied by retired military.



Residents who live in the Camelot I neighborhood describe when the neighborhood was new:

*BG: When we moved into this subdivision it was not in the City of San Antonio, ... but there were a lot of young families. And we were a young family at that time.*

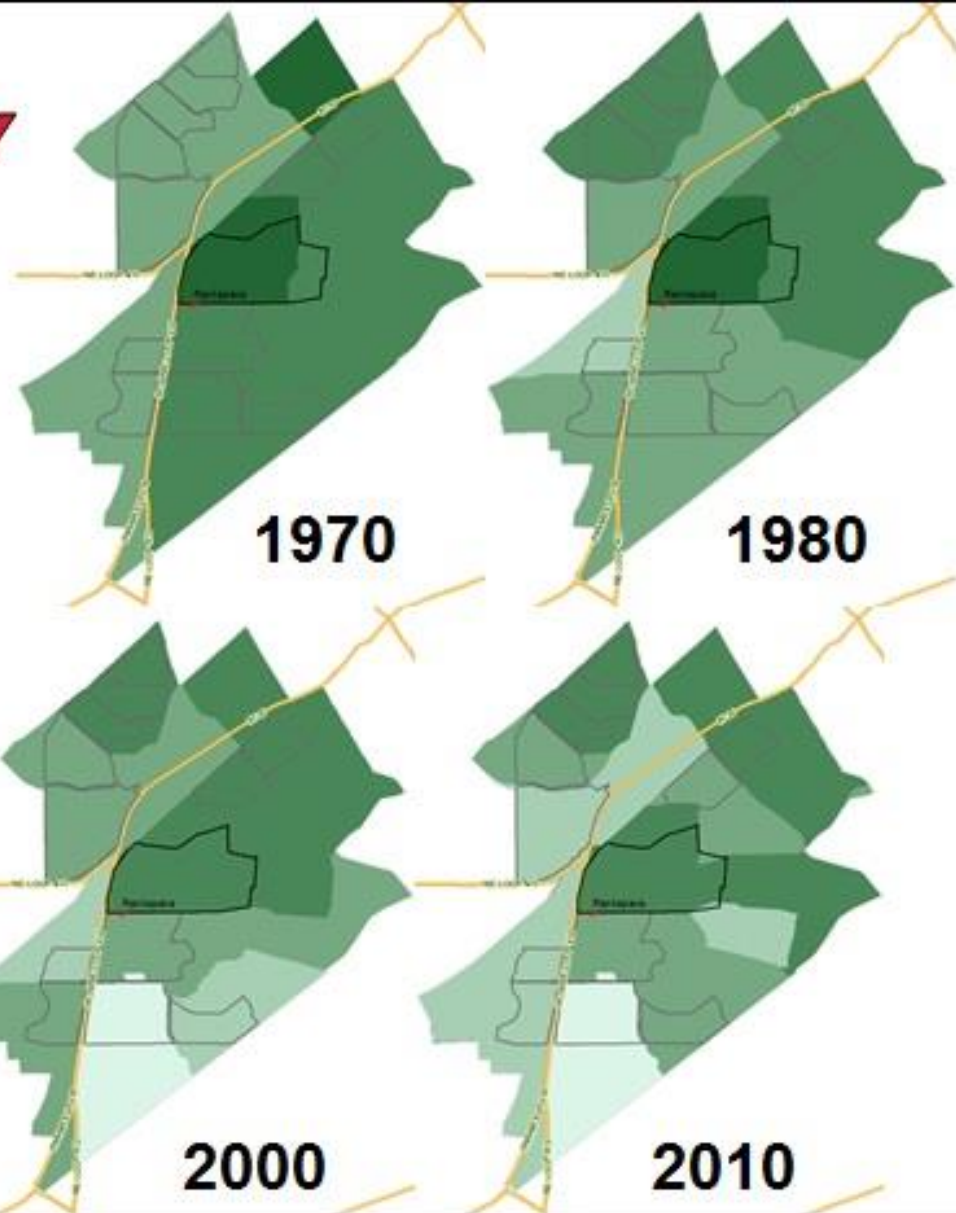
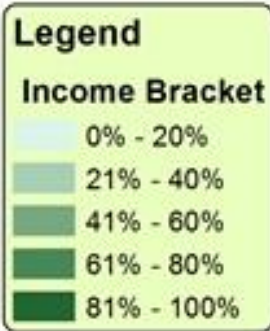
*BG: We had three daughters. The oldest one was junior high age and she went to Kruger the first year because Ed White wasn't finished, and then she went to Roosevelt. The baby went to Camelot and the middle daughter went to Ed White. And now, we're great grandparents.*

*The neighborhood, it showed promise of maintaining its value-*

*BG: when our kids were growing up we had 10...15 kids in the yard playing. It was just a lot of fun. And now, they are no small children on our cul-de-sac. There are only 8 houses on our cul-de-sac. Probably the youngest family has married kids now.*

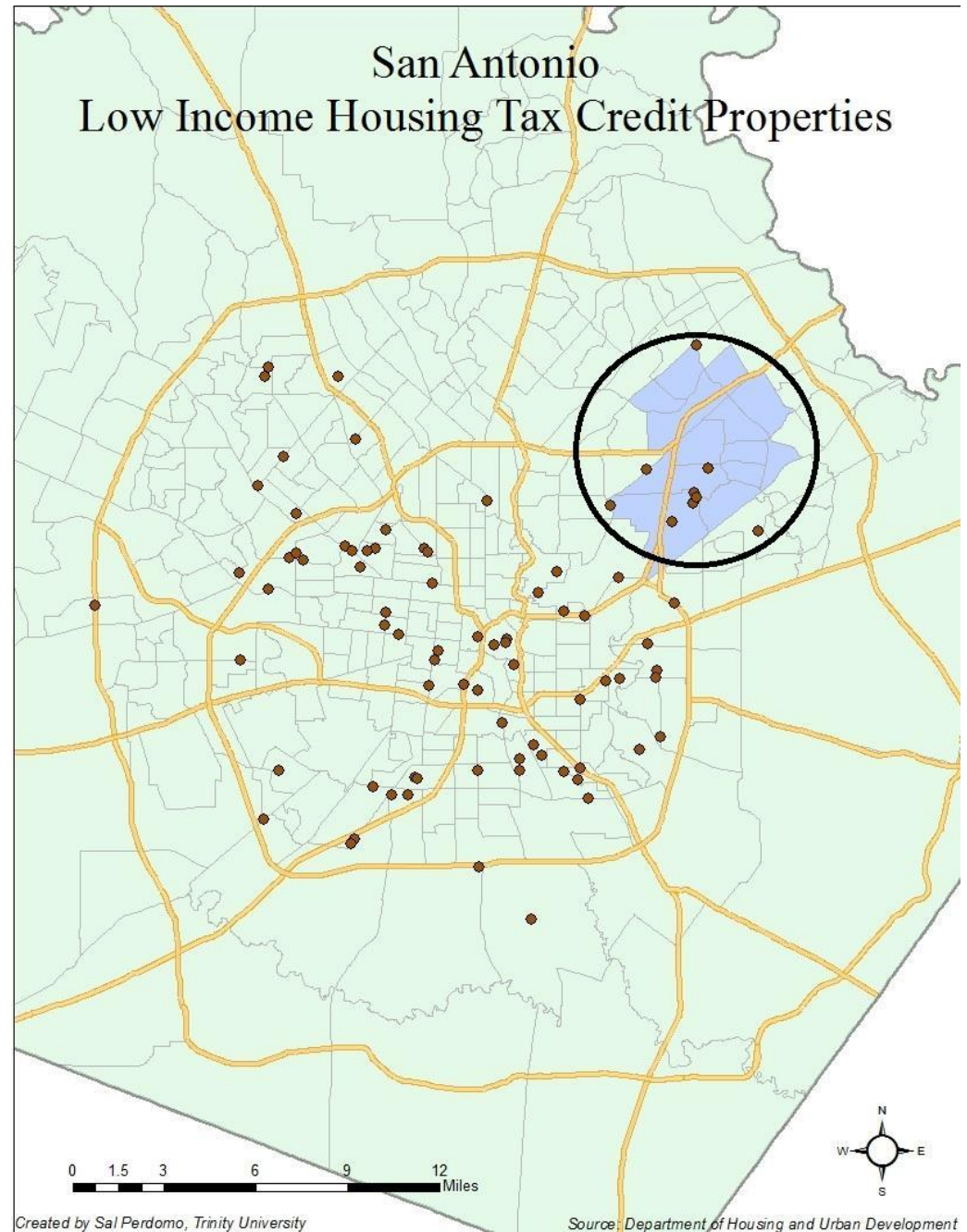
The process they refer to is neighborhood filtering – the slow decline of a housing stock as it ages, get more difficult to maintain, and begins to devalue. With this process, families with less disposable income begin to move in, attracted by lower rents. The map above illustrates this phenomenon well, as the quotes from neighbors describe the same process from a personal perspective.

# AVERAGE INCOME COUNTY BRACKET



Accompanying these changes is the change in the average income bracket. This map shows the average family income of this area's households compared to Bexar County's average. Lighter colors represent lower income levels and darker colors represent higher income levels. The lightest areas are within the bottom 20% of the San Antonio population's average income. As the map shows, the area primarily housed residents in the top 50% of the income bracket in the 1970s. Yet, from 1980-2012, the area shifts to housing residents who are primarily within the lower 50% of the income bracket.

Teachers and principals are very aware that the majority of their students live in the apartment complexes that dominate the area. Many of these multi-family complexes are Low Income Housing Tax Credit Properties; this area has a plethora of them compared to the rest of Bexar County. An increase in multifamily units and tax-credit properties coupled with a wave of violence in the 1990s, led to the closing of Windsor Park Mall and left the area in a state of deterioration. Some of these properties are well kept and well run while others are in various stages of deterioration.



## II Assets and Challenges



Quantitative and demographic data may outline the struggles of this neighborhood but they do not and cannot show what those numbers mean to the neighborhood's residents. In the following sections, a synthesis of quantitative data and qualitative data is presented. Compiling narratives from multiple focus groups, together with quantitative data from the school district and census begins to reveal stakeholders' greatest concerns concerning their neighborhood and its schools. We begin this discussion by presenting stakeholder- identified assets of the area. In the following section, we examine the stakeholders' identified challenges.



In the next three pages a summary table and two content analysis tables that outline the key themes across focus groups may be found. Themes were derived from content analysis of focus group transcriptions. The numbers under each stakeholder/ grade level category represents how many times the particular theme was mentioned during focus groups. If the same theme was mentioned multiple times by the same speaker in a single quote, it is counted as being mentioned once. In this section, we discuss the major themes that are most commonly mentioned across focus groups.

<b>Assets (all grade levels)</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Challenges (by grade level)</b>
Diverse student population	Elementary Schools	Lack of adult presence and mentorship
		Lack of social skills
		Students reading below grade level
		Chronic absenteeism
Student resiliency	Middle Schools	Conflict between social skills for the classroom and social skills for the home environment
		Need for positive adult role models
		Need for more engaging activities and exposure to experiences
Teaching Challenge and Personal Growth for Teachers	High School	College vs. alternative paths
Student-Teacher relationship based on social and cultural understanding		Productive use of portable technologies
		Consistent expectations

**Themes by Stakeholder**

Theme	Teachers					Total	Mentors				Total	Student	Total	Residents/ Business			Total	Combined Total
	Windcrest Teachers	Camelot Teachers	Krueger Teachers	Roosevelt Teachers	CIS		City Year Krueger	City Year Ed White	City Year Roosevelt	Roosevelt Alumni		Camelot I Residents		Young Rackers	Rackers with families			
Exposure to gangs and violence	1	2	2		5	1	2	1	4	1	1						10	
Need to standardize rules and expectations		2			2		2	3	3	8							10	
Social skills	4	4	3	1	12		1		1	1	1						14	
Extracurricular Activities		2	1		3		2	2	4	3	3						10	
Teachers: It is intrinsically rewarding to teach here	5		1	2	8		1	2	3					1		1	12	
Need more adults and positive role models	3	6	2	4	15		2		2	4				1	1	2	21	
Lowered housing stock, Section 8, Rent, motels	2	1	1		4	3			3	1	1	6				6	14	
Parents and home as starting point		4	3	2	9	1			1	2							11	

**Themes by Grade Level:**

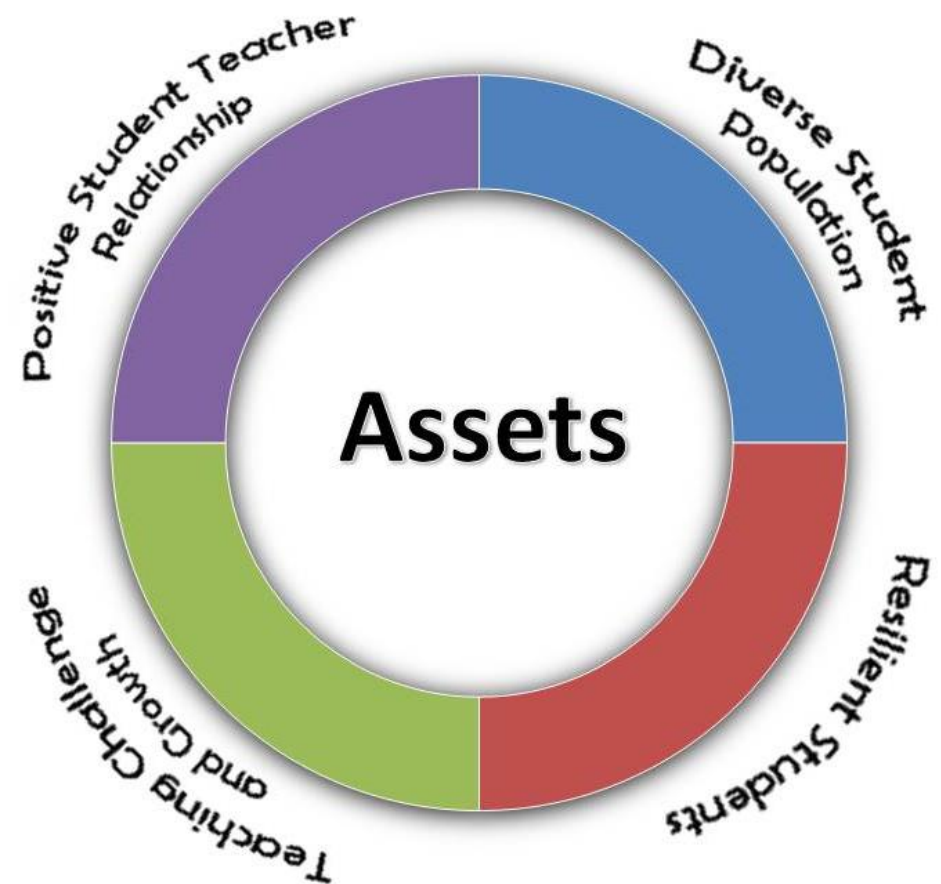
Themes	Elementary		Total	Middle			Total	High			Total
	Windcrest Teachers	Camelot Teachers		Krueger Teachers	City Year Krueger	City Year Ed White		Roosevelt Teachers	City Year Roosevelt	Roosevelt Alumni	
Students reading at lower level	1	5	6					2			2
Tension in student-teacher relationship				1	1	2	4		2	1	3
Advanced Maturity					2	4	6		1		1
College and alternative paths					2		2	2	2		4
Identity formulation				1		2	3		2		2
Social skills	4	4	8	3	1		4	1		1	2
Field Trips	2	3	5	2			2	1			1
Extracurricular Activities		2	2	1	2	2	5			3	3
Teachers: It is intrinsically rewarding to teach here	5		5	1	1	2	4	2			2
Need more adults and positive role models	3	6	9	2	2		4	4	2		6
Lowered housing stock, Section 8, Rent, motels	2	1	3	1			1			1	1
Lack of transportation	2	1	3		1		1				
Parents and home as starting point		4	4	3			3	2	1		3
Culture of poverty/ value disconnect	1		1					2	2		4

# Assets

Stakeholders identify multiple assets in the community and its schools, most of which are associated with the unique social characteristics of the area. First, the neighborhood accommodates a diverse and resilient population because the lowered housing stock presents less financial barrier to families from minority socioeconomic backgrounds and younger families. Consequently, the schools have the unique opportunity to educate a diverse student population. In order to engage this diverse student population, teachers and mentors have to be creative and flexible. More importantly, many teachers and mentors state that they enjoy this teaching challenge and this opportunity for personal growth. Teachers and mentors also identify the positive student-teacher relationship they have formed with their students as one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching in this neighborhood's schools. They further explain that this relationship can only be built on their cultural understanding of the students. They agree that this relationship may not be easy to build but makes a significant difference in the classroom, also in their overall teaching experience, once it is established.

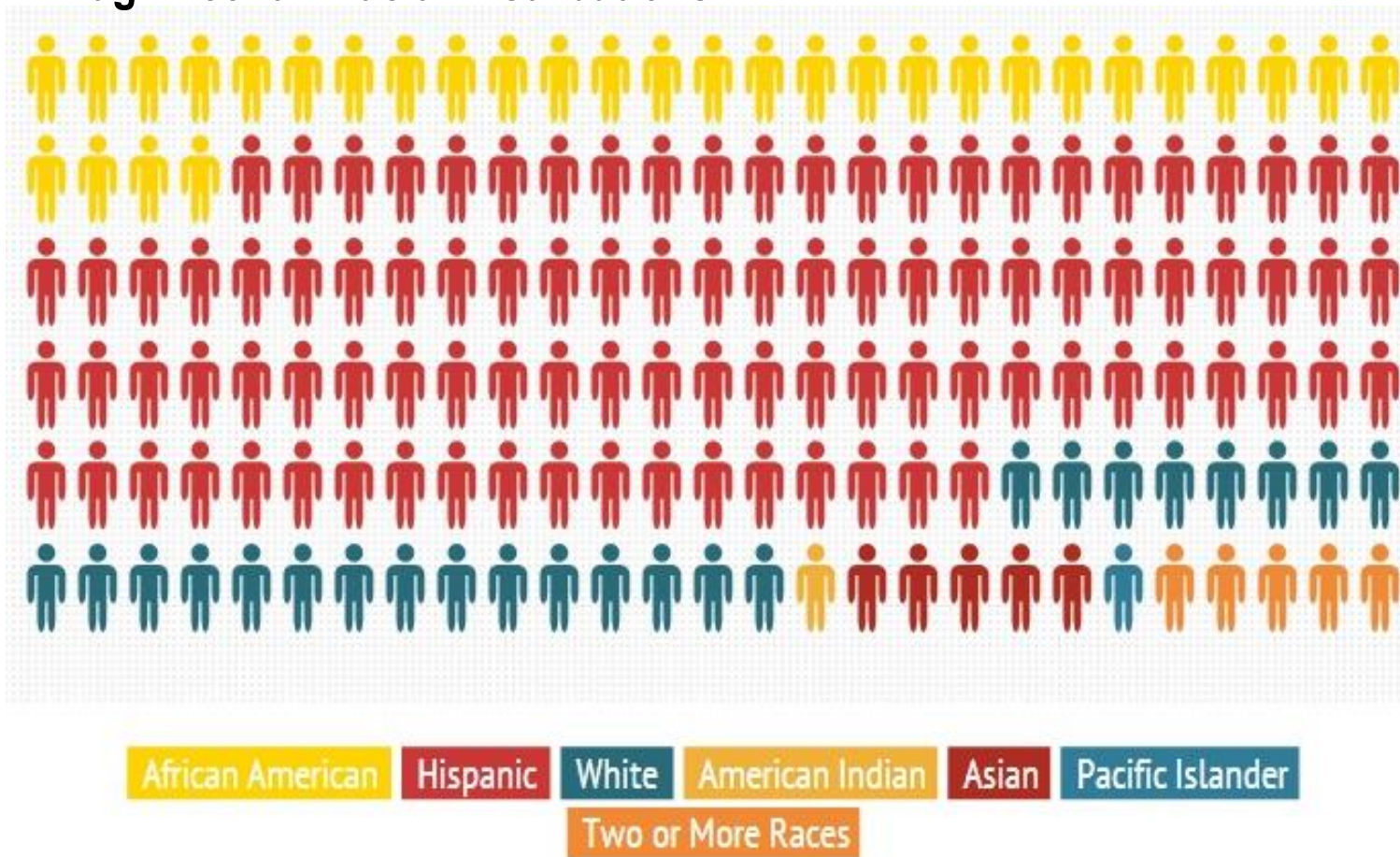
## Asset #1: Diverse Student Population

Stakeholders identify the diverse student population as these schools' greatest asset. The schools celebrate socioeconomic and cultural diversity. In addition, teachers and mentors experience a variety of cultures through their daily interaction with the students. This opportunity to explore different cultures is especially important in a world that is globalizing rapidly.



