

HEALTH JUSTICE FOR EASTSIDE STUDENTS

2013 Report by InnerCity Struggle



Strengthening Access to Health and Wellness for Academic Success



INNERCITY STRUGGLE 
Building a Movement in the Eastside

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Introduction

InnerCity Struggle's (ICS) mission is to empower youth and families to address issues of educational access and equity in the Eastside of Los Angeles and to promote healthy, safe and non-violent communities. Founded in 1994, ICS has actively worked to improve the quality of life in the Eastside by engaging youth, parents and community residents in developing their leadership skills to voice concerns, raise community awareness and promote solutions focused in the areas of education, health and violence prevention. ICS supports Eastside youth and adults in effectively conveying their platform of positive community change. Focus areas include leadership development and training in organizing, research, policy and communications. ICS also publishes data-based reports that track progress in reaching policy reforms.



InnerCity Struggle's organizing and advocacy efforts have resulted in improved opportunities for local youth; victories have included winning the construction of new schools, increased college access opportunities and improved school safety. ICS organized students, parents, community members and educators through petition drives, community meetings, mobilizations and rallies to secure the construction of Esteban E. Torres High School (ETHS) in a near decade-long process, with the school opening in 2010. With no new school built in East Los Angeles in more than 80 years, the ICS New School Campaign was in response to a growing student population of mostly poor and Latino students that were attending extremely overcrowded high schools with few opportunities for success reflecting years of neglect on the part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

Background and Urgency

Esteban E. Torres High School is located in unincorporated East Los Angeles and is currently a part of the newly established Intensive Support and Innovation Center of LAUSD. The reason for the school's inclusion in this ground-breaking department is due to it being comprised of five small theme-based schools focused on preparing all students for college and high-skilled careers with autonomies to deliver personalized instruction. Close to 100% of the Torres students are Latino, and more than one-quarter are identified as English Learners. More than 80% of students are also classified as economically disadvantaged. The student demographics reflect the community demographics. East Los Angeles has long served as an entry portal for immigrants into LA County, and is made up of predominantly working-class immigrant families from Mexico and Central America and others with deep roots that go back for generations. Adult education levels are very low in the community, with only 34% of residents 25 or older having a high school diploma. In terms of academic achievement, recent data demonstrates a need to increase graduation and college-going rates at Torres. In its first documented school year (2011-2012), Torres overall had a graduation of 62% and a successful A-G completion rate of 22%. Providing all students with the opportunity for success will require addressing their holistic needs.

InnerCity Struggle has led an effort to secure a comprehensive Wellness Center at Esteban E. Torres High School in an effort to meet the needs of students and their families. This effort is part of the Community Schools Campaign, launched three years ago by ICS in collaboration with the Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP).

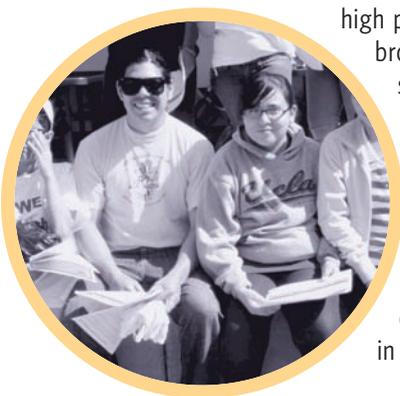
The effort aimed to establish a student support model based on school-community partnerships that can be leveraged to provide comprehensive health and human services to students at Torres High School. ICS's commitment to organizing and advocating for healthcare services on school grounds was informed by thousands of surveys and focus groups that identified lack of access to health services as a priority for youth and families. The Center is now comprised of eight health practitioners (plus one Outreach Coordinator) from three area based non-profit service organizations that provide physical, mental and reproductive services, at no cost and regardless of citizenship status to the 2,305 student campus. The intention of the Center is also to provide dental health care services to ETHS students, although none is currently provided. It is through relationship building and advocacy efforts that ICS in partnership with LAEP was able to help bring these service providers to be a part of Center to service Torres students. The non-profit community-based organizations currently providing the much needed services are:

1. Bienvenidos
2. Hillside
3. CHCADA (California Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse)

A 2010 national study of school-based health centers found that the critical role of partnerships was one of six necessary conditions to build an effective wellness center. The others include strong community support, dynamic leadership, multiple funding sources, starting prevention efforts early, and making the link between health and educational success. The Esteban E. Torres High School Wellness Center has made significant progress toward meeting these conditions. There is a continued need to secure a set of long-term funding sources and strengthen the link between positive health outcomes and educational achievement.

The Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health, The L.A. Department of Public Health and the Los Angeles Unified School District partnered in 2008 with other foundations and stakeholders to identify high priority areas for health and wellness centers in Los Angeles schools and brought forth a proposal to the LAUSD board to fund centers in 14 district schools. The board has contributed \$32 million to date for the construction of these wellness centers, but not for the actual service delivery. Esteban E. Torres High School was not one of the 14 sites designated for LAUSD funding, but has managed to open and sustain the center on a very small budget due to strong school-community support. While the Affordable Care Act allocated \$200 million from 2010-2013 to build more centers and expand services around the nation, schools are left looking for funds to operate the centers. School districts around the country are facing a shortage in nursing staff; LAUSD has only 400 nurses for a student population of over

Mónica García, President of the LAUSD School Board recognizes the collaborative work of the community during a time of crisis by stating, "congratulations to all the community partners for bringing a Wellness Center to the Esteban E. Torres High School community, students will now be able to benefit directly from the services provided."



600,000 (or approximately one nurse for every 1,500 students). This makes community partnerships a critical element of establishing and sustaining wellness centers in Los Angeles schools, as well as greater support from LAUSD, LA County and the philanthropic community .

According to Maria Brenes, Executive Director of InnerCity Struggle, "The Wellness Center must serve as a hub for community health, a place to obtain information and receive services for youth and their families. The Wellness Center must also play a role in prevention, support academic success and inspire replication in other schools serving low-income students of color."

According to Alejandra Meza, an 11th grade student at Esteban E. Torres High School and a youth leader with InnerCity Struggle that has utilized the Center, "the Wellness Center is excellent because it gives students a

School-based health centers serve as a growing national model to address student health needs because of a strong correlation between student achievement and health outcomes. 33% of Esteban E. Torres High School students surveyed by ICS stated that student wellness was a key support factor for staying in school and graduating. And, it provides an affordable and convenient alternative for students and their families if they do not have health insurance. Some East Los Angeles families report being in dire need of healthcare for preventable ailments to serious, chronic conditions and seek measures that lead to loss of work and school time.

METHODOLOGY FOR INFORMATION GATHERED FOR REPORT

- Direct observations of weekly Wellness Center services
- Interviews with nine school-site and off-site practitioners and/or providers, seven teachers, five counselors, five principals, including one school support staff
- Surveys and interviews with seventy-five students
- Interviews with ten parents

chance to let out any emotions and/or feelings about anything and provides physical and reproductive support. I believe that EVERY student should know about the Wellness Center."

A Closer Look: The Esteban E. Torres High School Wellness Center

Physical Health

The Esteban E. Torres High School Wellness Center helps meet the critical need for accessible, targeted, and community-relevant healthcare supports that allow local Eastside youth to address their overall health needs. Its wrap-around services aim to create a space for students to be supported in a holistic manner and to be prepared to excel academically. Recently, ICS surveyed and interviewed seventy-five students on the role of the Center in their lives. Key points from students include that the Wellness Center has had a positive impact on them and their family because it allows students to get physical exams faster than having to wait for their parents who do not always have time to take them to the doctor. Additionally, students felt increased information

and awareness regarding the type of services offered and availability of those services was crucial to ensuring more students are helped. Physical health services are provided by Bienvenidos and are available Tuesdays and Thursdays before, during and after-school hours. Students are able to make an appointment at the Center during service days and times.