Roosevelt Teachers and City Year in Ed White comment on the diverse student population:

## Magnificent 7 Racial Distributions

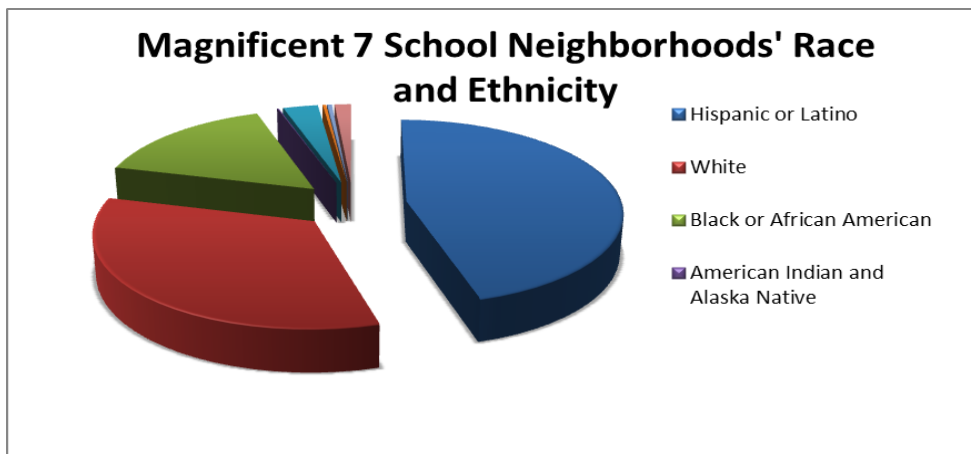


*“I think a lot of the students at school are really diverse. And have different backgrounds and a lot of different areas of their community so you kind of get a clash of different you know cultures and different personalities among all types of students at Ed White. It’s pretty interesting”.*  
[City Year Ed White]

*“And here, I have this*

*incredibly diverse community of ESL learners, not just Spanish speakers...and all my Spanish speakers aren’t even Mexican. I have students from*

*Columbia, from Cuba, from Puerto Rico, from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador. But we have a large population of refugees, and asylum seekers that go to school here". [Roosevelt Teachers]*



*"People are shocked the number of students we have from, like, Congo, Somalia or Ethiopia. We have students who are Burmese, and, you know Thai, Chinese, and so definitely the most diverse". [Roosevelt Teachers]*

These students are exposed to different socioeconomic and ethnic cultures through their daily interaction with peers. As a result, these students may be more culturally aware and more resourceful in communicating with individuals across different

cultures.

**City Year in Roosevelt** adds that the students also introduce different values and moral codes to the classroom. The mentors state that they love this unique opportunity to be exposed to new ideas:

*"I love the fact that a lot of them have their own kind of unique moral compass. You can tell the way that they evaluate things. They kind of each live by their own moral code."*

Race/ Ethnicity	# of Students
African American	1463
Hispanic	4411
White	1053
American Indian	25
Asian	233
Pacific Islander	27
Two or More Races	242

**Roosevelt Teachers** further explain that this diversity is a great asset because it allows the schools to reflect the real world:

*"Roosevelt's always been a diverse campus. It has been the most diverse campus I think for the entire district, but it's more diverse than ever and I think that's one of our bragging points, is that we reflect the real world."*

Racial and ethnic diversity in this area is seen as an asset inside and outside the classroom. It can be used to attract good teachers and prepares students to encounter difference when they graduate and enter the “real world.”

Even elders in the community remark on the diversity of the neighborhood, understanding it as a true asset. Members of the Camelot I neighborhood association recall when they bought their homes in the 1960s and 1970s:

*“This was a completely diversified neighborhood when we moved here, and we like that. That's why we like the area. That and the proximity to everything in San Antonio. This is a great location.”*

*“So we're very diversified neighborhood now, and we have a lot of Hispanics, blacks, whites...”*

*“And all three schools are within walking distance.”*

### **Published Research**

Published research delineates how cultural awareness and understanding serve as great personal assets in business settings. Ananat, Fu, and Ross (2013) suggest that African Americans’ feeling of exclusion from social settings where business knowledge is shared among a predominantly White population is the main cause of the Black-White wage gap. African-Americans may feel excluded from those settings because they prefer very different communication styles than what is practiced in those social settings. Gay (2001) suggests that individuals from different cultures display distinctly different communication and linguistic styles. This cultural difference can be seen across different ethnic and also different socioeconomic groups (Gay, 2001). This implies that individuals from different cultures may not communicate effectively and efficiently if individuals are not aware of the differing communication styles. In a business setting, an employee who lacks exposure to this linguistic diversity will also lack access to information from his/ her peers.



Linguists further this analysis by studying how bilingual speakers speak differently in different social situations. Linguists call this ability to speak differently, as a response to different social situations, the ability to *code-switch*. Myers-Scotton and Ury (1977) suggest that “a speaker switches codes for the two following reasons: to redefine the interactions as appropriate to a different social arena, or to avoid, through continual code-switching, defining the interactions in terms of any specific social arena” (p.6). Furthermore, the perceived social arena “represents cognitions about what behavior is expected for interactions, along with the limits for tolerable behavior deviating from this expectation” (p.6). Therefore, an individual who is also able to code-switch will be more efficient in communicating with people from different cultures.

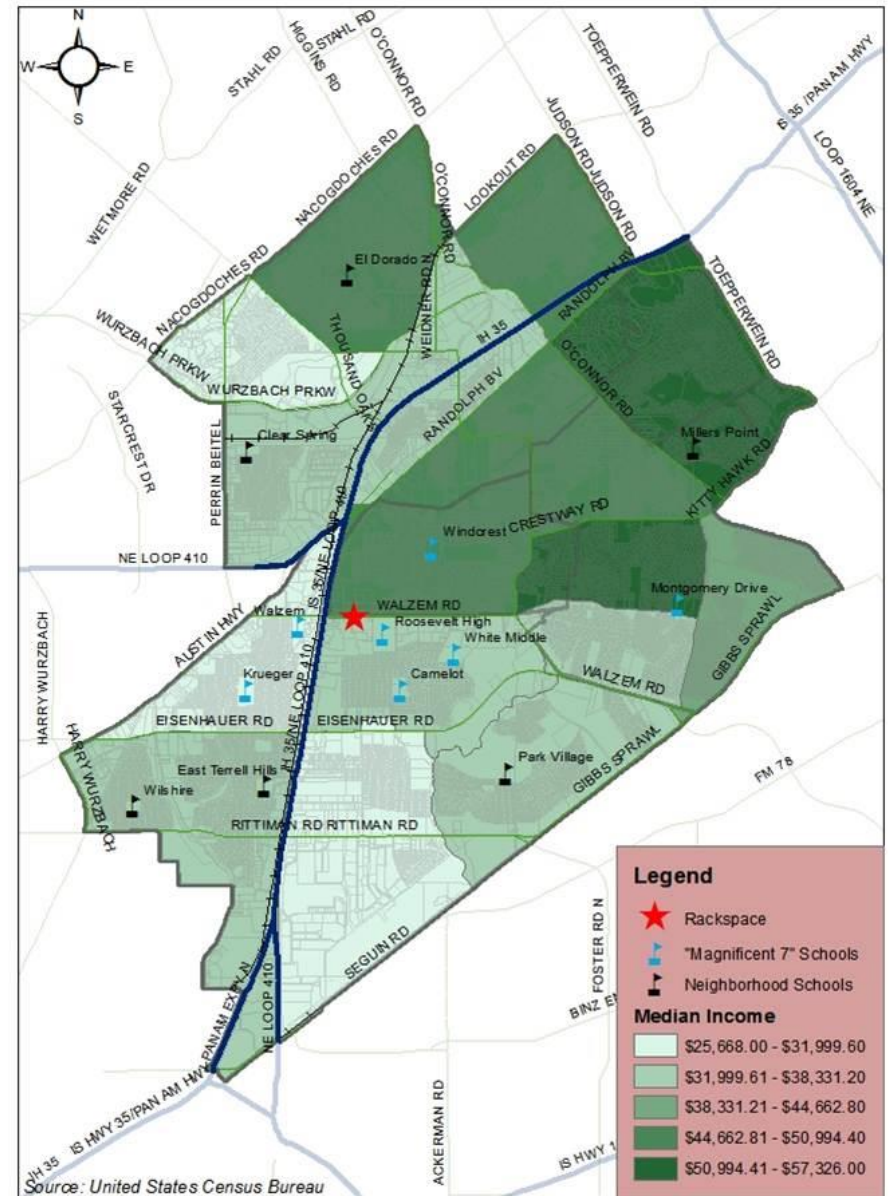
As students in this area are exposed to both socioeconomic and ethnic diversity, they are exposed to different communication and linguistic styles. This exposure may give students the ability to ‘code-switch’. In a business setting, they may be able to communicate more effectively with peers from different backgrounds. In turn, as adults they may have greater access to diverse sources of information as they feel less excluded from social settings made up of different socioeconomic or ethnic populations.

## Asset #2: Student Resiliency

In addition to diversity, resiliency is identified as an asset amongst school children in this community.. Mentors suggest that the students have developed an admirable sense of maturity and



# Median Household Income





responsibility because they have grown up in risky environments. In addition, mentors also observe that their students have better emotional mechanisms to deal with harsh changes and circumstances.

**City Year in Roosevelt** is concerned about the risky environment surrounding the students:

*“I think one of my biggest concerns is like the influences and the pressures that are going to continue and get more intense as they get older. Like, as freshmen they’re already exposed to things that I don’t think a child should be: they’re exposed to gangs, they’re exposed to violence, they’re exposed to drugs and alcohol and sex. And that’s at age 14. So as they get older, that’ll only become more of a norm. All my students that have told me that they don’t smoke and that they haven’t had sex yet, I’m afraid that they’re just a little bit closer. You know? It’s just like they, they’re growing up very, very quickly and it’s sad because they sort of, they sort of see themselves as much more adult because a lot of them have had to fend for themselves and a lot of them are on their own a lot of the time. So it’s hard to tell them “You’re not mature enough to do this” when they’re expected to, when you’re mature enough to have to work to support you family.”*

Although this City Year mentor is concerned that the students are getting closer to these risk factors in their surrounding environment, this quote also shows that some of the students may have developed a certain resiliency that protects them from these risk factors. On the other hand, this quote also delineates how some students have already started carrying adult responsibilities and obligations at this young age.

**Communities in Schools** agree that many middle school and high school students have developed the maturity to carry adult responsibilities:



*not have been able to do.*

*The grandparents are older and the kiddos need to help the grandparents whether it is going to the doctor's office as translators or if the grandparent is at home, sick. They, the students, are caregivers.*

**City Year in Krueger** adds that the students have a better coping mechanism to adapt to the changes in their lives:

*I have to agree they seem pretty emotionally stable like one of my students was talking about he wasn't living in a house for a week because something that happened just seemed like—was like "Oh yeah we dealt with it and then we moved on" and that was something that I would*

**City Year in Ed White and City Year in Roosevelt** suggest that the students' advanced maturity is the result of their harsh home environments:

*I would say they're not sheltered. Like they're very aware of their surroundings, they're very aware of their culture they live in. and a lot of times I find myself taking a step back and finding myself these are middle school students especially just like my grade level is the youngest of them all. They just got out of elementary school. They're very aware of how things are in society and it's like when I was their age I definitely was not like that but I was not sheltered but I definitely did not have as much understanding as they do. [City Year in Ed White]*

*They're really funny. They have really great sense of humor. They're really witty. That's how I can tell that if they have been, like, their intelligence had been nurtured all throughout their life, maybe they would be getting much better grades, they would be much more capable, because they are so witty and they are so quick to make really intelligent jokes. [City Year in Roosevelt]*

**Quantitative Data** shows that many of these students are coming from less privileged backgrounds. The map shows that some students are coming from neighborhoods where the median household income is well below that of the City. However, the qualitative data from focus groups show *that this environment may not solely be a deficit, but also an asset, of the students*. As discussed above, this environment may have trained the students to become mature, resilient, and adaptable. Since the majority of the students are coming from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds, it is important for the neighborhood's schools to implement ways to turn this background disadvantage into behavioral or academic assets.

### **Published Literature:**

Older research in 'resiliency' found that "when exposed to the multiple stressors of poverty, children typically do not do well in school, are more likely to be delinquent in later years, and have more and great marital and occupational problems (Cowen, Wyman, Work & Parker, 1990; Garbarino, 1995; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992 as cited in Condly, 2006, p. 212). However these students that City Year Corps Members mention are within the class described in more current research as "children who defy the conventional wisdom and not only survive hostile environments but also actually thrive; these are the resilient" (Garmezy, 1996; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten et al., 1995; Wolff, 1995 as cited in Condly, 2006, p. 212-213). As we can see from TEA data and teacher input, these students are not thriving academically. Yet, defining success in terms of academic performance alone may not be appropriate because many of these students operate on a different value system from the traditional value system of educators. Since resiliency literature defines a resilient person as someone who is productive now or has already overcome adversity, the description by stakeholders of these students as resilient can be confusing or dissonant when coupled with the literature. Yet, by looking at the description and characteristics that resilient persons have, one can see more easily why City Year Corps members

and CIS are describing the students as resilient and how that is perceived as an asset. The most widely accepted characteristics of resilience include “personality characteristics of the child, emotional integration within the family, and the degree of outside support that the child and family can obtain” (Werner, 1989 cited by Condly, 2006). The type of resilient characteristics City Year members are likely honing in on are individual-level characteristics such as “native intelligence and temperament” (Garmezy, 1991). By looking at a case study done by Schilling (2008) on a resilient woman, Tasha, we can better understand the individual qualities that resiliency literature describes:



‘I’m set in my own way and I don’t think nothin’ can change that now. I think anything I say, even though when I speak my mind... I’m always respectful. For one, I know how far to go. And two, I know better than to say anything that’s going to hurt your feelings or offend you because I don’t want you to do it to me. BUT... if it’s on my mind, you’re going to get it.’

Although some view her “stubbornness” negatively, particularly those concerned with her academic performance (Her mother and her school counselor), it appears to be what helped her overcome her adversity. As Schilling (2008) writes:

It is evident from Tasha’s story and external data sources that she exhibits some characteristics of resilient individuals identified by researchers. For example, her profile demonstrates autonomy and a sense of purpose (Benard, 1993; Werner, 1990) as well as insight, independence, initiative, and a values orientation (Hurtes and Allen, 2001). Tasha’s memories of middle and high school present a picture of the importance of her strong sense of self and moral

maturity. Hurtes and Allen (2001) describe adaptive individuals as those who “have evaluated their world and made their own decisions rather than accepting someone else’s rules...can identify what is appropriate, moral behavior, and have the courage to stand by their convictions” (p.336).

One crucial way Tasha was supported in overcoming her adversity includes her participation and extensive support from the K-12 program, Project Effort, which focuses on athletics, mentoring, teacher workshops, and family support and bonding. This outside support can be often found in the form of school-based strategies. Brooks (2006) offers 4 ways in which school-based strategies can help strengthen resilience which include (1) Developing Social Competence curriculums that focus on “building skills in problem solving, decision making, assertiveness, communicating effectively, managing emotions, conflict resolution, resisting peer pressure, and developing personal relationships”, (2) Increasing Caring Relationships with Adults, (3) Communicating High expectations, and (4) Maximizing Opportunities for Meaningful participation (p. 70-71). In other words, by supporting and developing, rather than ignoring or controlling, the resilient characteristics and behaviors City Year and Communities in Schools see in the students, we can begin to harness their resilient individual characteristics and help them overcome adversity. It is precisely the resilient characteristics -- including their ability to thrive in an adverse and unpredictable environment -- that, if supported and nurtured, are the traits that are valuable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

### **Asset #3: Teaching Challenge and Personal Growth for Teachers**

Teachers agree that teaching in these schools exposes them to unique challenges. Teachers strategize to educate and connect with this diverse student population. In this process, the teachers find themselves encompassed with opportunities for personal growth. Teachers also agree that it is rewarding to be able to serve this population because the students, coming from harsh backgrounds, really appreciate the resources they’re given in school.

**Krueger Teachers and Windcrest Teachers** agree that they enjoy the challenge of teaching this diverse student population:

*I will say that title campuses, we have to teach harder and fill in more gaps and it's extremely rewarding that we have had these special people that have a part for that because at Alamo Heights, all the kids are college bound and they are all pre-AP/GT and they will all succeed regardless of what that teacher does or does not do. And yet at Krueger, we really out teach that and we offer more innovative things than what they have. [Krueger Teachers]*



*I want to get all my students to the same finish line but I have to use different strategies, lessons, shorten the lesson, lengthen the lesson, try something else, play to their interest, rather than play to their academic side. I mean you have to get them to the same place everybody has to learn what an idiom is, so how am I going to get them to that path [Krueger Teachers]*

*Well I think it's something different with every year, every class, every kid. I mean you have to be creative, flexible. You know, what works for this kid may not work for this kid and you've got to come up with a new solution. Or what works for that group of kids, so... [Windcrest Teachers]*

Teachers who are creative, flexible, and adaptable -- teachers who are willing to try new pedagogies, within the curriculum -- must be sought and supported. These classrooms present teachers with unique opportunities to try different teaching approaches. Furthermore, good leadership must be prioritized<sup>1</sup>.

**Camelot Teachers** add that the students, coming from backgrounds with limited resources really appreciate the resource and attention they are given in school:

*One thing that I love about our kids, they have such big hearts and they appreciate the little things, every little thing is like "Yes!" and they don't want to go home at the end of the day. This is their exciting time. "We're gonna go to the computer lab, then we're gonna..." "Yay", but I just love*



---

<sup>1</sup> Good leadership must be developed. Good leadership creates an environment of trust in which teachers are empowered with chances to try different teaching approaches.

*that they genuinely love and appreciate what they're getting from school.*

**Windcrest Teachers** explain that a combination of the teaching challenge, the room for personal growth, and the student-teacher relationship makes teaching in these schools exceptionally rewarding:

*You know, I think a lot of it is like, a lot of people that work at Title 1 schools--it's because we want to be here and it's so much of that change in that relationship you build with them--I'm not saying it's easy, but the--the growth you feel as a person, you're really making a difference--you're really helping those students. I've had some that have come from Roosevelt and they've come back ... and I'm like, "How do you remember that?" but just truly impacting them and it's really like a love of, like your school but then it's the kids because, it's, it's tough I mean, it's not easy but it's tough but it's very rewarding. Very intrinsic, like inside, not like there's no money--no monetary, but it's very intrinsic.*

This teacher (quoted above) shows that these schools are ideal for teachers who are passionate about making a difference. Many of these students are surrounded by harsh circumstances. Some students lack adult role models in their lives, some face difficulties connecting with the academic



curriculum, and some others see limited opportunities in their surrounding environment. These are just some of the many places where the teachers can really make a difference. Therefore, from another perspective, the harsh environment of these students translates into a common asset of the schools. This unique student population makes the schools interesting places full of culture, diversity, and opportunities for change.

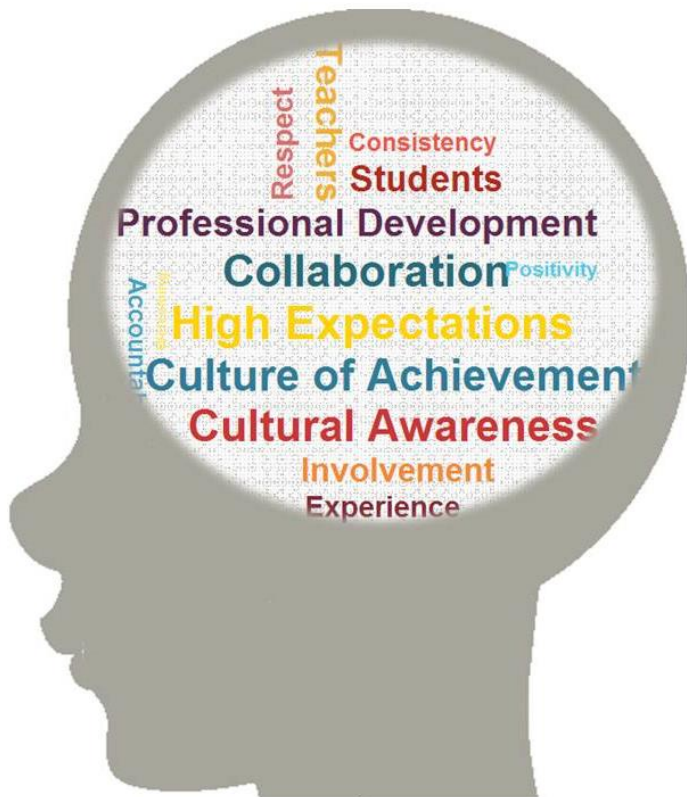
#### **Asset #4: Student Teacher Relationship Based on Social and Cultural Understanding**



Teachers and mentors identify their relationships with students as one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching in these schools. Furthermore, they stress that this relationship does not come easily but takes time and effort to build. In addition, stakeholders suggest that the students respond well to mentor-type relationships where the adult is sensitive to their diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Leadership is especially important in facilitating teachers' socioeconomic and cultural understanding of their students.

**Windcrest Teachers and City Year in Roosevelt** agree that it takes time and effort to build relationships with students:

*Like what [the principal] said, it's all about building relationships--these kids are not going to do anything for you because you have a firm voice or you're mean to them or you take something away. They're going to do it because they have that relationship with you. That you built.*  
[Windcrest Teachers]



*Like kids who told me flat out who told me they were not going to like the new teachers and were like, dead set on like being the most disruptive person possible are now like the best students in the class. And just because it-- it takes a while for them to get to know someone and want to trust them and once they realize what their expectations are, most of them are pretty good.* [City Year in Roosevelt]

Agreeing with **City Year**, a **Roosevelt Teacher** also explains how building a student-teacher relationship makes a significant difference in the classroom:

*...last year, my first year here, I had a different opinion [about the students] simply because I wasn't familiar with the local culture. Slowly I'm seeing the different side to it. I'm seeing those kids honestly just want an adult to care about them, and you know I was talking about what I see when and I come to campus*

*and when I leave campus, and it's funny because you have high school kids that are out on the courtyard, and that's their playground.*

The quotes from **City Year** and from the **Roosevelt Teacher** imply how the presence of this student-teacher relationship makes a difference in the classroom. Students respond differently to different teachers depending on whether the teacher has built a relationship with them. There are some evident cases, which will be discussed in the Middle School section, where the absence of this relationship presents challenges in the classroom.

**City Year in Krueger** and **Roosevelt Teachers** add how the genuine student-teacher relationship makes teaching in this area a very rewarding experience:

*On top of all that they do have their own issues but once they start to care about you they start to care about your issues and they ask you so many questions “Oh what’s going on in your life” and they have all these problems that I can’t even imagine but you wanna know about my simple.. “Oh I killed a bug today”... just how much they care about you... you want to stay once they start to care about you [City Year Krueger]*

*I think it’s different for those of us that came here. (Tears up) I want to take these kids home with me. They touch my heart. And it’s so hard, because they want love. They don’t have it. Even my most challenging kids are my best kids... [Roosevelt Teachers]*

*So when you make that connection with them, they latch on. My kids that I had last year, I could not get them to do anything, but they came everyday. Perfect attendance, but they failed my class. But now this year, “Hi miss, how are you?” So they have that report, and they want to see you and make sure you’re there because they know that you are a go-to person, but their circumstances still haven’t changed. [Roosevelt Teachers]*

The second quote from **Roosevelt Teachers** may illustrate the type of relationship the students are seeking. The students need adults who understand and are willing to discuss their circumstances with them. The focus of this relationship needs to be a mutual understanding in addition to academic progress. In a later section, we will discuss how problems emerge when the student-teacher relationship is overshadowed by an overemphasis on academic achievement.

A **Krueger Teacher** adds that effective leadership can facilitate teachers' development of cultural understanding:

*...I was at another campus similar to it at North Side, and the interesting thing when I started North Side, it was my first year teaching, the first day of staff development the principal took us on a bus and said "We're taking a field trip" and he actually just took us to the neighborhood. And saw the difference just from one street to the next street. And that made so much of an impact on—I know I made an impact on myself because of the fact that it's like "Ok so that's going to explain why they don't have a pencil, why they didn't bring their homework." It made a big difference and I felt like that was something that helped me because then I knew, I understood. Otherwise if I hadn't had that experience I would have never... Well what is it like? I mean I would have wanted to make sure your homework is done, make sure you respect your teachers, make sure everything's done, I mean it just wasn't that way. It was an eye opener for me...*

These principals can initiate the teachers' sociocultural understanding of their students. To establish this sociocultural understanding, principals need to be personally aware of the students' circumstances and appreciate the role those circumstances play in the classroom. Then they need to be willing to introduce teachers to those circumstances. Since these understandings are the basis for positive student-teacher relationships, effective professional development programs and student-teacher experiences such as the field trip described in the quote above can help build these rewarding relationships.



## **Published Research**

Published research agrees that effective leadership can enhance teachers' teaching experience. For this neighborhood's schools, a positive teaching experience can involve exposure to a diverse student population, exposure to challenges and opportunities for personal growth, and the building of rewarding student-teacher relationships. The principal is seen not just as a unifying force and the creator of school-wide collaboration (another characteristic to be discussed later), but also as an instructional leader (Center for Public Education 2007; Charles A. Dana Center 1999). The principal establishes and evokes the necessary 'culture of achievement' and provides the basis for high expectations through tangible goals needed for effective schooling (McGee 2003; Cotton 1991). Habernman (1999), in his case study on an effective low income serving elementary school in Houston, revealed that when a principal has a high level of awareness about the wide ranging issues of the school, individual students, and teachers, the teachers, staff, children, and parents feel more respected and act more cohesively. Effective principals are given the resources and access to improve the academic performance and instruction of the school with things like opportunities for visits to similar yet higher achieving schools, time to engage in daily instructional support, and professional development for instruction practices (Charles A. Dana Center 1999). McGee (2003) argues that, in addition to maintaining a visible academic and instructional presence in the school that provides for increased staff collaboration, the principal should be an "active and visible.... presence in the school and local community [that] ensures that the accomplishments of students and the school are publicly recognized and celebrated" (p.35).

Harsh circumstances in the neighborhood can be harnessed into assets. From some teachers' and mentors' perspective, these students are interesting, diverse, resilient, and caring. These are all strong personal characteristics that the environment has given these children. The personal characteristics serve as assets for social and community relationships. However, whether these characteristics comply with an academic environment is another question. In the next few sections, we discuss some challenges that these students' differing backgrounds, values, and characteristics present in the academic classroom environment.

## Challenges



Now that we have discussed the first portion of our assets and challenges chart (p. 8), we turn to the challenges identified by stakeholders at each school level. Each is developed using qualitative and quantitative data gathered in the field along with evidence from the academic literature.

## Challenges Section I: Elementary Schools

For many students in this neighborhood, elementary school is their first exposure to a formal, structured, educational setting. According to stakeholders, many of the children do not have educational resources in their home environments to prepare them, academically and socially, for elementary school. In addition, many children lack adult mentors and role models in their home environments. A combination of the lack of resources and lack of adult role models impact social skills, literacy skills, and attendance in elementary school.

Stakeholders interviewed at the elementary level included Camelot Teachers, the Camelot Family Specialist, Windcrest Teachers and the Principal, and counselors from Communities in Schools. We also attended the Family Fun Knight at Camelot Elementary School.



### Elementary School Challenge #1: Lack of Adult

## Presence and Mentorship

The lack of adults in these children's lives is a major concern of Camelot Teachers, Windcrest Teachers, and counselors from Communities in Schools. Stakeholders agree that the children come from neighborhoods and homes with a limited adult presence while the schools are, currently,

incapable of providing enough adult presence and adult mentorship to their students.



**Camelot Teachers** observe that, as a result of the lack of adult presence:

*You can tell that they're starving for a attention, you can tell because they take it from us, not that we don't give it freely, but*

*they'll just walk up for a hug and just take it from you. Or asking to be hugged, they're just starving for attention.*

**Windcrest Teachers** add that the children desire to have mentors in their lives:

*And [PALS] come, I mean [PALS] come and they're great. Mentees, or mentors for our children. And our children look forward to them coming.*

In the classroom, the lack of adult mentors directly impacts the efficiency of the classroom. When the teachers are asked about what is needed in the classroom, **Camelot Teachers** responded that they need more adults to help out:

*And I think for the younger grades, I think we would need like those warm bodies in our classroom to help because were supposed to be doing working with small groups bunt that means the other children the other 15, 14....*

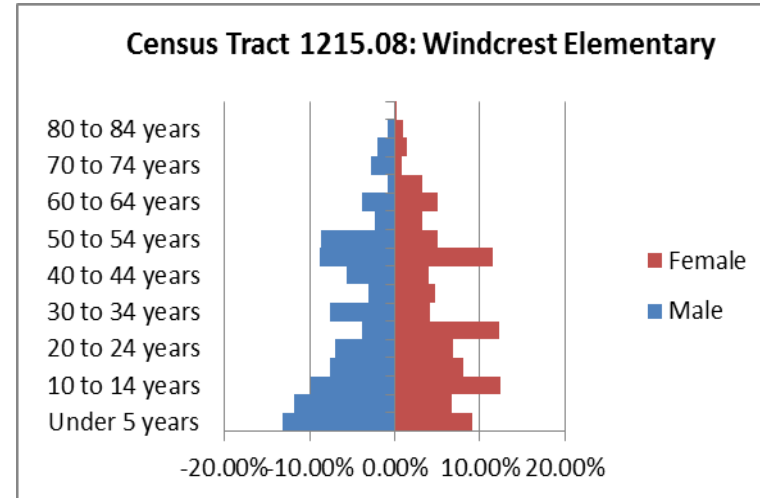
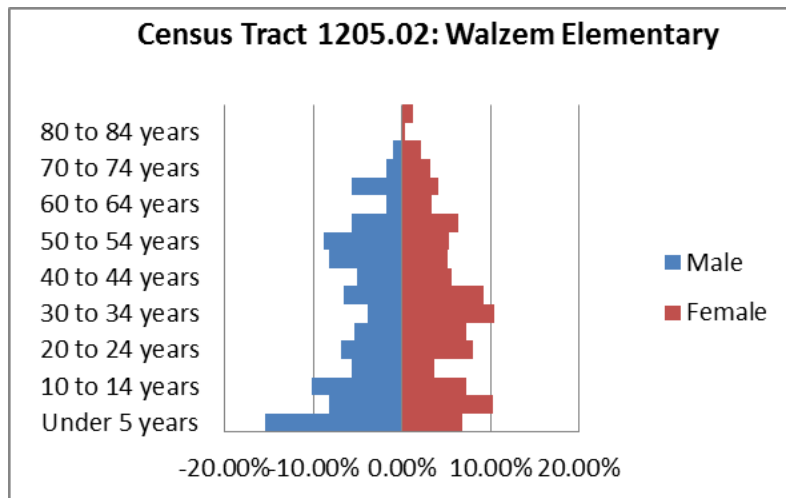
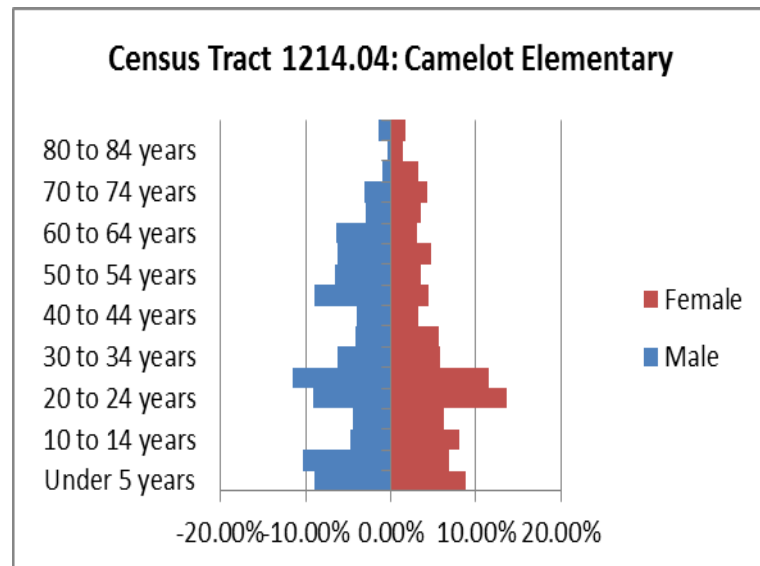
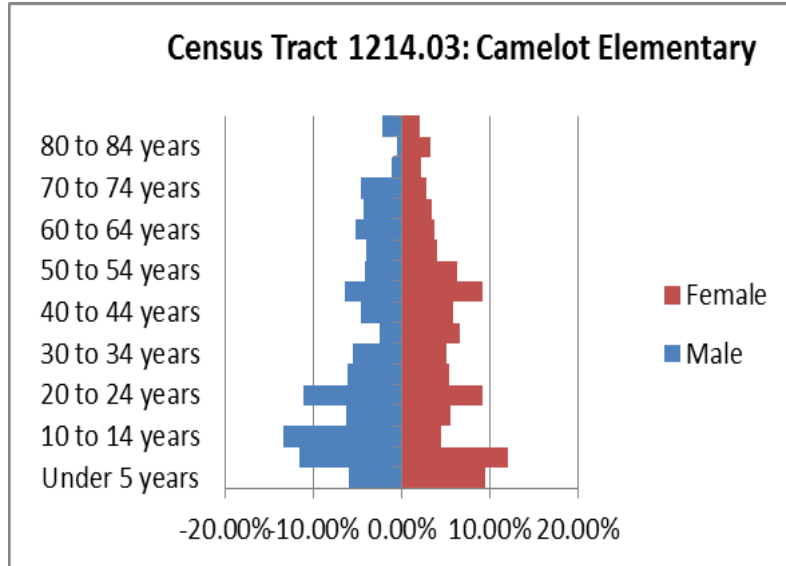
*...Are doing their own thing being um trusted to do what they're supposed to do, get along with each other. So what ends up happening is I'm sitting here with this small group then someone has a disagreement so I have to get up and solve the issue and then there goes ten minutes of my small group time. And this group is just waiting for me.*

**Quantitative Data** may signal a lack of parenting-age adults in the neighborhoods that the four elementary schools serve.

Age	Male	Female
25 to 29	6.79%	7.63%
30 to 34	6.60%	6.53%
35 to 39	5.74%	6.19%
40 to 44	6%	5.56%



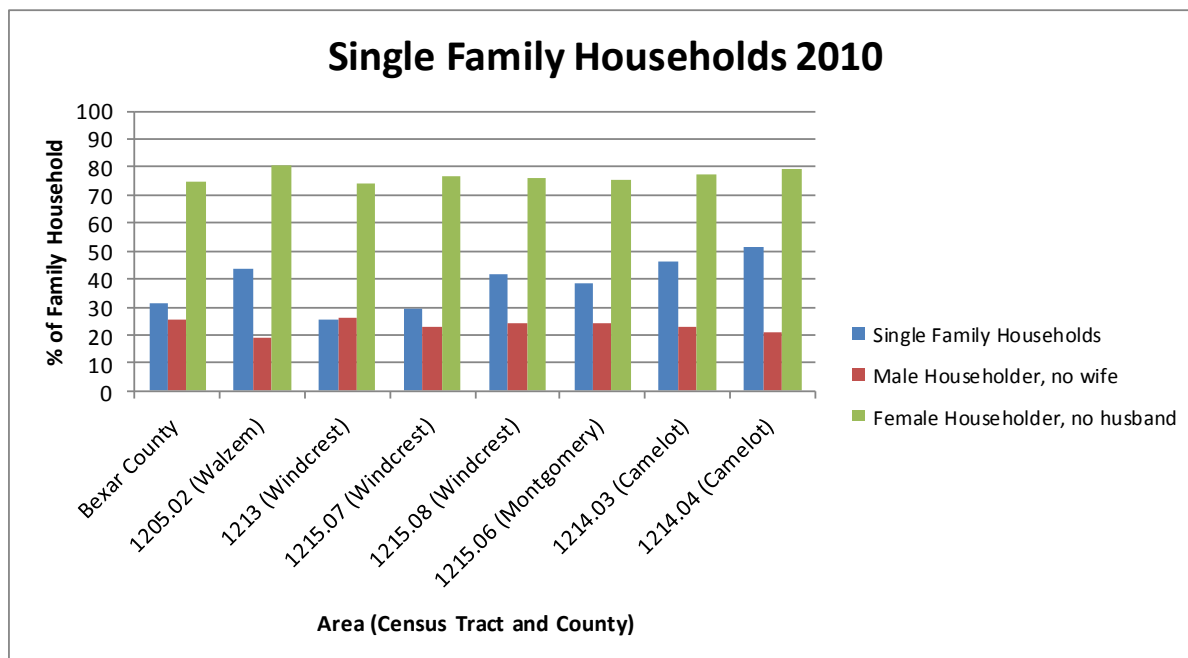
When the data is analyzed further and sorted to reflect the specifics of each individual elementary school, it reveals that both neighborhoods that feed into Camelot Elementary, one of the neighborhoods that feed into Windcrest Elementary, and the neighborhood that feeds into Walzem Elementary show the greatest absence of parenting age adults (25-44 years old):



Together with the lack of parenting-age adults in the area, quantitative data also shows that there is a higher percentage of children being raised by grandparents.

Quantitative data also shows that there is a higher percentage of single parent families in the area with a higher number of female-headed households than male-headed households.

**Community in Schools and Camelot Teachers** also state that the children lack male adult mentors:



*Even if it wasn't City Year, per say, even just mentors, not just females but also strong males... [Communities in Schools]*

*I think our community has a lot of our children are being raised by a female and there's a lack of male... [Presence][Camelot Teachers]*

**Communities in Schools** further add that the lack of male adults in these children's lives have a direct impact of their behavior and social skills:

*Well after the Sandy Hook Shooting, I think Northeast district did a moment of silence. They had a speaker, he didn't get into the specifics but the kids kind of knew. You hear about that shooting there? I had these three boys, fifth graders, just have this breakdown. Balling, crying, crying, I got called in with the counselor and then the teacher came in and the three boys were just crying hysterically. Turns out all three of their dads were in prison. Their dad's were in jail for beating up mom. Or something else upon them. but they were in jail and one of these never saw his dad but I*

*think a positive male model, just give, will be life changing for these kids. Because one of them never met his dad, and the other two, some of these are stepdads, the only male figure in their life was in jail.*

### **Published Research:**

In response to the lack of adult presence and guidance, many have sought out and referred to mentorship programs like the classic and prominent Big Brother Big Sister Association (BBBS). In a review of the research, we find that although the ultimate goal of mentoring programs is to help at-risk youth be productive members of society, their identified purpose is to provide a safe and supportive adult relationship that will help them realize their overarching goal or goals. The reasoning at large behind the need to supply and support such a relationship originates from the widely accepted notion that “every child needs a dependable, consistent, and positive relationship with at least one adult in order to achieve his or her fullest potential in emotional health, academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and vocational knowledge and skills” (Guetzloe 1997, 100). Typically, or in the past, such positive adult relationships have been provided in social or community settings like school, church, and even family. Yet today, particularly in low income areas, youth cannot rely on these settings to provide them with that essential relationship (Jekielek, Moore, and Hair 2002).

BBBS and programs similar to it like City Year(implemented in Krueger and Ed White Middle School and Roosevelt High School but not in the feeder elementary schools), fall into a subcategory within mentoring programs known as school-based programs that operate in a structured setting (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman et al. 2007), where the site is always the school, the meetings between mentor and student are generally one-on-one, and meetings are set more consistently, typically once or twice a week (Herrera, 1999). Analysis of mentoring programs is concentrated on



BBBS programs but still offers valuable information for effective characteristics and strategies for mentoring. In the foundational study on BBBS programs in 1995, Tierney, Grossman, and Resch found that BBBS programs lowered youths’ drug, alcohol use and violence, made modest academic improvements, and improved parent and peer relationships while having significant impact on youths’ self-worth, self-confidence or participation in social and cultural activities.

Although City Year has not published program and effectiveness evaluations, we can compare their program to BBBS programs that have been identified as effective through evidence based research. Their identified strategies for targeting at-risk students include youth screening for early indicators of future struggle in school coupled with an interventionist approach starting in 3rd grade. City Year emulates BBBS in that the mentor-mentee relationships only last one year (two maximum). City Year’s selective and competitive application process reflects quality mentor

screening, while their screening process for at-risk youth reflects quality screening for youth or mentees. Other areas City Year appears to excel in based on the best practices criteria include the consistency of mentoring times and places. Since City Year is a school-based program, the mentor relationship is solely based in the school, which takes transportation issues out of the picture, and allows for consistent meeting times and a big chunk of time for relationship building.



**Best Practices/ Existing Programs:**

Best practice research reveals several characteristics a mentoring program should have including stable funding and staff, training and preparation for the mentor and mentee in order to facilitate the development of a strong relationship, an orientation for youth and parents, consistent communication between program staff and all stakeholders throughout the mentoring relationship, a set evaluation and assessment procedure for the process and outcomes of the program, an established

place and time for the mentoring that provides transportation, and a logic model “illustrating exactly how their services will result in the desired impact for youth” (Garringer, 2007; Jekielek, Moore and Hair, 2002)

The teacher-identified need for increased adult presence in the schools combined with the literature supporting the effectiveness of mentoring programs for low-income student’s points to the possible solution of expanding the already existing mentoring program, City Year, into the elementary schools. Targeting many of the problems that either persist or develop into something else (and possibly more difficult) early on can help assure more students will be reached and provided with a positive relationship that can guide them in and outside of school.

## **Elementary School Challenge #2: Lack of Social Skills**

Elementary school teachers and mentors agree that many children come into elementary school lacking basic social skills. These skills include management of emotions, organizational skills, classroom behavior skills, and awareness of proper interaction with peers. This lack of social skills can also interfere with a student’s literacy development, which will be discussed in the following section.