Mental Health

The Center has also excelled at providing mental health services offered by the three community-based agencies across each of the five schools, which in addition to Bienvenidos, includes HillSides and CHCADA (California Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse). Each of the schools' guidance counselors plays a critical role in referring students in need to the services and ensuring access. A total of six mental health therapists are available for the five schools on different days and times throughout the week. Student issues reported being addressed range from substance abuse to depression. Additionally, students must be enrolled in Medi-Cal to access this particular service. Parents interviewed report being most familiar with the mental health services offered.

Reproductive Health

The Center also effectively provides reproductive health services which include STD/STI testing, pregnancy tests, birth control, Plan B, information for teens who are pregnant and general information on reproductive health. Students report that they can come in to the Center when it is opened to get tested, get information and get a pregnancy test, amongst other services. Additionally, students that have partners who do not attend ETHS, can still come in and get tested as well. Similarly to physical health services, reproductive health support is provided by Bienvenidos and is available Tuesdays and Thursdays before, during and after-school hours. Students are able to make an appointment at the Center during service days and times. Surveyed students also identified a need for increased information and awareness of these services to ensure more students access them.

Dental Care

At the onset of the Wellness Center's opening, there were dental services provided for students but those are no longer available. Efforts are currently underway by InnerCity Struggle and LAEP to secure services by the end of 2013 from a new provider. Additionally, students surveyed identified vision care as a need.

School Nurse

Although, not officially part of the Wellness Center, it is important to acknowledge that there is a school nurse available six days out of the month at Esteban E. Torres High School. The nurse provides full-scope services, including first aid, CPR and condom distribution. Students may refer themselves to the nurse or be referred by teachers, counselors and/or parents. The nurse reports being challenged with having to share her time with another high school on the same day she is assigned to be at ETHS. Additionally, she reports frequently addressing cases of diabetes, sports injuries and stress-related ailments with students at the campus.

The Role of Teachers and Principals

Teachers and principals interviewed all agreed that the services provided at the Wellness Center are critical for student success. They also expressed a need to increase collaboration between faculty and Wellness Center staff to ensure increased student awareness and use of services. Additionally, a recommendation was made for specialized teacher training in regards to ensuring a safe environment for students accessing the wellness supports

The Role of Families

Interviews with parents highlighted the need to provide bilingual information in order to increase awareness of services among families. Recommendations were made to utilize existing parent engagement structures to distribute information.

Outreach Mechanisms

The Esteban E. Torres Wellness Center Outreach Coordinator is available to share information across the campus about the physical health and reproductive health services and serves as a liaison with constituents of the Center.

Lessons Learned

Through methodologies of observations, interviews and surveys, InnerCity Struggle identified SEVEN key takeaways regarding the impact of the Wellness Center at Esteban E. Torres High School. These include,

1. A need to increase information and awareness regarding physical health and mental health services and availability of supports.
2. A great mental health need exists for students facing issues such as depression, thoughts of suicide and substance abuse.
3. The referral process to access mental health services is clear and similar across the five schools.
4. A need exists to increase the availability of the school nurse to ensure students obtain adequate support.
5. A need for a system to collect data regarding the impact of services.
6. A need to create vehicles for on-going communication with school staff and families regarding service availability.
7. A need to strengthen the link between wellness supports and academic success.

Next Steps

The goal of InnerCity Struggle's efforts to collect information regarding the services provided by the Esteban E. Torres High School Wellness Center is to help identify successes and areas to strengthen for the benefit of students. ICS will continue to play a key role in engaging partners, allies, students and



parents in organizing and advocacy efforts to increase wellness and wrap-around supports at the school. Partner organizations, healthcare providers, teachers, students, families and school administration have demonstrated a commitment to youth and the community. ICS will build from this momentum to help take the Center to the next level through increased community and stakeholder collaboration.