**Windcrest Teachers** are concerned that some children do not know how to handle their emotions and their interaction with other peers:

*...I mean like upset, like how emotionally, how they deal with something, when "it's normal to be upset" and "it's okay to be mad" and those are normal feelings and how to deal with them and how to interact with your peers and one another. Just socially, emotionally*

**Camelot Teachers** add that some children are struggling with basic organizational skills such as eating on their own:

*Even when I did the lunch bunches like some of them didn't know how to eat, didn't know how to eat with a fork.*

Some **Windcrest Teachers** believe that the absence of Pre-K education may have contributed to the lack of social skills. In a conversation about the difference between the students who have gone to Pre-K and the students who have not, Windcrest Teachers say:

School	% Econ. Disadv. 2012*	# Children in Kindergarten 2012	# Children Pre-K Eligible*	# Children in Pre-K 2011
Camelot	89	106	95	No Pre-K Program
Montgomery	90	89	80	103
Walzem	96.1	126	122	70
Windcrest	69.8	113	79	No Pre-K Program
<b>Total #Children Pre-K Eligible : Total # Children in Pre-K</b>			376 : 173	

\* According to TEA, one of the qualifying characteristics for free Pre-K is “educationally disadvantaged” which simply indicates those who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. Because this specific characteristic is not listed in the AEIS reports from which we gathered this data from, we substituted it for “economically disadvantaged” which is also indicates qualification for free or reduced lunch.

*Definitely [there is a difference]. Um, their social skills with others, you can definitely see--well of course [the kids who have gone to Pre-K] know the routine, the expectations that are set through all the school and...Kinder--First grade teachers have similar um, schedules or planning.*

**Quantitative data** shows that there is a disparity between the number of children who are eligible for free Pre-K and the number that actually attend Pre-K. The chart to the right shows the percentage of children in each school that are economically disadvantaged and the number of children in Kindergarten in 2012. By multiplying the first two columns we can see (approximately) the number of Kindergarteners in 2012 that were eligible for free Pre-K in 2011. The last column shows the actual number of children who were enrolled in Pre-K in 2011. Since Camelot and Windcrest do not have a Pre-K Program, children eligible for free Pre-K may have gone to Montgomery or Walzem for Pre-K. The last column thus shows the ratio of children eligible for free Pre-K compared with children who actually receive Pre-K education, which is a 2:1 ratio, meaning

less than half of the children who are eligible for free Pre-K are not receiving it. While this is obviously an approximation, it is still an indication of a grossly undeserved population in early development resources.

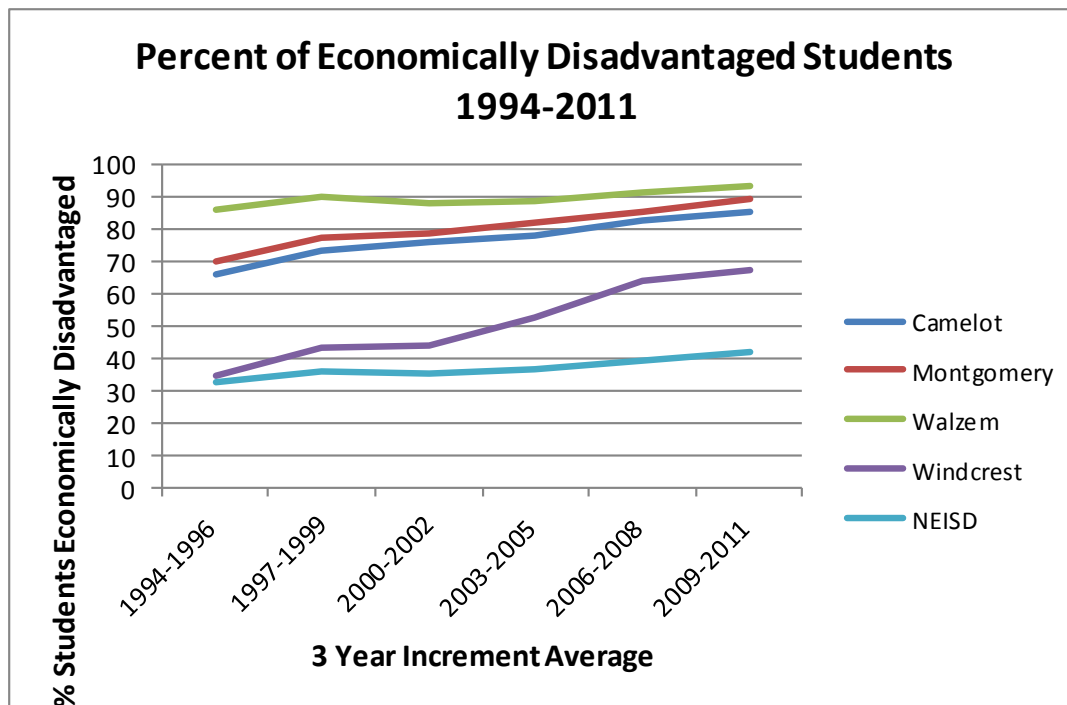
However, other **Windcrest Teachers** believe that the effect of Pre-K education on social and organizational skills is limited:

*And I've been really surprised because the ones I've had come from Pre-K, 2 of them are right on, know everything and 2 of them are not any different than the other ones who didn't go to Pre-K.*

**Camelot Teachers** offer another probable cause to the lack of social skills. They believe that it stems from the lack of resources and exposure in the children's home environment:

*A lot of them have never held a pencil before, never held one, or a crayon, or crayons or markers are not allowed in their house because it makes too much of a mess. They've never, I mean we've had children who don't know how to use scissors don't know how to use a pencil.*

This deficit in the children's home environment may help explain the discrepancies in behavior **Windcrest Teachers** see among children who have gone to Pre-K. Some children may be unable to retain what was taught at Pre-K as they live in an environment scarce in resources.



**Quantitative Data** shows that, in comparison with the district average, there is a higher percentage of students in Camelot, Montgomery, Walzem, and Windcrest who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This implies that there is a higher percentage of children who have grown up in homes that may lack resources to build their social and organizational skills that prepare them for school. The trend also shows that the number of students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is increasing.

In addition, **Camelot Teachers** and **Communities in Schools** express concern over the negative elements that are present in these children's home environment:

*Facilitator: Where are they picking this [foul language] up?*

*Everyone! Parents, everywhere, they hear it at home [Camelot Teachers]*

*[The parents] are placing that thought or that seed there that school's not important. So, therefore, they are the teachers of these negative habits... [Communities in Schools]*

According to **Camelot Teachers**, the lack of social skills is a concern across all of the elementary grades. The students do not just come in lacking social skills but are unable to retain the social trainings in school:

*A lot of it, just from 4th grade, and if my team was here they'd say this, it's behavioral. Behavioral support. They don't have home training so they don't know how to act in the classroom. We can talk to them and talk to them and show them and show them and model and model and it's still the same at the end of the year.*

As a result, the students start showing behavioral issues as they progress through the grades, especially after the long summer break:

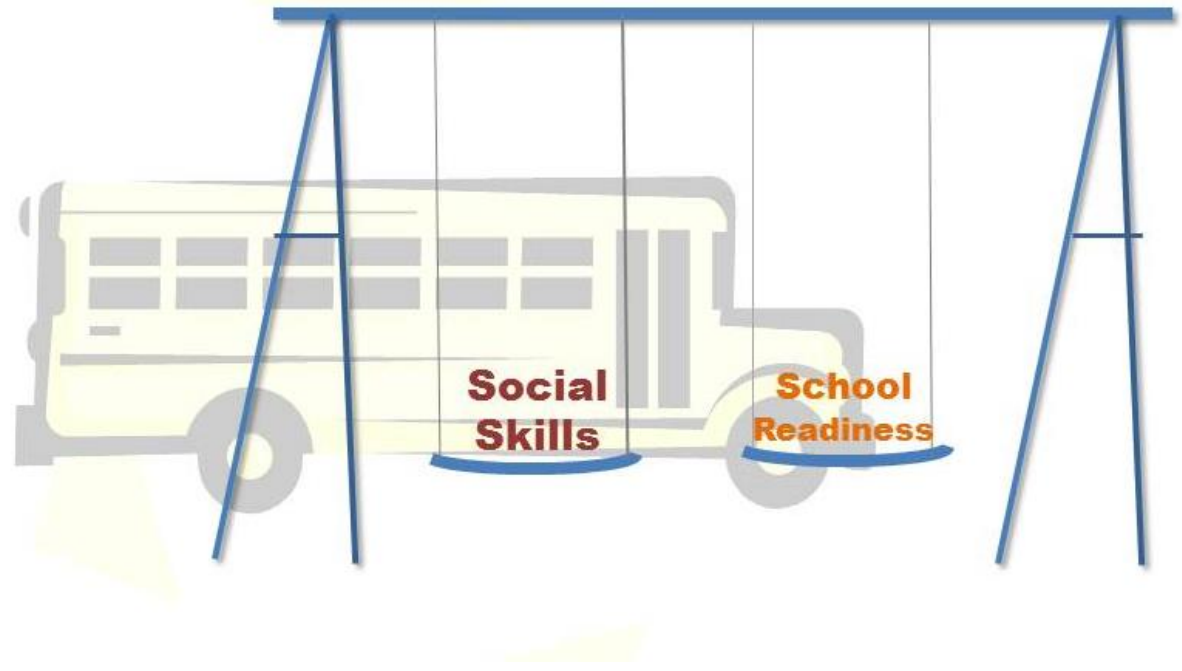
*I think with the lower grades it's more like academic catching up, and I think it starts in like 2nd or 3rd they start to become undone behaviorally.*



## **Published Research:**

The “social skills” issue that many of these elementary school children are said to exhibit is referred to in the literature as behavioral and cognitive readiness: “Broadly defined, behavioral readiness represents the child’s capacity to exhibit behaviors associated with school adjustment and attainment. Often, these are defined as learning behaviors or approaches to learning that involve the capacity to engage effectively in classroom routines and learning activities” (Bierman, Torres, Domitrovich, et. Al 2009, p.306). More specifically, behavioral readiness is defined by some researchers and practitioners through several key social and emotional skills such as self-confidence, capacity to develop positive relationships with peers and adults, concentration and persistence on challenging tasks, an ability to effectively communicate emotions, an ability to listen to instructions and be attentive, and skills in solving social problems (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, and Fox, 2006).

Research shows that children of or approaching school age who exhibit deficits in behavioral readiness or lack essential social and emotional skills also show deficits in important traits for success in school including lower vocabulary and non-verbal IQ scores, lower levels of classroom participation, less academic knowledge, are likely to be rejected by their peers, and are likely to receive less positive feedback from teachers (Bierman, Torres, Domitrovich, et. Al, 2009; Hemmeter, Ostrosky, and Fox, 2006). Researchers argue that some specific family factors contribute to and are associated with behavioral and social issues such as financial instability or less access to resources needed for healthy development, maternal depression, harsh parenting, stressful family life events, limited social support, and family instability (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, and Fox 2006; Isaacs, 2012).



Because social and behavioral issues are strong predictors of future academic success and the behavior of children is most malleable at the school-entry age, intervention is suggested in the pre-school-kindergarten level. A multi-level intervention approach that targets the child, teacher,

and parent through training programs for behavioral and emotional issues has been successful in decreasing negative characteristics such as withdrawal, aggression, noncompliance, disruption and increasing positive characteristics such as academic success, cooperation, sharing behaviors, self-control, self-monitoring, and self-correction (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, and Fox, 2006).

Other interventions or solutions for behavioral readiness include pre-k or increased “peer play”. Pre-K or more peer play can help children develop the capacity for emotional support, empathy, conflict resolution, and co-operative learning. In addition peer play is “grounded in fantasy play that stimulates imagination and allows children to explore and consolidate their understanding of various social roles, social routines, and conventions” (Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2004, p. 96).

In addition to Pre-K or increased peer play, field trips are suggested and discussed by several stakeholders as a tool for engagement and an opportunity to provide children with more positive and diverse experiences outside of their homes and neighborhoods, which tend to be limited in resources for education. Research shows that field trips have positive cognitive impacts on the learning of facts and concepts. More importantly for these children, field trips are shown to increase motivation and interest in a subject by sparking their curiosity (DeWitt and Storksdieck, 2008).

### **Elementary School Challenge #3: Students Reading Below Grade Level**

Students’ reading levels are identified as a primary academic concern by elementary school teachers and mentors. As **Communities in Schools** states:

*...when [the students] can’t read where they’re supposed to, everything is affected.*

Teachers and mentors observe that many children enter elementary school already behind on their reading skills. As a result, teachers find themselves playing catch up in the very first year of elementary school.

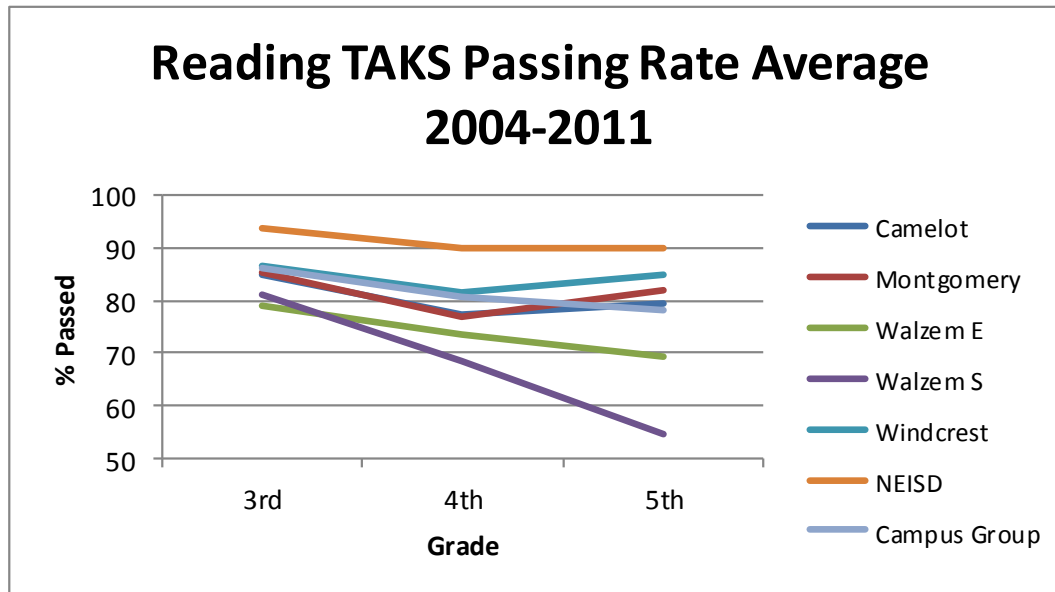
**Windcrest Teachers and Camelot Teachers** see similar trends when children come into first grade lacking any reading skills:

*Few...this year I had...14 that came to me knowing nothing. Couldn't write their name, read their name, knew...knew absolutely no letters, no numbers... [Windcrest teachers]*

*...they don't even know how to write their name, they don't even know what a letter is. So for us, if we get them from knowing no letters and sounds to knowing all their letters and sounds by the end of kinder they've made a years' worth of progress. So they leave kinder and they're still not reading. So they go to first grade and they're still trying to get them to the right level... [Camelot Teachers]*

**Camelot Teachers** and **Communities in Schools** believe that the gap in these students' reading skills widens through Elementary school.

*One of the things that I wanted to talk about like with [name] like they're still teaching phonics in 4th grade which they shouldn't be doing...it's like a domino effect. No wonder they're not where they're supposed to be [Camelot Teachers]*



*...And they just get pushed forward and forward and they just get more and more behind. [Communities in Schools]*

**Quantitative Data** also reflects that the children are struggling with their reading skills and assessments. This graph shows the average reading scores of the seven years between 2004 and 2011 across the three grades levels. All four elementary schools in the neighborhood are testing below the NEISD average while they all experience an evident dip in fourth grade. By fifth grade, Montgomery, Camelot, and Windcrest are able to recover from that dip while the two groups in Walzem (English and Spanish) continue to struggle

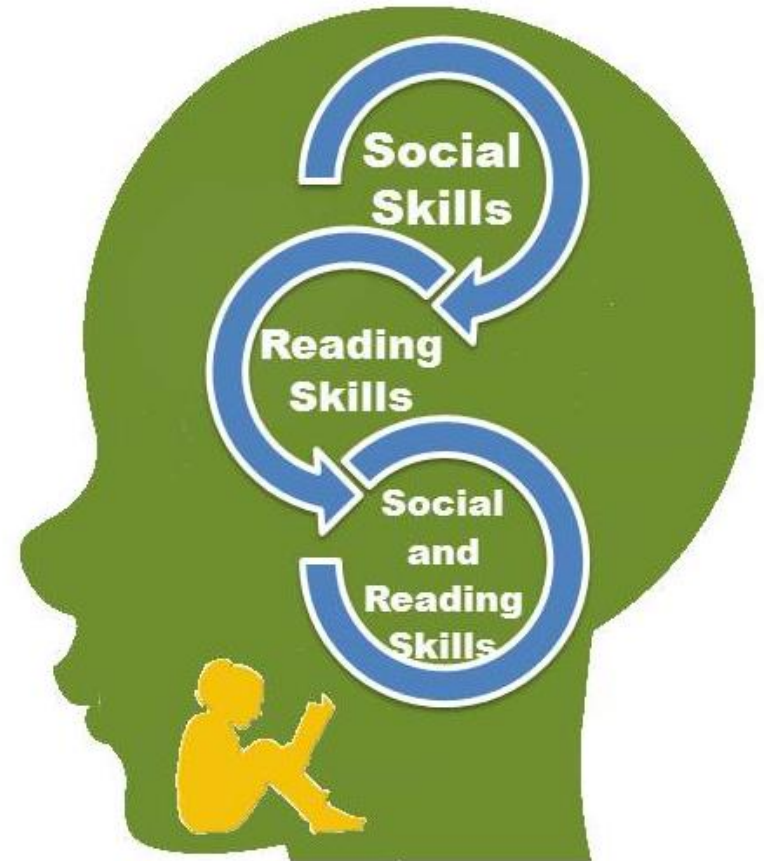
with this reading assessment. We average across the seven years to eliminate extraneous or exceptional data; in addition, most schools have had changes in leadership during this period, so averaging dampens any changes due to leadership.

### **Published Research: Relationship between reading skills and social skills**

There seem to be questions regarding the relationship between reading skills and social skills. Teachers claim that behavioral issues in the classroom are directly affecting student literacy development. On the other hand, some principals suggest that a lack of reading skills leads to a lack of social skills. Published research shows a lack of social skills is the initial cause of lowered literacy skills. Eventually, a lack of social skills and struggles with literacy develops into a negative feedback mechanism as students' progress through the grades:

Published research shows that the reading gap is a common phenomenon among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poverty affects children through its impact on the ability of a family to invest in educational resources related to a child's development such as children's books, lessons and stimulating learning materials that allow children to be exposed to reading and experience more about the world (Foster, 2002).

Beyond the simple lack of educational resources due to poverty, research also indicates that there is a clear correlation between social skills and literacy development. To understand the correlation, it is important to specify the definition of social skills. According to Lim and Kim (2011), social skills (in this context) can be defined as approaches to learning. This is the type of social skills that affects a child's academic achievement. Children with certain social skills "can clarify and interpret their teacher's instruction, provide substantive information, and answer content-based questions to solve problems within the context of cooperative interactions" (Lim & Kim 2011, p. 207). They have better ability to focus attention, finish tasks through self-regulation and motivation, and benefit through interaction with their peers and the teacher (Lim & Kim 2011,



Dickinson and Neuman, 2006). On the other hand, a lack of social skills directly effects literacy as “children who become easily frustrated or angry in the classroom should have difficulty in completing various reading tasks and that they are less likely to engage in reading activities” (Lim & Kim 2011, p.209). Dickinson and Neuman (2006) add that “poor self-regulatory abilities explain the greater relationship difficulties with peers and teachers experienced by children from low SES families.” Thus a chain of effects lead from a lack of social skills to lowered literacy. First, children from disadvantaged backgrounds lack resources (books, parent engagement, peer interaction opportunities, etc.) in their immediate environment to build these classroom social skills. As these children enter school, this lack of social skills translates into a lack of learning approaches, patience, and motivation. As they progress through school, they struggle with literacy as they’re lacking these important skills.

According to Neuman and Celano (2006), “Without opportunities to be read to, children have less experience with new, different, and more sophisticated vocabulary outside of their day-to-day encounters; they are less likely to learn about their world and to hear decontextualized language, the beginnings of abstracting information from print” (p.180). The idea of learning a decontextualized language through reading implies that comprehension plays a larger role than phonetic identification in reading. Luke, Dooley, & Woods (2011) state that comprehension happens when the reader can make meaning of the text in specific contexts. Struggles with literacy are often seen in socioeconomic and culturally diverse schools because the “autonomous models of literacy...[treats] comprehension strategy instruction as an intellectual/disciplinary content-free and culture-free intervention” (Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011, p. 155). Students will have difficulty comprehending the text if they cannot make meaning of the text in their larger sociocultural context. Luke, Dooley, & Woods (2011) suggest that, in addressing literacy issues in socioeconomic and culturally diverse schools, a curriculum reform is required in which the curriculum “engages with student knowledge and community culture, rich themes and content, and is intellectually challenging” (Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011, p. 163).

The “leveling the playing field theory” argues that balancing resources has a fundamental effect on leveling opportunity. In terms of reading skills, balancing the reading resources for the children in the neighborhood can possibly have a significant impact on not just their reading scores but also their experiences of the world. Furthermore, as discussed above, children’s literacy can be directly affected by their social skills. As they progress through school, these two categories of skills becomes closely interrelated. Therefore, Wang & Algozzine (2011) suggests that “teaching both reading and behavior promises more than teaching reading (or behavior) and expecting improvements in behavior (or reading) in efforts to improve the success of all students...” (p. 108). However, many students in the neighborhood do not have access to resources that can build either their social skills or their reading skills. Many students do not have books at home while many others do not have an available adult to read and discuss texts with them.

### **Best Practices/ Existing Models:**

There are literacy programs in the City of San Antonio that attempt to level the playing field for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among those programs are the Summer Reading Program held by the San Antonio Public Library and the Read 3 program coordinated by HEB. In both programs, children and parents can rent books from public sources such as the San Antonio Public Library and HEB's donation drive. The children also receive a certificate or a gift upon their completion of the program. These programs are great models that encourage reading among children who can read independently or among children with parents who can read to them. The gift and certificate upon completion of the program may give the child a sense of pride and achievement.

### **Elementary School Challenge #4: Chronic Absenteeism**

**Communities in Schools** and **Camelot Teachers** identify absenteeism as a main issue that puts students behind in learning new material. On the other hand, chronic absenteeism may also give children the idea that school is not important. The two stakeholders agree on two main causes of the elementary students' absences (beyond health): family reasons and undesirable weather.

Through further discussion, **Communities in Schools** and **Camelot Teachers** specify the lack of parental involvement and the lack of transportation as the main causes of the students' absences. Although the reported data seems to belie stakeholder input, we have chosen to honor the teachers' perspective and concern and explore this issue further.

**Camelot Teachers** state that absences and tardiness directly interfere with a student's academic progress:

<b>Campus</b>	<b>Attendance Rate (2010-2011)</b>
Camelot	95.8%
Windcrest	96.2%
Montgomery	95.7%
Walzem	96.1%
NEISD	96%

*...I mean I've had kids that have 50 something tardies. 50 something tardies, and some of those tardies they show up like 2 hours late. And I'm glad that they're there so I can catch them up on material but they're already absent anyway.*

On the other hand, as portrayed by this quote, the absences also put extra work loads on the teachers. The teachers do not only have to attain to their classes' regular curriculum and progress but also have to help the absent child catch up with his/ her materials.

**Communities in Schools** is more concerned with the implications of these absences. They infer that some of the absences reflect the parents' apathy towards school:



*I think a lot of Montgomery's concerns, regarding attendance, if you're a first grader you're not skipping class, you know. You're not coming to school because your parents are not bringing you. Or there's a reason. You're sick, or there's a family emergency. Maybe there's a lack of parent education. They're not that concerned that a first grader needs to be in school all the time. Even pre-k and kindergarteners, we've got some kids with 30 something absences.*

Through frequent absences, this parental apathy towards school may gradually affect a child's perception of school and education.

As discussed in a previous section, this area also lacks parenting age adults. This deficiency translates into a direct effect on attendance. According to **Communities in Schools**, the students are absent when there are no available adults to bring them to school:

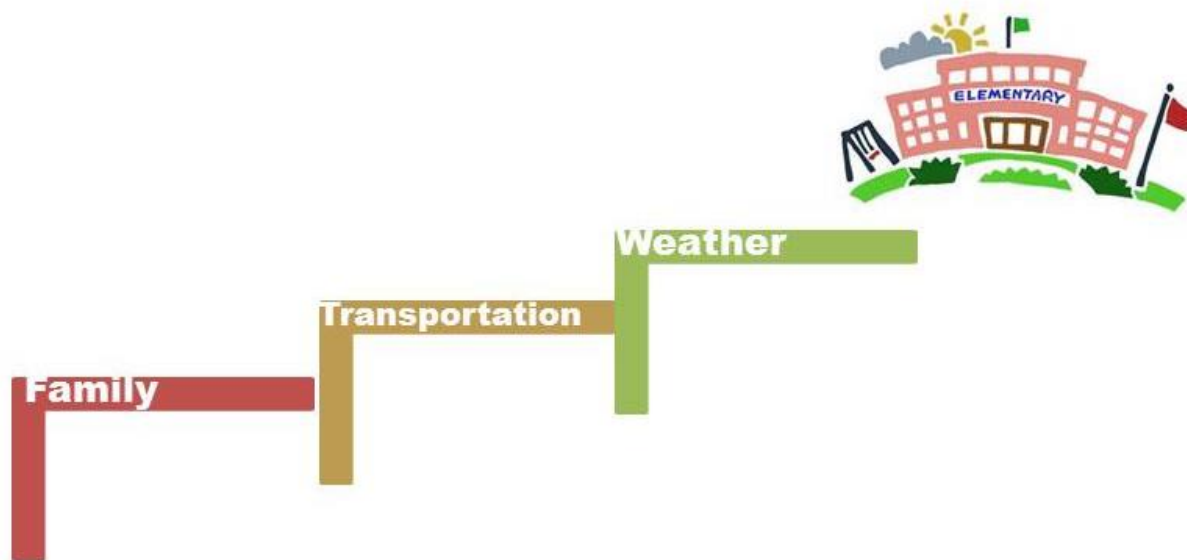
*But a lot of times they're out of school for family reasons. Family reasons, they're sick, their mom is sick, they want to take care... so that's where a lot of the attendance issue comes.*

This trend also implies a lack of transportation in the area. Many children, especially those in the younger grades, can only get to school if there is an available adult to walk them to school. Therefore, whenever that adult is unavailable, the child consequently misses school.

The effect of the lack of transportation on school attendance is the most evident on days where the weather is undesirable. According to **Communities in Schools** and **Camelot Teachers**, attendance is low on cold or rainy days:

*So, okay, our attendance, when it's cold, it's like they don't come for two or three days. When it's rain, they don't come. Because, um, there over here, Austin Highway. If they live, um, to a certain side of Austin Highway, they don't get bus transportation. If they literally just walk across the street, they'll get bus transportation if they live across the street. [Communities in Schools]*

*So transportation there... Just met with a family this morning and "it's cold" and whatever and whatever reason they don't want to get them to the school and walk and you know that safety thing we said this and the streets are safe, but only the streets are safe, but they don't take all the other things into consideration with the drugs and the gangs, our neighborhoods really aren't safe. Of course parents don't want their kids walking to school. [Camelot Teachers]*



**Published Research:**

Ready (2010) found that absenteeism is higher among children of disadvantaged backgrounds. Quantitative data shows that “more than one out of three children with poor



kindergarten and first grade attendance rates lived in a single-parent home compared to less than one out of four children who had average or good attendance” (Ready, 2010, p.277). These absences in the lower grades directly affect the children’s literacy development while this effect is also the most evident among children of lower socioeconomic status (Ready, 2010, p.279). Ford & Sutphen (1996) also found that the most frequent causes behind at-risk children’s absences include “limited or inconsistent parental involvement in school preparation routines... transportation to school” (p.99). As elementary school intervention programs may have significant effect on truancy in the later grades, Ford & Sutphen (1996) suggests the establishment of attendance incentive programs in the lower grades. These programs should make school more rewarding for students, increase communication and involvement with parents, and help families eliminate barriers, such as transportation, to attendance (Ford & Sutphen, 1996).

As discussed above, many students are already struggling behaviorally and academically at this early school level. Teachers and mentors agree that there are critical needs, such as the need for more adult role models in the classrooms that should be met. Intervention at this age is important because these children are still young and malleable. They also, eventually, graduate to middle school where the academic curriculum becomes more serious and challenging. Teachers and mentors suggest that it will be ideal if the students can be better prepared, academically and socially, before they enter middle school.

## **Challenges Section II: Middle School**

In the elementary school sections, stakeholders identified the lack of social skills as a major concern. In middle school, qualitative data from teachers and mentors presents another perspective on these students’ social skills. As discussed in the Assets Section, these students have great personal characteristics that make them interesting and resilient young people. However, these characteristics may not be applicable in a traditional academic classroom. In this section, we begin by outlining and discussing the conflict between the social skills for the classroom and the social skills for the home environment. Furthermore, we will be discussing these students’ identity formulation process as middle school is a time when children generally start to formulate identities through identification with the adults around them. This also means that the middle school is a time when students begin to build serious relationships with the adults around them. Qualitative data shows that these students are seeking very particular relationships. They are seeking mentor and coach type relationships where the adult is willing to embrace their different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and values. These adults can also be a great resource to expose these students to new opportunities and experiences.

At the middle school level, **Krueger Teachers** and the **Principal, City Year in Krueger, City Year in Ed White, and Communities in Schools** provide insights.

## **Middle School Challenge #1: Conflict between Social Skills for the Classroom and Social Skills for the Home Environment**

In middle school, teachers and mentors hold very different perspectives regarding their students' social skills. According to the **City Year** Corps Members at Ed White and Krueger Middle Schools, the students in this neighborhood are a lot more mature than the average middle school student. These students are more aware of their surrounding environment, their relationships with one another, and have better emotional mechanisms to handle harsh circumstances and changes. On the other hand, some teachers feel tension in their relationship with their students. These teachers are concerned that students come into middle school lacking organizational skills and classroom etiquette that will allow them to succeed at this grade level. In addition, teachers state that many students do not know the appropriate way to interact with adults.

**City Year in Krueger** and **City Year in Ed White** agree that the students are more mature than average middle school students:

*...a lot of the kids we work with grow up a lot quicker and mature a lot faster and more like I think worldly is the wrong term but more like.. realistic about what's going on around them [City Year Krueger]*



*...So they know a lot more stuff than I knew when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, stuff that they shouldn't know in many cases but they are a lot quicker and they can be very wise beyond their years... [City Year Ed White]*

On the other hand, the teachers hold a very different perspective on the students' social skills. **Krueger Teachers** state that the students did not know how to interact with teachers:

*...how do you talk to a teacher, what if there's a problem, how do you approach a teacher with a problem. We give them an agenda but I don't think they really know what to do with it*

*The sixth graders [sighs, long pause] .... They come lacking things that they need to be successful in sixth grade. Lacking organization skills, lacking some social skills I mean I had to teach people how to say hello when you stand at a door and say hello and they just walk right past you. There's some social skills that they just don't have—I didn't even worry about the 'yes ma'am' 'no ma'am' stuff, I'm just talking about everyday stuff that makes you successful in life; when someone speaks to you you're supposed to speak back...*

**Krueger Teachers** add that, aside from failing to meet the social expectations in the general school environment, some students also fail to meet the learning expectations in the classroom:

*...this one girl actually, they wrote poems, this one girl wrote a poem about all the things she's thinking about when she's in class, and none of which*



*she's supposed to be learning... I wish [Rackspace] would spend money, maybe not a whole week, but maybe a couple of days of getting 6<sup>th</sup> graders in before 6<sup>th</sup> grade starts. We do like a four hour little thing that, covers the basics but they need—god they need so much more.*

This quote illustrates the definite set of expectations and values surrounding the learning objectives in the classroom. This set of expectations and values delineates what the teachers see as the appropriate mindset and behavior in the classroom. The expectations may not have stemmed from the teachers' own value systems but may have stemmed from curriculum requirements. As demonstrated by the quote, a deviation from this appropriate mindset and behavior may be regarded as lacking social or learning skills.

In addition, what are the social skills that the teachers are referring to? Why do the mentors and the teachers have such different opinions regarding these students' social skills? The mentors characterized these students as mature and equipped with social skills. In the Assets Section, we've also discussed how the students are resilient and street smart. However, the teachers suggest that their students are lacking social skills. This discrepancy suggests that the mentors and the teachers may be referring to differing sets of social skills. The mentors may be referring to the social skills that the students can implement in their home environment. This home environment requires students be more mature and more realistic with their circumstances. On the other hand, the teachers may be referring to the social skills that are applicable to the classroom. This includes the ability to follow curriculum, agendas, and instructions. It also includes the students adopting a certain demeanor in their interactions with the teachers.

This discrepancy implies that there may be a value disconnect between the students' home environment and the school environment. The mentors see the students' social skills as an asset because the mentors relate to the students through a holistic relationship. The mentors form relationships with the students through an understanding and appreciation of their home environment. As discussed in the Assets Section, sociocultural understanding is the crux of these student-teacher, student-mentor, relationships. Rewarding positive relationships can only be built once the adult becomes aware of these students' differing backgrounds and circumstances. The Assets Section shows that some teachers are successful in building this mentor type relationship. These teachers enjoy the type of relationship City Year Corps Members share with their students. Other teachers may not be able to form that relationship with their students because they relate to their students through curriculum. These teachers may see the students' home social skills as a barrier because these social skills may not necessarily be applicable to the classroom.

**Communities in Schools** confirm that the tension between students and teachers arises when teachers can not relate to the students' backgrounds:

*Because I've seen the teachers that can relate to the students. They know this particular population act a certain way, they talk a certain way. It's just their culture. And so the teachers can relate. They're not scared to do the home visits, not scared to go to the neighborhoods. I mean, you have some 'I'm just here to do my job. I really don't care about the kids. And what they're going through and different things like that.' The students know that and they know who to target, they know who to intimidate, who to upset and those teachers just have a really low tolerance for these students. They are the ones always sending them out. They're getting the most referrals from the same teachers because they just don't know how to relate to the students.*

*I think empathy is the huge thing. I think if you're not able to relate to them, if you just don't understand. Although, yes I mean I'm not from the hood but I still understand their struggles and I know what they're going through and I know if a student didn't sleep last night because they're up and because, you know, the parents are fighting. You know, so they're out in the street, then of course I'm going to expect the student to come in, they're going to be in a certain mood, I don't want to deal with this or that, so then I think if the empathy is there, then yes. If not, if they're just sitting on the outside looking in, then they can't relate to them.*

Although these teachers struggle to build a relationship with their students still have the passion for their education, as demonstrated in focus groups, they may not have previous exposure to and understanding of the cultures these students are coming from. This implies that professional development to introduce teachers to the background of these students may facilitate positive and appropriate student-teacher relationships. On the other hand, it is also more difficult for teachers to focus their relationships with students solely on social understanding. The teachers are, inevitably, responsible for improving these students' test scores and academic assessments. Yet, as discussed earlier, teachers see a conflict between the students' sociocultural values and the classroom's values. This suggests that a culturally sensitive curriculum or pedagogy may be necessary in these schools to reduce the value disconnect and the causes of tension in the student-teacher relationships. In essence, there are *lots* of ways to deliver a curriculum – can we identify or create a way that is more appropriate to these kids?

<u>School</u>	<u>% Pass</u>	<u>% Econ. Disadvantaged</u>	<u>% At Risk</u>	<u>% Mobile</u>	<u>% LEP</u>	<u>% Attendance</u>
<b>Nimitz</b>	66.33	84.3	57.35	27.18	13.38	94.35
<b>White</b>	66.33	72.08	54.35	21.6	6.37	95.08
<b>Krueger</b>	74	65.4	43.77	21.6	6.08	95.03
<b>Jackson</b>	74.67	54.63	46	19.53	7.1	95.92
<b>Garner</b>	78.5	58.6	47.42	24.68	5.18	95.67
<b>Harris</b>	78.8	35.38	38.16	11.65	2.52	96.42
<b>Eisenhower</b>	79.67	38.28	48.13	18.6	4.3	95.6
<b>Driscoll</b>	82.67	32.2	36.25	13.53	1.88	96.12
<b>Bradley</b>	89.3	18.6	28.03	11.87	1.8	96.53
<b>Tejeda</b>	93.17	10.98	19.57	11.8	1.82	96.83
<b>Wood</b>	93.17	10.98	19.57	11.8	1.8	96.78
<b>Bush</b>	95	9.13	18.92	10.25	2.07	96.68
<b>Lopez</b>	95.25	9.13	15.2	10.4	2.9	97.05
<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>		-0.971661669	-0.96795551	-0.8584424	-0.7984	0.920895856

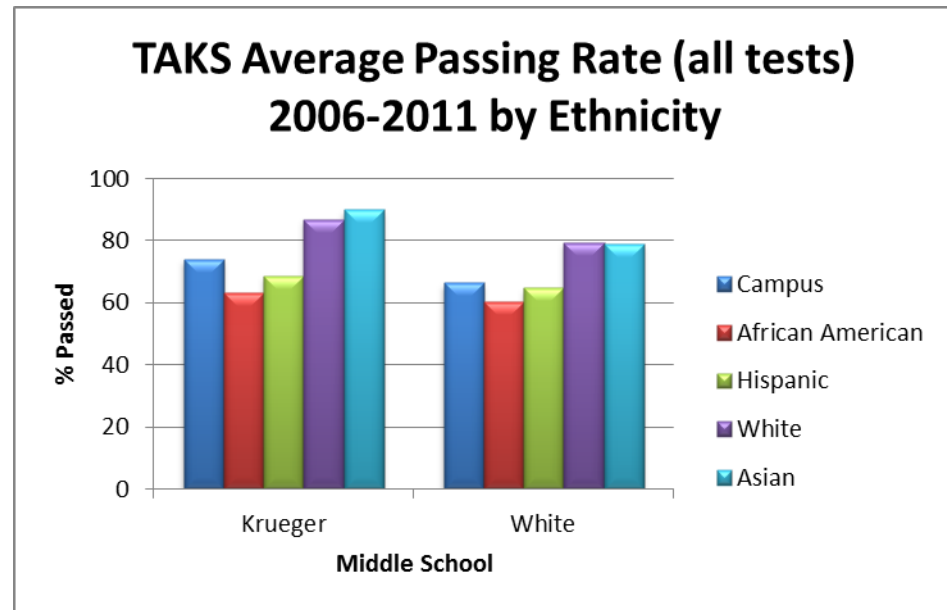
**Quantitative Data** shows that there is a clear correlation between the percent of students that have passed TAKS and socioeconomic characteristics such as percent economic disadvantaged, at-risk, and attendance. The chart below shows all 13 middle schools in NEISD, ranked from lowest to highest of percent that passed TAKS. The “% passed” number for each school is the average of all the tests, across

all grades, for the years 2006-2011. Similarly, the socioeconomic characteristics and attendance rate are also averaged across all grades and from 2006-2011. The correlation coefficients for percent economically disadvantaged, at-risk and attendance are significant. The economically disadvantaged and at-risk variables show a significant inverse relationship while attendance shows a significantly positive relationship.

The No Child Left Behind Act 2001 goals of closing the achievement gap mandated information on the performance of different ethnicities on state-wide assessment tests. The graph to the right shows the percent of students that passed the TAKS tests in Krueger and White middle school broken down by ethnicity. As you can see, in these two schools there are still discrepancies in the performance of different ethnicities with African American and Hispanic students still under-performing compared to the campus passing rates.

### Published Research

Lisa Delpit (1995) found that “children from middle – class homes tend to do better in school than those from non-middle class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper middle class” (p.25). Students from the lower class, on the other hand, may not be as successful in school because students may “struggle to maintain both a connection to the local culture in which the student eventually intends to work and a connection to the learning environment” (Parish and Linder- VanBershot, 2010, p. 1). This disconnect is also seen among students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds. Delpit (1995) further discusses how the values-disconnect presents issues of power in the classroom. She states that “these issues include: the power of the teacher over the students; the power of the publishers of textbooks and of the developers of the curriculum to determine the view of the world presented... the power of an individual or group to determine another’s intelligence or ‘normalcy’” (Delpit, 1995, p. 25). This power struggle may create tension in the student-teacher relationship, as seen in this neighborhood’s middle schools.



Gay (2001) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching [students] more effectively” (p.106). Gay

(2000) believes that students become more engaged in the course material when they can relate that academic knowledge to their living



experiences and framework. For example, Reeves (2003) found that African American students performed better on state social studies tests after the teachers integrated the curriculum with culturally sensitive materials, such as the dance, literature, vocabulary, geography, history of Mali, the home of many students’ ancestors (p.13). Habernman (1999) calls this thematic teaching and argues that “for children in poverty who often lack the life experiences assumed by those who write textbooks, and who assume there is a common body of knowledge shared by all 6, or 8, or 12 year olds, thematic teaching seeks to provide the common experiences to all children...” Therefore, this type of teaching may narrow the value disconnect between the classroom environment and the home environment of socioeconomic and cultural minority groups.



One common step to take in order to prepare teachers for a culturally sensitive pedagogy includes extensive professional development. Gay (2001) suggests that “teachers need to know (a) which ethnic groups give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving and how these preferences affect educational motivation, aspiration, and task performance; (b) how different ethnic groups’ protocols of appropriate ways for children to interact with adults are exhibited in instructional settings; and (c) the implications of gender role socialization in different



ethnic groups for implementing equity initiatives in classroom instruction” (p. 107). A misunderstanding of different cultures’ learning styles can lead to false perceptions of behavior. Gay (2001) observes that a traditional classroom setting is more didactic where the teacher speaks to the students whereas African American and Latino students prefer a more dialectic classroom setting where an active conversation is held between the students and the teachers. This shows that the questioning and conversation in the classrooms may not necessarily be the result of disrespect but the result of cultural preferences. In assessing academic performance, teachers also have to be aware of different cultures’ communication styles. According to Gay (2001), many African, Asian, Latino, and Native Americans convey knowledge through a more narrative style that is highly contextual. People who don’t understand this communication style may see this language as circular and disjointed (Gay, 2000, Gay 2001). Delpit (1995) adds that culturally sensitive curriculum should embrace different cultures’ communication styles because each culture should have the right to maintain its own language styles. Parrish (2010) further adds that “the ability to accommodate culturally based learning differences is becoming an increasingly critical skill in this time of rapid globalization and technology- influences cross cultural interactions” (p. 8).

### **Best Practices: Project Based Learning**

In addition to professional development and culturally sensitive curriculum and pedagogy, project based learning is often cited by researchers as an effective way to engage and teach students in school, and can be particularly beneficial for students who struggle with traditional (often Middle-class) styles of teaching (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, & Karjick, et al., 1991). Project-based learning (PBL) is defined as “Projects that are complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities” (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffitt, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller, & Michaelson, 1999, as cited by Thomas, 2000, p.1). The point of PBL curriculum is for students to learn through experience, often trial and error, and for teachers to serve as more of a guide or a coach instead of a traditional teacher’s role, which is more in line with the dialectic (versus didactic) classroom setting that African American and Latino’s tend to prefer. PBL is often thought to be so successful with engaging students because it allows students to apply and connect what they are learning in class to real-life experiences and problems:

Proponents of project-based learning claim that as students investigate and seek resolutions to problems, they acquire an understanding of key principles and concepts. Project-based learning also places students in realistic, contextualized problem-solving environments. In doing so, projects can serve to build bridges between phenomena in the classroom and real-life experiences; the question and answers that arise in their daily enterprise are given value and are shown to be open to systematic inquiry (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Karjick, et al., 1991, p. 372)

A successful project-based learning project by a high school Astronomy teacher focused on integrating technology and other students and professionals from outside the school. The teacher allowed the students to pick their own projects to complete throughout the year, something unique and interesting to each of them, all along simply guiding them in the right direction to find literature and research methods about their topics. Because the teacher developed personal relationships with each student, it made it easier for students to bring ideas for new projects as well as their personal interests to the teacher and the class (Petrosino, 2004).

### **Best Practices: Ethnocentric Charter Schools in Hawaii**

In a study of three ethnocentric charter schools in Hawaii, Buchanan and Fox (2004) found that the combination of project based learning and culturally sensitive curriculums is effective in increasing school engagement and academic results of Native Hawaiian students. These schools' curriculum, pedagogy, physical organization of the classroom, values and attitudes, and student – staff interaction are structured to be culturally sensitive. For example, in one of the schools, Buchanan and Fox (2004) observed that “the curriculum is essentially divided into two parts: project- based learning conducted by multiage teams of students (K-5 or 6-12) and skills where students are divided into ability groupings” (p.95). For the project based section, students are assigned learning projects that “depend heavily on group responsibility (a basic Hawaiian principle) and learning by seeing and doing (a basic Hawaiian epistemology)” (Buchanan and Fox 2004). This division of the curriculum shows how schools can engage state curriculum, taught in the skills based section, with the local culture, emphasized in the project based section – again, accommodating a standardized curriculum through creative pedagogical techniques.

The physical organization of the schools can also help enhance the connection between the school and the local community. Buchanan and Fox (2004) describe how one of the schools used its space to reflect the Hawaiian value of people's harmony with the community and with nature:

There are no chairs and a few tables. There was not a blackboard in sight. No walls separated one class from the others. Surprisingly, however, the room is not chaotic. Noise level was at a minimum because there was very little off-task talking between the students in different groups. In fact, it was difficult to find a student whose face was not intently directed toward either the teacher (in those classes where teachers stood at the front) or at his or her work (in those classes where the teacher moved from group to group). (p.97)

This demonstrates that students from minority backgrounds may respond better to non-traditional classroom settings that are sensitive to their backgrounds. More importantly, the ethnocentric charter schools in Hawaii show that it is possible to fulfill state required curricula through creative, culturally sensitive pedagogy. Ultimately, whether it is professional development, culturally sensitive curriculum, or project-based learning, strategies that focus on and acknowledge the different backgrounds and difficult life-experiences that shape how students act, learn, and interact with others in school are recommended for solving student-teacher tensions and miscommunication in the classroom.

## Middle School Challenge #2: Need for Positive Adult Role Models

Middle school is a time where students, generally, start forming their sense of identity. Content analysis of the focus groups shows that the students in this neighborhood are specifically picking up and creating the identity of an adult. As the students are picking up identities and maturing at the same time, an interesting trend emerges. Mentors suggest that students may start their maturing process through imitating the behavior and language of the adults around them. However, the mentors express concern over whether the students truly understand the behavior and language they are adopting. Therefore, positive adult role models become a much needed resource in these students' lives. Role models can serve as examples of positive behavior while they can also direct these students' maturity towards a more positive path.

**City Year in Ed White** describe students who are starting to identify with larger social groups around them. Furthermore, peers expect each other to act accordingly to the perceived norms and stereotypes of each social group:

*...they know how to feed into the stereotypes and umm like I've heard with kids like, "Oh, but I'm Mexican so I'm supposed to act like this" and "Oh, but I'm black" or "Why don't you act like this because you're a certain way?"*

This demonstrates how sociocultural stereotypes are reinforced through these students' peer to peer interactions. On the other hand, this also shows that the students are becoming aware of the adults around them and are trying to define and adopt these adults' behaviors.



**City Year in Ed White** is concerned that the students may not necessarily understand the language and behavior that they are adopting from surrounding adults:

*I'd say that's probably one of the things that scares me a little too is like the double edged sword is umm that the kids are so they think they are super mature ...And I don't think they fully understand the things that are coming out of their mouths sometimes.*

This suggests a need for positive adult role models who can help these students understand the language and behavior of the adults in their immediate environment. These adult role models need to be culturally sensitive as these students are coming from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The mentors need to be aware that there may not be one set, but multiple sets, of acceptable behavior and language among these students. Therefore, the role of adult role models is to help students direct their identity formation and maturity instead of trying to mold the students' identity and maturity towards a specific path.

**City Year at Kruger** also states that, as the students are maturing, they start thinking about their futures at this very young age. However, the adults around them can only provide them with very limited perspectives and options.

*One of the things I think my kids like particularly struggle with is... it's an interesting contradiction because they know what they should be doing, they know they should be getting good grades, they know they need to go to college, do higher ed... but like in their home environment, friends, family, there's so much like evidence going against that fact such as their older sister dropped out of high school like to give an example where like they just don't think they can achieve that level even though they know they should.*

In an environment where students lack experiences and exposure, positive adult role models can help provide students with options and resources that the students may not be aware of. These adults can also help the student develop goals before they enter high school.

## Published Research

Similar to our previous discussion in the elementary school portion of this report on the need for mentors, middle school-aged students that are at-risk need and benefit greatly from mentor programs and relationships. Mentors in middle schools offer social and behavioral support for students, like they do in elementary schools, in addition to more academically focused support such as helping create career goals, creating a



positive attitude towards education, and reducing dropout rates in high school; “Students with problematic behaviors and who struggle for academic success are at risk for dropping out of school and need a mentor, a one-on-one relationship with an adult role model that many are missing in their daily lives. A mentor is someone who cares about the student and will hold them accountable, encouraging them to become more involved with their education and stay in school” (Hoover, 2005; Penn, 2010 as cited by Slack, Johnson, Dodor, & Woods, 2013, pg. 2).

As we discussed previously in this section, middle-school aged students are going through an identity formation process and are thus becoming more aware of what those identities mean in a social context. Because of this new awareness surrounding identities and the social world, mentoring programs that place particular focus on multicultural awareness are extremely important in fostering a successful and

strong mentor-mentee relationship. Crutcher, (2007) argues that mentors “need to exhibit cultural awareness and respect their mentees as both individuals and members of larger social constructs...[requiring] certain attributes or abilities, including selflessness, active listening skills, honesty, a nonjudgmental attitude, persistence, patience, and an appreciation for diversity” (p. 1-2).

The role of mentors in general is to provide a positive and supportive adult relationship that younger people are often lacking in their home environment. Yet, mentoring in impoverished Middle schools plays a heightened academic role by providing a positive and supportive adult

relationship built around education; i.e., the mentor plays a larger role in engaging and keeping students in school, offering them career goal development, and ultimately being a role model for educational attainment and engagement that at-risk middle school students need and often lack.

### **Middle School Challenge #3: Need for More Engaging Activities and Exposure to Experiences**

Middle School teachers and mentors agree that extracurricular activities and exposure to experiences outside their immediate environment can have positive impacts on their students. Activities such as sports, theater, or field trips engage students who may not be engaged by the traditional academic curriculum. Extracurricular activities also motivate students to keep their grades up while many of these activities provide extra positive adult role models to the students. Exposure to new experiences can also help these students develop more diverse and positive career goals and aspirations.

**City Year in Ed White, City Year in Krueger, and Krueger Teachers** agree that extracurricular activities can serve as these students' academic motivation. On the other hand, these activities also provide the students with another positive adult role model who can hold them accountable for their grades and behaviors:

*...you can play sports you can hold that against them and usually the coaches are pretty accountable with kids involved in athletics [City Year Ed White]*

*...Gemini ink just has these amazing, artistic people that are... really from the fresh air, they are different and the kids just respond to them differently, they're so much more open to them and I see that the fresh person as definitely an advantage [Krueger Teachers]*

*One thing I noticed with like the athletes is that when they're in season, that's when coaches do roam the halls more often and the coaches are a lot more over them so that they can stay playing and that those kids have really good behavior on the beginning of the year, they're kids who are very very well behaved um and I just didn't think anything of it and then once the fall ended they started being--acting up more because they didn't*

*have an expectation they just didn't really care about school. So I guess if I were principal I would try to make more incentives and more like maybe not incentives but just have something to continually like keep them trying to reach a goal or be able to do an activity or something because once sports for all the athletes then school stops as well [City Year Krueger]*

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Passing Grade*</b>	<b>Absence Percentage*</b>	<b>Discipline Referral Percentage*</b>	<b>Graduation Percentage*</b>
<b>Non-Athletes</b>	83	6.40%	57%	94.60%
<b>Athletes</b>	85	4.40%	13%	97.10%

The quote by City Year in Krueger also demonstrates how goal setting can greatly influence the students' behaviors and academic progress. Therefore, in middle school, it is important for mentors to start helping these students develop short term and long term goals that can be centered on academics, sports, or other extracurricular activities.

**City Year in Krueger** adds that the students also take their extracurricular activities very seriously:

*A lot of them take their extracurricular very seriously. Like I know a lot of them are kind of like jokesters in the classroom usually like whenever I see them in their athletics clothes or football pads they seem to be very serious, they seem to carry themselves very seriously. And same thing with like the theatre group um one girl in particular is like or has been like a very big problem, for her behavior and then once I see her working on theatre things or see her helping the theatre class she's very serious and like looks very mature and is acting like a leader which isn't what she acts like in class... like they do care about things you just have to find what it is.*

The different attitudes the students portray in the classroom and in their extracurricular activities suggest that some of the classroom behavior issues may be the result of the student's disengagement and value disconnect with what is taught or perhaps *how* it is taught in the classrooms. On the other hand, the students do not show behavioral issues during their extracurricular activities because they are engaged with the activity. This once again suggests the need for a culturally sensitive pedagogy, as mentioned in the previous section, which better engages students from non-dominant groups. The current academic pedagogy may not be able to serve the needs of the diverse student body. However, the relatively diverse options among extracurricular activities may help accommodate the differing aspirations, interests, and learning styles of these students.



**Krueger Teachers** also point to field trips as another category of engaging activity. These field trips are also effective in helping the students set long term career goals:

*They talk about it—they still talk about it. The other day we talked about it in class because someone said “I wanna be a cosm—cosmetologist” and one kid and this was the kid who was brand new—she just came here a few weeks ago. And another student went “oh I went to Aveda” I want to be that too. I loved it”*

Once again, the students behave very differently on these fieldtrips than from how they behave in the classroom:

*When kids are engaged in something they like...There's not issues of discipline and management. Because every place that they visited, every company responded on how well respected the kids were being. And we would love to have the kids back. And it was all because the kids were interested in it.*

**Krueger Teachers** add that activities can also help build school pride and identity:



*UIL... [the school band] won several competitions, our band and our orchestra have all done well, our choir has done well, I could go on and on ...kids are performing very well, I mean we have many many things to celebrate [Krueger Teachers]*

**NEISD Athletics' self-assessment in 2008** shows how participation in athletics poses positive influence on the students. The chart shows that athletes have a higher passing grade, lower absence percentage, significantly lower discipline referral percentage, and higher graduation percentage when compared to non-athletes in the 2007-2008 school year.

### **Published Research:**

Published research shows that participation in extracurricular activities poses positive effects on young adolescents. Fredricks (2008) found that participation in extracurricular activities is associated with “higher than expected grades, school value (i.e. perception of the importance of school for the future), self-esteem, resiliency, and prosocial peers, and lower than expected risky behavior...” (p. 1029). One specific cause of these positive effects is that participation in extracurricular activities gives students access to non-familial, caring, adults (Fredricks, 2008, Barber, 2003). These adults can serve as advisors and help students set goals (Barber, 2003). On the other hand, membership in an extracurricular activity group also helps students build identity and self-esteem (Fredricks, 2008). This implies that the availability of extracurricular activities is especially important in middle school as middle school is a time when students start to explore their identity (Fredricks, 2008).

Studies also show that the positive effect of extracurricular activities on young adolescents is the most evident among at-risk youths (Fredricks, 2008, Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). In comparison with intervention programs such as school dropout prevention programs, extracurricular activities focus on the assets, instead of the deficits, of the students (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). Mahoney and Cairns (1997) believe that the appreciation and reinforcement of individual assets builds a positive relationship between the student and the school. This positive relationship can later help reduce drop outs as these at risk youths enter high school (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). Fredricks (2008) adds that the relationships and networks a youth forms through extracurricular activities is especially beneficial to low income youth “who have greater exposure to risk factors that can negatively affect their development” (p.1041). Therefore, participation in extracurricular activities is beneficial to young adolescents because it gives students a place to build and expand experiences, relationships, and personal assets.

Qualitative data from middle school shows that middle school circulates around relationship building. This includes both student-curriculum relationship and student-teacher relationship. These relationships need to be built on cultural sensitivity and understanding. Stakeholders hope that the establishment of these relationships can make significant differences by the time these students move into high school.

An interesting research question could be to investigate the long-term cost *savings* of extra-curricular activities if they in fact DO encourage at-risk students not to drop out of school before completing twelve years. With the additional funding that comes with every student in attendance, might these programs pay for themselves?

### Challenges Section III: High School

As students move from Ed White and Krueger Middle Schools into Roosevelt High School, we begin to see the culmination of their complexly formed adult-like identities, lack of positive adult role models and exposure to outside engaging experiences in a disenfranchised attitude towards education. Although the negative attitudes towards education have essentially been building in these students with different factors since elementary school, the high school factors (lack of alternative career paths post-high school graduation, dissonance with a potential powerful engaging field of technology, and a school culture of mixed or low expectations) all act as the “last straw” for these kids’ relationships with academia.



At the high school level, we talked to **Roosevelt Teachers, Young Roosevelt Alumni, Communities in Schools, Roosevelt Family Specialist, and City Year Corps Member in Roosevelt.**

## High School Challenge #1: College versus Alternative Paths

As discussed in the Assets section, Roosevelt serves a very diverse student population. These students' diverse backgrounds lead the students to develop diverse career goals and aspirations in high school. Some students may want to go to college, some may want to join the military, and some others may want to learn particular skills and trades that can be used immediately. It is a great strength that students are starting to develop concrete career goals at this age but teachers are also concerned that there is a lack of alternative paths for those students who do not plan to attend college.

**Roosevelt Teachers** observe that many students come from homes that do not value college education:

*I'm just new to this game. Teaching and learning about all this. Motivating these kids to something to that they don't get motivated to at home. Their parents don't sit there and say, "Go to college, college was so awesome." When I say that they're like, "College?"*

**Roosevelt Teachers** further explain that many students' harsh home environment does not allow them to plan for and attend college. The students are living in an unstable environment that makes long term planning, such as planning for college, difficult. In addition, these students' disadvantaged economic background also requires many to work towards financial independence at this young high school age:

*These kids need jobs today. Not after they graduate from college. I have a student whose mom is in the hospital, and they think she's going to die. That's all he has. When she dies, tomorrow, or next week, there's nothing, zero. So he's not interested in what I'm talking about for after he graduates from college. It's what I do tomorrow. The here and now. Some of my kids are focused that way. Although I do have great kids who are*



*going to college, and in my own neighborhood, one kids doing great, another...it's anywhere you go, anytime you go. Here, specifically, it's the immediacy*

**City Year** confirms that going to college is not realistic for many of the students:

*I think it's cool when they realize what they're capable of. Not all of my students are striving for that 90 because they want to get into such-and-such university. They might just be getting those good grades so they can move on to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, they can move on to 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and they can graduate. And that's fine with me. As much as I would want them all to be like "I want to go to this university," I know that that's not realistic for all of them.*

The quote from City Year shows that these students have an unconventional motivation to do well in school. Instead of setting college as their goal, these students set high school graduation and job acquirement as their main motivation. This type of motivation can be seen as a great asset of these students. However, it is also important that the teachers and mentors know how to approach and utilize these students' differing types of motivation. In addition, the school also needs to provide resources to those students who are planning on attending college. The teachers and mentors outlined intervention strategies to serve this diverse student population:

First, there is a population in Roosevelt that is planning on attending college. **Roosevelt Teachers** suggest that there should be more counselors in school to mentor this population:

*I think too our kids need a lot more help with counseling... Our counselors have probably five hundred students, and if you have 500 kids counting on one person, that is the only person who they think is going to help them get to college. They don't have enough time. I think that if there's some way to get people in just to expose the kids. Whether it'd be workshops on how to write your essay or how to do that. Things like that would definitely be helpful.*

By exposing students to the college application process, the counselors may also motivate some non-college bound students to starting thinking about college.

Second, **City Year in Roosevelt** suggests that some students just need adult mentors to give them extra encouragement and motivation:

*And there is one of my students that I'm just blown away by the...when I first, he wasn't even originally on my focus list. Someone had recommended that he be part of the program because his grades were slipping. He was kind of reserved. I think he just needed someone to encourage him and tell him that he is intelligent. His parents live in California. He moved out here with just his grandma. And I think he just sort of needed that support. So I just kind of gave that to him. "You're really smart." And now he's taking Pre-AP English next year. He's doing*

*phenomenally. His grades have improved all across the board. He got a job, which is cool. He's just like a really good kid and he always was, but I don't think he had enough people telling him that.*

A **Young Racker** adds that some students need to be exposed to new experiences:

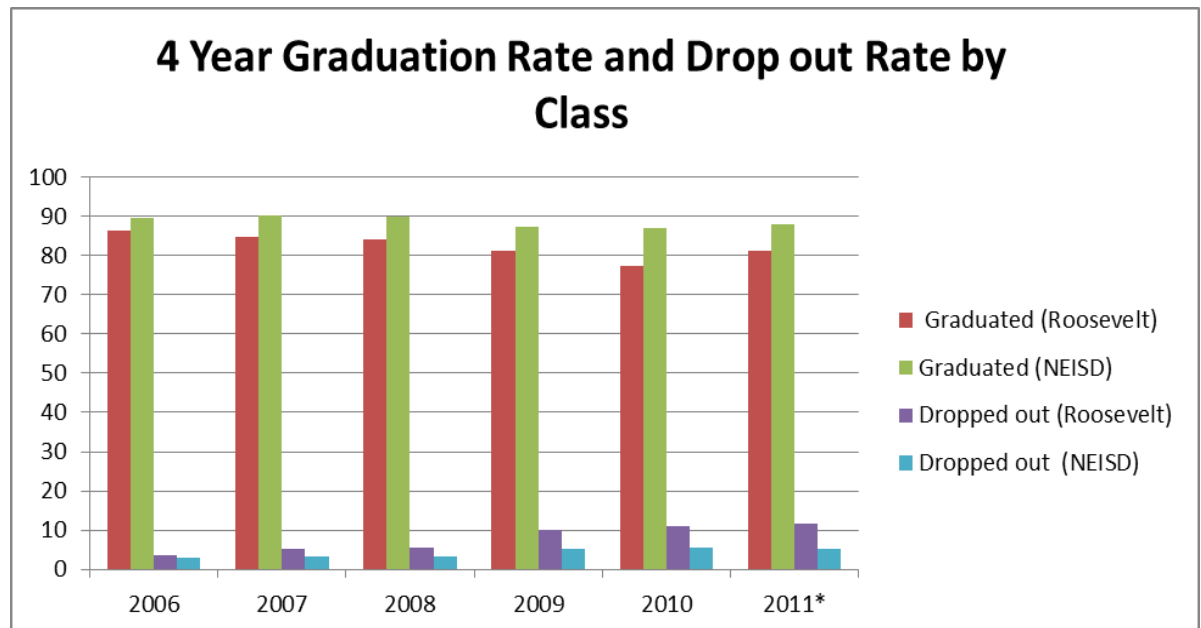
*So from experience, one of the biggest wins, we had the opportunity to take on a Roosevelt intern and just expose her to like, integrate her into the team, showed her the corporate world, that not so much corporate world, the Rackspace way and just her spending time with our teens for six weeks she came out and said I never even considered even going to college, but I look at this like, how this is kind of like? They have never seen. They see us going out to the community and helping, do they know what Rackers do, do they know these types of opportunities are available. Sponsoring a couple of those children that are very very driven, they already have that spark in their schools and bringing them in and giving them the opportunity, a work day program, so they can see what is it to work in a corporate office as opposed to, I worked at a fast food restaurant for high school, there is so much more than that.*

Lastly, **Roosevelt Teachers** propose that alternative paths should be offered to students who do not plan to go to college. These students need to be offered curriculum that is sensitive to their circumstances. They also need to be given opportunities to acquire skills that they can use immediately.

*...these kids want something that is applicable to their life...not in the future. They want it right now. What are you teaching me that's good to me right now?*

*We have students working 40 hour work-weeks. Can they go to school at a time that's more convenient for them? There's so many things that we have boxed ourselves in because this is what the expectation is without looking at the circumstances.*

However, **Roosevelt Teachers** are concerned that, currently, there is a lack of alternative paths:

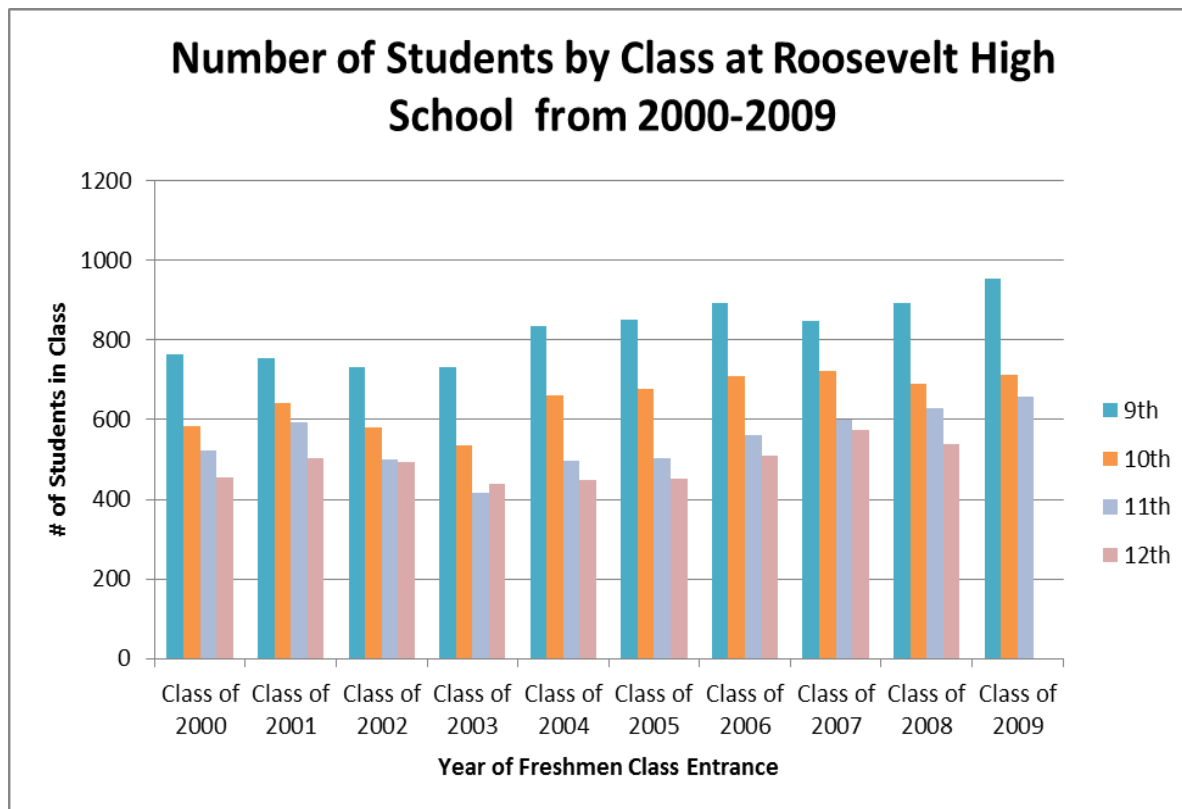


*I don't believe that everyone in this area is going to college, and we have absolutely nothing to offer at all... No vocational stuff.*

How many students are dropping out of high school because they see no other alternative to their circumstances? Are the dropouts the students who see no value in their education or have lost interest in school?

### **Quantitative Data**

The first graph on the right shows that Roosevelt High School has a lower graduation rate and a higher dropout rate than that of the district. According to TEA, this graduation rate is calculated by dividing the total number of graduates by the sum of graduates, continuers, GED recipients, and dropouts. This graph may not fully represent the situation at Roosevelt as the magnet students are not separated from the equation. According to the teachers and mentors at Roosevelt, the dropout rate is higher than what the graph shows.



The second graph on the right shows that Roosevelt is losing a significant amount of students from 9<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The reasons for this reduction in class size are not specified but it is evident that a substantial amount of students are leaving school each grade level beyond 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

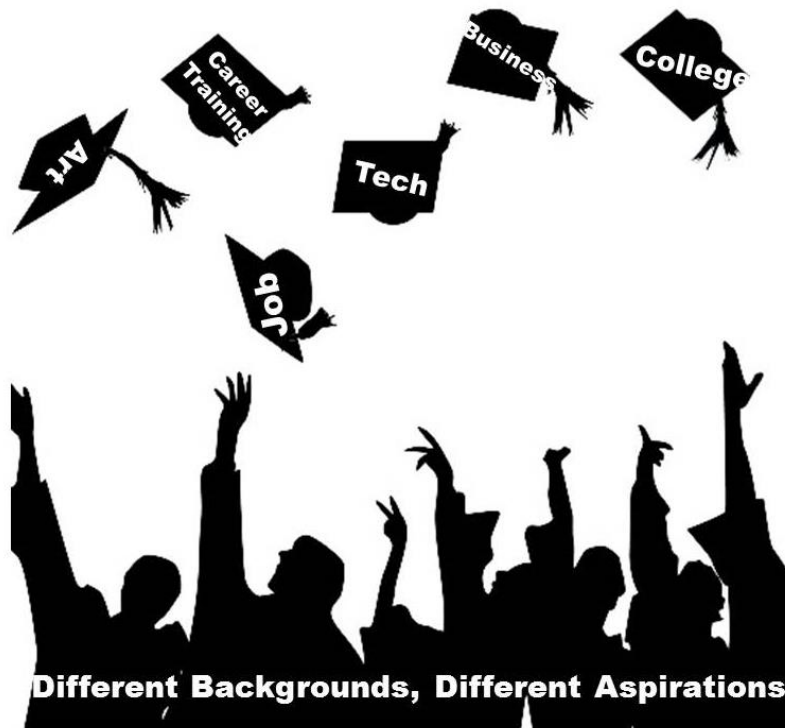
### **Published Research**

Paul Willis (1977) argued that general education is filled with White middle class values of mobility through higher education (as cited in Lehmann, 2005, p.330). It is believed that students can become successful adults through the learning of math, sciences, language, and those academic subject areas. However, not everyone responds to this education philosophy. Willis (1977) points out that “the lower level of educational

attainment of working class youth is not so much as result of inability to compete at school, but of an unwillingness to compete, rooted in a deep class-cultural antagonism” (as cited in Lehmann, 2005, p.330). This class antagonism may stem from the value system which those students are raised in. The value system further creates a mismatch between the students and general education. As the students are raised in this particular value system, they will not see the purpose of academic achievement and will start losing interest in school.

Alternative paths, such as Career Technical Education, respond to the cultural values of minority students. In a study of the German and Canadian technical education program, Lehmann (2005) found that technical education students are often raised in families that values manual skills over academic skills. These students consider themselves to be more mature than their peers and express eagerness to gain work experiences (Lehmann, 2005). These characteristics are very similar to that of the students in the Roosevelt cluster. For instance, in middle school, these students are already showing signs of advanced maturity. In high school, they are showing eagerness to take on adult responsibilities and to enter the work force.

There has been a debate over whether technical education and alternative paths further isolate and segregate minority students from the college bound population. However, recent research shows that technical education can serve as a job safety net for these students while it fosters societal inclusion by encouraging student participation in the work force (Nilsson, 2010). The current job market has moved to demanding professional, educated, workers (Holzer, 2012). For instance, many high paying jobs, such as those in the professional and financial service sector, “do not require a four-year college diploma, but they generally do require some kind of postsecondary training and certification” (Holzer, 2012, p.32). Technical education and alternative paths can prepare students for these types of certifications.



**Different Backgrounds, Different Aspirations**

### **Best Practices Models: Career Technical Education Schools**

There are currently a couple of successful technical education programs in the United States. Among those are the P-Tech High School in New York and the STEM Hhigh Schools in Chicago. The P-Tech High School is a technology high school in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York. It is partnered with IBM and aims to “prepare students for entry-level technology jobs paying around \$40,000 a year” (Baker, 2012). This high school intends on graduating every student with a diploma and an associate’s degree by extending the four-year high school requirement to six years. As of 2012, P-Tech had the highest attendance rates of any other high school in the City

of New York and seems to be a successful track (Speilman, 2012). On the other hand, the Chicago STEM schools, modeled after the New York P-Tech, are partnered up with IBM, Cisco, Microsoft, Motorola Solutions, and Verizon Wireless. These corporate partners help the schools develop their curriculum, mentorship programs, internship programs, and training programs in order to match the labor demands of the corporation. These two best practice models show that the private- public partnership is very important to the success of these schools. This partnership also allows the corporations to mold and create their labor force to match demands of specific labor market (Bosch and Charest, 2008).

### **Best Practices Models: Alamo Academies**

The Alamo Academies work to educate and train students still in high school with technical, industry-needed skills and knowledge. The program connects San Antonio based industries in need of specifically trained workers with high school students by providing them up to 34 hours of free dual-college credit and a paid summer internship. Not only do the Alamo Academies provide students with financial support in the form of free college credit and the competitive advantage for a high-paying job immediately after graduation, they play a key role in sparking students' interest in paths and careers alternative to 4-year college degrees. The Aerospace (St. Philip's College Southwest Campus; Floresville High School), Information Technology & Security (Alamo Colleges' Advanced Technology Center, San Antonio; Central Texas Technology Center, New Braunfels; Boerne High School, Boerne), Advanced Technology & Manufacturing (St. Philip's College Southwest Campus, the Central Texas Technology Center in New Braunfels and Sam Houston High School campus), and Health Professions Academies are the 4 current programs in the Alamo Academies with participating companies including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Toyota, ITM, Rackspace, CPS Energy, AT&T, SWBC, Methodist Healthcare System and the CHRISTUS Santa Rosa system (<http://www.alamo.edu/academies/>, accessed July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013). By providing "the talent pipelines that high-skill, high-wage industries need to thrive in San Antonio", the Alamo Academies helps reduce high school dropout percentages, raises the quality of life for many at-risk kids, and makes technically education financially feasible. Could Rackspace adapt this already tested and furnished model and form such a partnership with Roosevelt?

### **High School Challenge #2: Portable Technologies (i.e. Cellphones)**

Teachers and mentors at Roosevelt agree that there is an abundance of cellphones on campus. Some stakeholders believe that having cellphones is part of these students' popular culture. However, cellphones can also be a distraction in the classroom. On the other hand, other stakeholders see the abundance of cellphones as a learning opportunity.



**Roosevelt Teachers** attribute the abundance of cellphones to the culture of poverty which the students are living in:

*But I wonder to some extent—remember when we did that whole thing on the culture of poverty? How the kids have six or seven TVs but they don't have a single book or magazine. It feels that same way with cell phones. These guys have top-end cell phones that I can't afford to have. We won't spend the money on other things. Is it connected to the whole culture of poverty?*

**Roosevelt Teachers** and **City Year** claim that cellphones interfere with the learning process in the classroom:

*But I also think too that they're growing up with a different time and day in age. My students are very attached to their cell phones. I have to ask them to disconnect. It's time. It's the same spiel every five minutes. I need your ear-buds out. Please focus your attention on me. Eyes on me. Using all the little different...clap once, clap twice. Okay I get their attention. I need cell phones put away. If it vibrates don't answer it. You know, so I have to constantly make this disclaimer. What the disconnect is, is that our students do not see that their cell phones are offensive. They don't deem it as offensive. They don't know what professional behavior is. [Roosevelt Teachers]*

*My biggest thing is that I would go after the iPods and the phones in class because it takes a class hostage. [City Year Roosevelt]*

On the other hand, **City Year in Roosevelt** sees how cellphone can be used for educational purposes:

*They're always on their phones, but instead of like texting or like playing games, like sometimes, a lot of the times, they're actually like looking up things that are important for the lesson, and like there was this one kid, he was wondering about a poem that he*



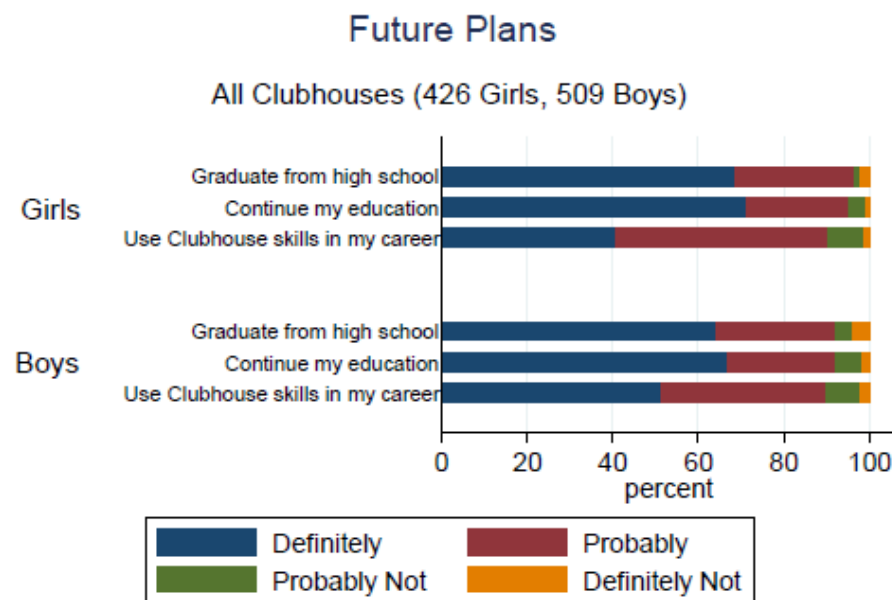
wanted or a term and he was trying to relate it to something that we were talking about in class. And he pulled out his phone and he Googled it, and was like, ‘Oh here I found it’. It’s like, ‘oh, cool like you’re using your phone to not text your girlfriend, that’s awesome.’ And like just being alert if they need a word that they don’t know or trying to find like a synonym for a word they automatically go to their phones, I guess it’s kind of like, use a dictionary! But still it’s kind of like it’s great that you’re using that for something positive!”

As cellphones are so embedded in the students’ daily routines, the school may not be able to eliminate the students’ cellphone usage. However, the abundance of cellphones presents a unique chance for teachers to embed the students’ popular culture with the academic curriculum.

### Published Research

As cellphones become more advanced and the market becomes saturated with smartphones, the opportunity to incorporate cellphones into curriculum and see them as aides rather than distractions grows exponentially. Norris, Hossain, and Soloway (2011) have predicted that “Within five years *every* child in *every* grade in *every* K–12 classroom in America will be using a mobile learning device”,

hinting at how it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the prevalence of cellphones in every aspect of people’s—particularly *young* people’s lives (p. 25). With this prediction, Norris, Hossain, and Soloway (2011) argue that in the new globally situated information technology era, traditional school curriculum and its relationship to technology are being forced to change. This need for more holistic and interactive learning can come in many forms, including methods both inside and outside the school. Although there is a growing body of research surrounding different approaches and positive outcomes associated with incorporating technology and more specifically, cellphones into the classroom, due to national and state requirements and restrictions, methods for incorporating technology into learning outside



the school may have more flexibility and promise for implementation. Additionally, students' attachment to their cellphones speaks to their interest of emerging technology that, through things such as Youth Oriented Community Technology Centers (CTC) or programs like the Computer Clubhouse, can be tapped into and expanded upon. Technology centers or programs that aim to engage young adults in technology have been shown to help them feel more connected to their communities (Charmaraman & Hall, 2011; London, Pastor, Servon, Rosner, & Wallace 2006), helped them create more social capital by building both bonding and bridging networks (London, Pastor, Servon, Rosner, & Wallace, 2006), and helped reduce dropout rates and encourage further pursuit of higher education (Greaves & Hayes, 2010; Gallagher, Dominguez, & Michalchik, 2011). The chart above shows the tremendous impact Computer Clubhouses across the States have on students' academic achievement.

An excellent local example of a combination of a Youth Oriented Community Technology Center and a Computer Clubhouse is the new Best Buy Teen Tech located on the West Side of San Antonio. According to the Computer Clubhouse Website, the goal of the Best Buy Teen Tech center is "To help teens explore their passions in technology and inspire future education and career choices" by breaking "the mold of traditional, static computer labs by offering catalytic environments that will spur teens to learn, experiment, collaborate and play with the latest technologies to build 21st century skills and enable them to seize opportunities for self-expression" (<http://www.computerclubhouse.org/content/best-buy-rfp>, accessed July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011). With a wide variety of resources to fuel them, teens are able to develop projects and skills based on their interest in things such as computing, digital photograph, film making & videography, graphic design, audio production, robotics, game development, and programming.

By providing teens with access to tools and skills that allow them to use computers and technology for more than entertainment or "play" the Teen Tech Center is working to eliminate the "new digital divide". Ritchel (2012) argues that "In the 1990s, the term "digital divide" emerged to describe technology's haves and have-nots", while the new digital divide is centered around those that have "digital literacy" or not. And the challenges for overcoming the new digital divide are amplified for families with limited resources (Ritchel, 2012).

Ultimately, whether it is in the form of smartphone pedagogy or community technology centers, solutions that incorporate or compliment the rise and prevalence of handheld technology offer unique ways to engage kids, keep them in school, and provide them skills that they can use immediately outside of high school, or develop with more training.

### High School Challenge #3: Teacher Expectations

Stakeholders agree that teachers and mentors should standardize their expectations for their students. They believe that there will be better behavioral and academic outcomes if the students are challenged with higher standards.

In a conversation about teacher expectations for regular level classes, **Roosevelt Alumni** state that some teachers have really low academic expectations for their students:

*G: I remember sitting there and thinking that they were the easiest class I have taken and a lot of [the other students] were struggling.*

*P: Like, the teachers really spoon feed you.*

*G: Oh my God, like in those classes. She literally gave us the answers to the test.*

*P: Like the day before*

*G: Like she would read through the test.*

**City Year in Roosevelt** and **Communities in Schools** agree that the students need to be presented with higher academic expectations. They are also sure that the students are capable of meeting those elevated standards. On the other hand, they are concerned that lowered academic expectations will reduce the students' academic competency:

*I have a, I like the teacher that I work with a lot, she definitely cares about the students, but there's something in general that has to change because I think the*



*expectation for some of the...some of the teachers have high expectations and I feel maybe our English department might just be lacking with things that...just the expectations that they hold to the students. They...my teacher will give them like three days to do an assignment that shouldn't be taking them three days. And the only reason that they take the whole 3 days is because they know that it's always going to be given to them. And they always know that if they raise their hand and say "Can I finish this tomorrow?" That she's going to have to say yes because otherwise they're all going to fail and she can't have that. If from the first day there was more consistency like "you have 20 minutes to do this and I'm literally only giving you that 20 minutes" then the kids that first four assignments they might all bomb, but eventually they're going to do it because the only reason that they take those three days, they don't need those three days, but it's because they know that they can. They know that they can do nothing for basically two of those days and literally I've seen students get the entire assignment done that one period and it's because they can. It's just that they know that they can push off everything. It's just that the expectations are so low and the deadlines, there's not enough consistency. [City Year Roosevelt]*

*Academics and laziness just, you know, I've missed these assignments but I know I can turn them in late but then they never turn them in because they just keep putting them off. Um, so I've seen a lot more academic. And it's not that they're not smart. [Communities in Schools]*

**City Year in Roosevelt** further states that the teachers should also standardize their behavioral expectations for their students:

*I think the follow through on a lot of their rules and expectations. They have these rules like "You're not supposed to be in the hall. You're not supposed to be tardy. You're not supposed to skip. They have a dress code, but they selectively, it's because our school is gigantic and they can't get everyone in trouble, but they selective choose "Today, I'm going to tell that girl that she's dressed inappropriately" when 90% of the girls in the schools are dressed inappropriately. "Today that kid is going to get lunch detention." And he's probably not going to have to go because they're not responsible for making it to lunch detention on their own. We're supposed to take them there. And it's that a lot of the punishments aren't followed through on and a lot of the punishments are almost not, like they get sent to AHS [Alternative High School] when they fight ... I think they really need to rehash the way they follow through on things and the way they deal with some of these issues, because fighting is a big issue and sending kids to AHS isn't doing anything about it. I don't know what will. I don't know how I would deal with it, but I know that removing kids from getting an education isn't helping.*

*My teacher used to have them do this thing where they would get this bathroom pass and she had to sign it every time they went to the bathroom and they were only allowed three in the nine weeks. And then that was too difficult, she couldn't keep up with it, so she stopped it. So they go to the*

*bathroom one right after the other right after the other right after the other because they know. And every time she tries to re-instate something, it's too late. It's too late in the year. They're too used to the fact that...you know, she always says "Now I'm going to take away your cell phones." And I've seen her take away a cell phone once. And it's like these empty threats that I think a lot of teachers aren't that intelligent when they make these empty threats, but they remember. They might not remember for some reason that they had an assignment due today, but they're going to remember that you say every day "I'm going to take away your phone" and you don't take it away. And I think that that's a big issue is just consistency...*



### **Published Research:**

Studies of high performing schools in poor neighborhoods show that one of the most common characteristics that the schools share is high expectations (Center for Public Education, 2007; Hayes, 2008; Cotton, 1991; Bell, 2001; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman, 2005; Habernman, 1999; McGee, 2003; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel, 2002). The characteristic of 'high expectations,' or as the Center for Education (2007) puts it "a culture of high expectations," is seen as more tangible through strategies like staff and teacher continued education and self-assessment, holding students accountable for assignments (Cotton, 1991), using the effort paradigm that emphasizes the relationship between effort and outcomes (Habernman, 1999; Cotton, 1991; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel, 2002; Carter, 2000), forging positive and caring relationships with adults and the community (Center for Education, 2007; Bell, 2001; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman, 2005), and the more general practice of the "trickle-down effect" where "principals held high

expectations for faculty and staff, who held high expectations for themselves and the students" (Hayes, 2008; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman, 2005).

Similar to the commonly cited characteristic of high expectations, many of these effective high-poverty schools exemplify a strong focus on academic achievement. Teachers and mentors hold high expectations for their students' academic progress. Recommended strategies or processes by which academic achievement comes to be the core value of the school include: increased focus on basic skills like math and reading skills (Center for Public Education, 2007; Reeves, 2003; Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny, 2004; Barth, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, *et. Al*, 1999), use of state standards and tests (like TAAS; Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny, 2004), curriculum design and assessment (Center for Public Education, 2007; Barth, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, *et. Al*, 1999), use of “few indicators of improvement in contrast to the typical school improvement plan that contains a large number of unfocused efforts to improve” (Reeves, 2003, p. 3), increased time spent on and in academic endeavors such as literacy activities, after-school and summer learning activities (McGee, 2003; Center for Public Education, 2007; Haberman, 1999), academically oriented classes, and increased academically oriented electives and in-school tutoring (Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel, 2002).

**Alternative career paths, relevant curriculum, high expectations, and more:**

Whether it is through a lack of alternative career paths, engaging and relevant curriculum, or school culture of high expectations, Roosevelt High School is failing to engage students in school and offer them skills and opportunities they can use to live productive lives after they graduate—if they even do. Looking back at each section, we can see that the students' disenfranchisement and issues in school have been building since elementary school, and perhaps even before that.

All along our analysis of the most prominent stakeholder identified issues, we have provided published research to support potential solutions; the research has shown *how* these problems could be resolved, but now let's take a look at *when* stakeholders believe these solutions should be implemented in order to be most effective.

# Moving forward: Where do we go from here?

## A. Stakeholder- Identified Intervention Points

There are intervention points for both assets and challenges. In the previous sections, we discussed the assets and challenges across grade levels. Following the discussion, we compiled and synthesized what published research says about those assets and challenges. Keeping all that in mind, in this section, we'll be presenting particular intervention points identified by stakeholders.

### Intervention at Particular Grade Levels

In the Challenges sections, we discussed challenges for each grade level. We also synthesized what published research says about those challenges and way to approach them. Keeping all that in mind, in this section, we'll present some stakeholders' identified intervention point where the challenges are most exigent.

#### 1. Elementary School

Stakeholders identify the earlier years of elementary school as important intervention points. Intervention at such a young age should prepare students, academically and behaviorally, for later school years when the curriculum becomes more challenging.

**Communities in Schools, Camelot Teachers, and Roosevelt Teachers** specifically mentioned second and third grade as crucial intervention points:

*I've heard that by third grade, a student makes up their mind. Whether they're going to be successful in school or not. [Communities in Schools]*

*I think with the lower grades it's more like academic catching up, and I think it starts in like 2nd or 3rd they start to become undone behaviorally [Camelot Teachers]*

*We've lost all sorts of...any semblance of fun at school. That's gone. it's leaving already in the third grade, and if they're third graders and already hate going to school and are scared of taking a test, at third grade, then by the time they reach us, they're so tired about hearing about*



*tests, and how we got to pass the tests, and how if you don't pass the test, the teacher loses their job, or they're going to close the school. By the time they reach us they're tired of school. School is not a place of learning. [Roosevelt Teachers]*

**City Year in Roosevelt** and **Roosevelt Alumni** add that children should start being exposed to behavioral trainings and experiences in early elementary school. They believe that this early exposure may help make a difference in these children's high school career:

*And it starts at home and then also starts at the elementary school with, like, if the students aren't expected to keep a folder or do homework at the elementary school or middle school, they're for sure not going to do it in high school. And a lot of the high school teachers are always surprise or concerned that students don't turn in their work or they lost their folder after one day, but they weren't expected to [do] homework in middle school and they weren't expected to keep a folder in elementary school. [City Year Roosevelt]*

*I think that the kids are attracted are going to be in ETA, or gonna be in DATA. I mean a lot of them had experience with Rackspace already. Like he was on robotic team. ETA, kids have that option to get in, and if they don't, they're probably not interested anyways. I don't know, maybe if they started at a younger age, they can follow the tract... [Roosevelt Alumni]*

## 2. Middle School

Stakeholders identified both sixth and seventh grade as important intervention points. They suggest that intervention programs in these grades should emphasize and direct identity formation.



**Communities in Schools** identify sixth grade as the effective intervention point:

*First, it's sixth grade. They're at that point where they're trying to find themselves, they're just there at the campus. By the time they get to seventh and eighth grade, they know what to do. But the 6<sup>th</sup> graders are the ones that are getting into the most troubles they're the ones struggling academically.*

Yet, **Krueger Teachers** suggests seventh grade as the effective intervention point:

*Seventh graders are just crazy. It's.. this is my on—I've taught every grade from sixth through 12 but I avoided 7<sup>th</sup> grade on purpose for a long time and this is my second year in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and um.. they're really are a mess. But they're trying to figure out who they are and they they.. they're caught between wanting to be sweet little kids and you know tough you know 8<sup>th</sup> grader kind of thing.*

Middle School teachers also struggle with preparedness as the new 6 graders arrive lacking many of the organizational and social skills they need to be successful. Krueger teachers offered the suggestion of a rising 6<sup>th</sup> grader summer orientation program – possibly just a few days – that could be used for skill-building *and* community-building amongst the new class.

### **3. High School**

Stakeholders identified ninth and tenth grade as the intervention points in high school. Intervention programs in these years should focus on engaging students to prevent dropouts.

**Roosevelt Teachers** state that engagement programs should begin in the early years of high school to prevent dropouts:

*And that's the key, because once they make it to junior or senior year, then we know we have them. But it's getting them up to junior or senior year, because the population. Their freshmen class is usually huge, and we're down almost half, maybe a little bit more than half, by the time they're seniors, so getting them through and actually up. Once we find out that engages them, they stay.*

These intervention points identified by stakeholders suggest that intervention should be a consistent effort. These programs are important because, even though the environment and circumstances around these students may not be changed easily, the programs may alter the students' perception of and level of engagement in school. Hopefully, successful intervention programs, regardless of grade level, can pose long term impact on these students.

## **B. Interventions around ASSETS:**

We said that there are intervention points for both assets and challenges. *This* is precisely where the ‘branding’ conversation should begin – with the self-identified assets of the community. Not only are they assets though, so too do these assets distinguish this part of San Antonio and the North East School District from other areas: those assets are the diversity and resiliency of the student body. Nowhere else can one find a more ethnically-complex student body; nowhere else can a teacher interact with so many students from so many different backgrounds; nowhere else can students experience so many other cultures and identities. According to teachers and mentors, these are the great marketable qualities of the schools. The Magnificent 7 Schools can become a teacher destination for high quality teachers who want to be exposed to diversity and who truly desire to make a social impact through education.

In an interview, **Graham Weston** identified the Rackspace Foundation’s mission statement as youth and public school focused: “The Rackspace Foundation is a funding organization that focuses on creating a learning community where education is valued, families and educators are engaged, and students strive to reach their fullest potential”.

*facilitator: So really it is youth focused*

*Graham Weston: It is youth focused ... It’s also a public school focus as well*

This mission statement collaborates well with the conditions of the neighborhood. In speaking with over 200 stakeholders, we found that, even though this community is situated in a harsh physical, social, and economic environment, this community’s greatest assets lie within the youth and the youths’ possibilities in school.

**Rackers** suggest that these qualities of the youth can be marketed and branded through publicity programs and events:

*If you had an event space that someone was willing to, whether it is just a big gym that could be transformed and you talk about, you know the resilience of these kids and some of the things they are capable of doing. If you, an art show, it's all their art in the community. And publicize it and PR and get everyone in here to look at it, this is what has been produced. Get a couple kids that are a band, a garage band, so they have the opportunity to take, whether you like rap music or rock music, whatever it is, whatever the individual went through that influence and expression. To have a place to do that, maybe that is the first little, then hopefully you start building giant.....*

Another **Racker** adds that these programs can aim to help the children express their unique cultural identity:

*...We're talking about bringing in culture and creating a culture. We sit in a culture, if you, go to some of the schools over in this area, these kids have culture, they just don't have the opportunity to express it or the time or they parental guardian type of involvement that can help them to express it, so it's not that we don't have a culture that is a unique feeling in just this place, you don't have to bring it, it's already here, it's just how do you foster them to help them bring it out...*

The Best Buy Teen Tech Center demonstrates that technological means are great grounds for these students to express their unique cultural identity. The mentors at the Tech Center encourage the students to celebrate their culture through technological pathways.

Rackers and students may even share a common culture. According to one Racker:

*M: Something I was just thinking of, what is so great about Rackspace, is that we embrace differences. When I give tours, or you know, talk to different individuals, I talk about the fact that you don't have to waste time putting on a front to look like a mold, to fit into a mold, you can just come be yourself and just go and everyone in here looks completely different and I think that is great. Um, but sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ walk outside of these doors and that level of acceptance we drop. Built into that acceptance is also the, whatever could potentially be negative that we would look at, we drop that off and take that value or whatever it is that you geek out about. Cause I don't know how to write code, but I will geek out on audiences and focus and market to groups and other types of stuff, that is what I geek out on and so we will look at that and see that as a value and concentrate on that versus all the other external stuff they may not get and so how do we then go externally and stop judging that this place doesn't have this, or doesn't have this, or what does it have? Then amplify that and put it on the pedestal and say this is what is great.*

## **II. Starting the Conversation about *branding* ...**

An intriguing combination emerges in this work: a diverse student body that is technically-savvy, resilient, and tolerant of racial, cultural, and economic differences to the point that they often ‘code-switch’ when speaking and relating to one another, deploying different ‘codes’ used by different social groups when they find themselves in those settings. This, in a neighborhood shared with one of the largest, most forward-thinking, and innovative computing corporations in the world, where (again) technically-savvy people work in the world of computers – in codes – connecting people and ideas thousands of miles apart.

Is our common ground *code-switching*???

Finally, we give the final words to a Racker:



*M: I think part of the message that we talked about was the underdog story for Rackspace. Where you were the underdog and competitors didn't think you would survive. They would always send that video of Kramer like "sell, sell, sell". I feel like that is the story that we can share with the community that we have really done a good job. But I mean this success story the underdog, the world thinks that you are not going to succeed. You pull yourself up and here we are now, I think that, the fact that we chose this community and put a stake in this neighborhood that we are here to help you.*

social responsibility. The purpose of this work has been to determine a starting point based on the strengths and challenges of the community. I hope we have done that, and gone even a step further in suggesting intervention points and strategies, and perhaps even a branding idea.

## References

- Ananat, E., Fu, S., & Ross, S. L. (2013). Race-Specific Agglomeration Economies: Social Distance and the Black-White Wage Gap. *NBER Working Paper Series*. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18933>
- Baker A. (2012, October 21). At Technology High School, Goal Isn't to Finish in 4 Years. *The New York Times*.
- Barth, P., Haycock, K., Jackson, H., Mora, K., Ruiz, P., Robinson, S., & Wilkins, A. (1999). Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations. *Education Trust*, 1-103
- Bell, J. (2001). High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools. *Leadership*. Sept./Oct, 8-11
- Bierman, K. L., Torres, M. M., Domitrovich, C. E., Welsh, J. A. & Gest, S. D. (2009), Behavioral and Cognitive Readiness for School: Cross-domain Associations for Children Attending Head Start. *Social Development*, 18, 305–323. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2008.00490.x
- Blumenfeld, P.C., Soloway E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating Project-Based Learning: Sustaining the Doing, Supporting the Learning. *Education Psychologist* 26 (3-4), 369-398.
- Bosch, G. & Charest, J. (2008). Vocational training and the labour market in liberal and coordinated economies. *Industrial Relations Journal* 39 (5), 428-447. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2338.2008.00497.x
- Buchanan, N. K., Fox, R. A. (2004). Back to the Future: Ethnocentric Charter Schools in Hawai'i. In E. Rofes & L. M. Stulberg (Eds.), *The Emancipatory Promise of Charter Schools: Toward a progressive politics of school choice* (pp. 77-106). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Brooks, J. E. (2006). Strengthening Resilience in Children and Youths: Maximizing Opportunities Through the Schools. *Children Schools* 28 (2), 69-76. doi: 10.1093/cs/28.2.69

Carter, S. C. (2000). *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*. Washington: Heritage Foundation.

Cathleen N., Hossain A., & Soloway E. (2011). Using Smartphones as Essential tools for Learning: A Call to Place Schools on the Right Side of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Educational Technology*, (May/June), 18-25.

Center for Education. 2007. *A Synthesis of Validated Research on High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*. Education.com, Retrieved May 30, 2013, from [http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_Research\\_review/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Research_review/)

Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin. (1999). *Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School* Washington: U. S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service.

Charmaraman, L. & Hall, G. (2011). School dropout prevention: What arts-based community and out-of-school-time programs can contribute. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 9–27. doi: 10.1002/yd.416

Condly, S. J. (2006). Resilience in Children: A Review of Literature With Implications for Education. *Urban Education* 41, 211-236. doi:10.1177/0042085906287902

Cotton, K. (1991). *Educating Urban Minority Youth: Research on Effective Practices*. Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Retrieved July, 16, 2013 from <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/825>

Crutcher, B. N. (2007). Mentoring across cultures. *Education Digest*, 73(4), 21-24.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press,

DeWitt, J., & Storksdieck, M. (2008). A short review of school field trips: Key findings from the past and implications for the future. *Visitor Studies*, 11(2), 181 – 197.

Dickinson, D.K., & Neuman, S.B.(Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2). New York: Guilford.

Eccles, J. S., Barber, B.L., Stone, M., & Hunt, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of Social Issues* 59 (4), 865-889.

Ford, J. & Sutphen, R. (1996). Early intervention to improve attendance in elementary school at- risk children: A pilot program. *Social Work in Education* 18(2), 95-102. database.



- Foster, E.M. (2002). How Economists Think About Family Resources and Child Development. *Child Development* 73: 1904-1914.
- Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2008). Participation in extracurricular activities in the middle school years: Are there developmental benefits for African American and European American youth? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37, 1029-1043.
- Gallagher, L., Dominguez, X., & Michalchik, V. (2011). *Assessing Youth Impact of the Computer Clubhouse Network*. Boston: The Computer Clubhouse Network
- Garnezy, N. (1991). Resilience and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty. *American Behavioral Scientist* 34 (May-April), 416-430.
- Garringer, M. (2007). *Research, Best Practices, and Resources for Effective Youth Mentoring*. Portland: Hamilton Fish Institute and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
- Grossman, J., & Rhodes, J.E. (2002). The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Programs. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30 (2), 199-219
- Guetzloe, E. (1997). The Power of Positive Relationships: Mentoring Programs in the School and Community. *Preventing School Failure*, 41(3), 100-104.
- Habernman, M. (1999). Victory at Buffalo Creek: What Makes a School Serving Low-Income Hispanic Children Successful? *Instructional Leader* 12(2): 1-9
- Hayes, S. (2009). *Characteristics of Successful High-Poverty Schools: What the Research Tells Us*. Vermont Department of Education
- Hemmeter, M.L., Ostrosky, M., & Fox, L. (2006). Social and emotional foundations for early learning: A conceptual model for intervention. *School Psychology Review*, 35, 583-601.
- Herrera, C. (1999). *School-Based Mentoring: A First Look into its Potential*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Herrera, C., Grossman, J., Kauh, T., Feldman, A., McMaken, J., & Jucovy, L. (2007). *Making a Difference in Schools: The Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Holzer, H. J. (2012). *Raising job quality and worker skills in the US: creating more effective education and workforce development systems in states* (No. 42). Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).

Issacs, J. B. (2012). *Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children*. Massachusetts: Brookings Institution.

Jekielek, S., Moore, K., & Hair, E. (2002). *Mentoring Programs and Youth Development: A Synthesis*. Child Trends: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

Jesse, D., Davis, A., & Nancy P. (2004). High-Achieving Middle Schools for Latino Students in Poverty. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 9(1), 23-45

Kannapel, P., Clements, S., Taylor, D., & Hibpshman, T. (2005). *Inside the Black Box of High- Performing High-Poverty Schools*. Lexington, KY: Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

Lim, H. J. & Kim, J. (2011). A longitudinal study of children's social behaviors and their causal relationship to reading growth. *Asia Pacific Education Review* 12, 197-213

London, R. A., Pastor, M. Jr., Servon, L. J., Rosner, R., & Wallace, A. (2010). The Role of Community Technology Centers in Youth Skill-Building and Empowerment. *Youth Society*, 42 (2), 199-228. doi:10.1177/0044118X09351278

Luke, A., Dooley, K., & Woods, A. (2011). Comprehension and Content: Planning literacy in Low Socioeconomic and Culturally Diverse Schools. *Australian Education Research* 38, 149-166

Mahoney, J. L., & Cairns, R.B. (1997). Do Extracurricular activities protect against early school dropout? *Developmental Psychology*, 33 (2), 241-253.

McGee, G. W. (April, 2003). *Closing Illinois' Achievement Gap: Lessons from the 'Golden Spike' High Poverty High Performing Schools*. Unpublished paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL.

Myers Scotton, C. & Ury, W. (1977). Bilingual Strategies: The Social Functions of Code-Switching. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 13, 5-20

Neuman, S. B., & Celano, D. (2006). The knowledge gap: Implications of leveling the playing field for low-income and middle-income children Reading. *Research Quarterly* 41 (2), 176-201

Nilsson, A. (2010). Vocational education and training - an engine for economic growth and a vehicle for social inclusion? *International Journal of Training and Development* 14 (4), 251-272

Norris, C., Hossain, A., & Soloway, E. (2011). Using Smartphones as Essential Tools for Learning: A Call to Place Schools on the Right Side of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Educational Technology* May-June, 18-25.

Petrosino, A. J. (2004). Integrating Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in Project-Based Instruction: A Case Study of an Experienced Teacher. *Journal of Science Education and Technology* 13 (4), 447-460.

Picucci, A. C., Brownson, A., Kahlert, R., & Sobel, A. (2002). *Driven to Succeed: High Performing, High Poverty Turnaround Middle Schools*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin

Ready, D. D. (2010). Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early Cognitive Development: The Differential Effects of School Exposure *Sociology of Education* 83 (4), 271-286

Reeves, D. (2003). *High Performance in High Poverty Schools: 90/90/90 and Beyond*. Center for Performance Assessment: 1-20.

Richtel, M. (2012, May 29). Wasting Time Is New Divide in Digital Era. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/30/us/new-digital-divide-seen-in-wasting-time-online.html?smid=pl-share>

Schilling, T. A. (2008). An Examination of Resilience Processes in Context: The Case of Tasha. *The Urban Review* 40 (3), 296-316

Slack, R. S., Johson, C. A., Dodor, B., & Woods, B. (2013). Mentoring “At-Risk” Middle School Students: Strategies for Effective Practice. *North Carolina Middle School Association Journal* 27 (1), 1-11.

Speilman, F. (2012, April 1). New six-year tech high schools in Chicago offer associate degrees. *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Study shows which technology factors improve learning (2010, June 28). Retrieved from <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2010/06/prweb4196254.htm>

Tierney, J., Grossman, J., & Resch, N. (1995). *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning*. San Rafael, CA: The Autodesk Foundation.

Wang, C., & Algozzine, B. (2011). Rethinking the Relationship between Reading and Behavior in Early Elementary School. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 104, 100-109

Webster-Stratton, C., & Reid, J. M. (2004). Strengthening Social and Emotional Competence in Young Children—The Foundation for Early School Readiness and Success: Incredible Years Classroom Social Skills and Problem-Solving Curriculum *Infants and Young Children* 17 (2), 96–113.

Willis, P. E. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Columbia University Press.