The original intent of the Center was to shift the way in which students, parents and school staff and administration relate to one another and to the school community in addition to supporting academic achievement. Maggie Flores, a 12th grade student at Torres High School and a youth leader with InnerCity Struggle that advocated for the Center stated, "...seeing the Wellness Center open is great because it came from an idea about how we can help all students succeed and it is about making sure all students feel healthy and safe."

A Call to Action: Health and Wellness Now!

There is an opportunity to ensure that all students attending Esteban E. Torres High School graduate college ready and healthy. In order to do this, the Wellness Center must be expanded and strengthened. In particular, InnerCity Struggle calls on all stakeholders to support the Center by:

- Securing a full-time Wellness Center Coordinator in order to oversee outreach and awareness efforts of services provided, convening of providers, tracking of data on impact of services and communication with school administration and faculty across all five schools.
- Dedicating new organizational services and staffing in order to ensure the model is fully implemented and availability of services is expanded through increased days and times the Center can be opened. School principals identified the need for a Psychiatric Social Worker;
- Allocating increased School District resources to strengthen awareness and utilization of the Wellness Center services. In particular, resources will allow for more information available to students and teachers, which include easily accessible information on the schedule of services, the types of services, the referral process, updates/highlights on the most critical care needs for students and information on the medical providers. The creation of a tailored website is key;



- Institutionalizing dental care services. According to a 2010 LA Unified Board Study, tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease and is the leading cause of absence from school. The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research reports that in CA, students miss ~874,000 school days annually due to oral health problems. These missed days cost school districts money, as funding is calculated based on Average Daily Attendance.
- Providing students with vision care resources.
- Increasing health insurance coverage for students, including Medi-Cal enrollment.

- Increasing availability of the school nurse.
- Strengthening alignment between academic programming, enrichment activities and wellness supports.

The Esteban E. Torres High School Wellness Center can serve as a model for the community to support the goal of health and academic success for all students. This truly is a community effort that has to be supported. Each of us is in this together - Join the growing movement for Health Justice in schools!



References

- List them here

Acknowledgments

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- United Students and Familias Unidas student and parent members
- School Board President Mónica García
- Esteban E. Torres High School staff
- Bienvenidos
- Hillsides
- CHACADA (California Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse)
- The Praxis Project
- The Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP)

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Twitter: @ICSEastLA

YouTube Channel: [UnitedStudentsEastla](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/09/school-health-clinics-los-angeles_n_2653119.html



A Snapshot of the Wellness Center Weekly Schedule

Below is a comprehensive schedule of services provided at the Esteban E. Torres High School Wellness Center. The information was collected and plotted on the chart by InnerCity Struggle.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Physical Health Clinic	CLOSED	7:30am - 4:30pm (Closed 1pm - 2pm for Lunch)	CLOSED	7:30am - 4:30pm (Closed 1pm - 2pm for Lunch)	CLOSED
Reproductive Health Clinic	CLOSED	7:30am - 4:30pm (Closed 1pm - 2pm for Lunch)	CLOSED		CLOSED
Nurse's Office	Open 1st & 3rd Monday of ea. month 10am - 12pm & 2pm - 3:30pm		CLOSED	CLOSED	10am - 12pm 2pm - 3:30pm
MENTAL HEALTH THERAPISTS for each School					
ELAPAA	9am - 2pm	9am - 2pm	9am - 2pm		10am - 2pm
SJLA	10am - 2pm				
ETA	9am - 2pm	9am - 2pm	9am - 2pm		
HAAT		10am - 3pm	10am - 3pm		10am - 3pm
ELARA		10am - 3pm	10am - 3pm		10am - 3pm

School Names:

- ELAPAA: East Los Angeles Performing Arts Academy
- SJLA: Social Justice Leadership Academy
- ETA: Engineering and Technology Academy
- HAAT: Humanitas Academy of Art and Technology
- ELARA: East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy

