A STUDENT AND PARENT VISION for
EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN THE EASTSIDE
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A Closer Look at Education in Eastside Schools

East Los Angeles High Schools are large comprehensive high schools. Their combined enrollment exceeds 16,000. Overcrowding is a problem at these schools, especially at Garfield and Roosevelt. Originally designed for approximately 1,000 students, Garfield and Roosevelt schools serve over 5,000 students each, making them among the largest schools in the nation.

Over four fifths of teachers at Los Angeles High school had full credentials in the 2005-2006 school year. The percent of fully credentialed teachers was 83% at Wilson High School, and 84% at Lincoln High School. The percent of credentialed teachers at the other two schools was higher; eighty nine percent of teachers at Roosevelt held a full credential and 90% of teachers at Garfield held a full credential. Overall 87% of teachers at these four schools hold full credentials. This figure is comparable to the 86% of teachers in LAUSD that hold full credentials, but lower than the 91% for California High Schools.

Students at the four Eastside schools have limited access to counselors. On average, there are 320 students to every counselor at these schools. While this ratio is quite high, the student to counselor ratio in Eastside schools is lower than the average of 854 for LAUSD high schools.

Graduation rates are alarmingly low at each of these high schools. For every student that enrolled in 9th grade in 2002, over 5,500 were placed in program improvement for 5 or more years. Meanwhile, Lincoln has been in program improvement for 11 years. The four Eastside schools have persistently low standardized test scores. As a result Garfield, Roosevelt, and Wilson have been placed in program improvement for 5 or more years. Meanwhile, Lincoln has been in program improvement for 11 years.
Identifying the Problem

8. College Opportunities and Resources

A common myth about Eastside students is that they do not want to go to college. Our data shows the opposite. In a survey conducted at the four Eastside high schools in the fall of 2006, 62.5 percent of students responded that they wanted to attend a four-year university or college after completing high school. This data demonstrates that students from the Eastside have high aspirations for themselves. But the Eastside's historically low graduation and college-going rates lead us to question whether students are provided adequate opportunities for college preparation. Is our educational system failing students in preparing them for the 21st century workforce?

More than 15,000 students attend the four high schools in the Eastside: Roosevelt, Garfield, Wilson and Lincoln. Lack of resources, fully credentialed teachers and counselors are factors that greatly contribute to the crisis in our local schools. Statistics show that Garfield and Roosevelt are among the most overcrowded schools in the district. As a way to accommodate all students, the Los Angeles Unified School District placed both schools on year-round calendars. This created three tracks of students sharing the same school and results in the loss of approximately 17 instructional days a year, compared to students on a traditional school-year calendar. Over the course of four years, these students lose almost an entire semester.

Eastside middle schools are severely under-resourced. For example, according to recent data provided by the Los Angeles Unified School District, Hollenbeck Middle School has no World Language courses available for its 2,597 students. The middle schools have also failed to prepare students for the rigor of high school math.

School district records indicate that only 32.6 percent of the students enrolled in math in the 2005-2006 school year at Garfield passed; making it the lowest in the district.

b. Drop-Outs and the Disappeared

In 2002, about 5,578 freshmen entered the four eastside high schools. Four years later only 2,115 graduated: 64 percent did not graduate from high school! In addition, only 14 percent of the entering freshmen completed their college prep requirements, making them eligible to apply to a university! We refer to the non-graduates as “The Disappeared” because the state and district records do not account for them. And their numbers are increasing at an alarming rate. As Lineth Gutierrez, a junior at Garfield High School stated: “Many of the people I started with my freshman year are now working at McDonald’s and a few have turned to selling drugs.” The middle schools have also failed to prepare students for the rigors of high school math.

Disappearance rates in Eastside high schools are dramatically higher compared to other high schools in the school district. For example, in the school year 2005-2006, 9 percent of the students at Garfield High School (2002-2006 school year is not available) graduated compared to only five percent of students at Cleveland High School, located in Reseda, a school with similar demographics. Students, schools like Cleveland with higher graduation rates and higher availability of A-G classes also have a significantly lower suspension rates compared with high schools in the Eastside. Schools located in the Eastside have lower graduation rates and less A-G availability in addition to higher suspension rates. This question posed in whether there is a relationship among suspension rates, A-G availability and graduation rates.

A-G Access

Although students on the Eastside aspire to higher education, the sad truth is that most of these students do not have access to the courses that are required by four-year universities and colleges. These 15 courses are known as the A-G college course requirements. The college preparatory track is simply not available to the majority of students. For example, only 64 percent of the classes offered at Garfield High School in the 2005-2006 school year fulfilled the A-G requirements. According to recently released data by the Los Angeles Unified School District, Garfield offered only 64 courses of World Language during the 2006-2007 school year, which is insufficient to ensure all students are completing the two-year minimum Foreign Language requirement for college eligibility. In addition, during this same school year, there were 48 industrial arts classes offered at Garfield, which does not enable students to access a quality Career and Technical Education.

Therefore, there is a need to strengthen and develop both A-G and Career and Technical Education course availability to prepare students for college and the 21st century workforce.

Mayra Jiménez, a junior at Roosevelt, explains, “The classes I need for college are full or they are not offered and I have to cross another track to take it.” Although students attempt to take the necessary classes, not all students have access to them and are therefore barred from meeting the requirements. No wonder that state records show that only one out of every twelve Eastside students attend a four-year university.

This is why InnerCity Struggle was part of a student, parent and community led effort that culminated on June 14, 2005, with the passage of the A-G Life-Prep Resolution by the Los Angeles Board of Education. This resolution will make A-G classes standard for all LAUSD high school students. The next critical step in this effort is enacting that LAUSD aligns its resources to ensure successful implementation of the resolution to prepare students for college and the 21st century workforce.

Discipline

Eastside high schools share a common pattern of low graduation rates and high suspension rates. Students surveyed felt that negative perceptions were imposed on them such as being labeled as “bad ones.” As Garfield High junior Miguel López describes: “We’re made to feel like criminals. Our school look and feel like jails. It seems like we’re fighting for our seats. I know students who were suspended for minor things, like going into the wrong bathroom.”

Policy makers and community members must question rules that force students to miss school for disciplinary reasons. In addition, we must question whether larger, overcrowded schools are actually premised upon a high drop-out rate. For example, if every entering freshman at Roosevelt High School completed their senior year, a group of approximately 1,500 students, the school would not be equipped to house or support them. There’s a need to develop policies and invest resources that retain and support students rather than punish them with suspension.

InnerCity Struggle’s survey results demonstrate the ineffectiveness of discipline policies in the Eastside in supporting students to excel in school. For example, at Roosevelt, Garfield and Wilson High School, only 23.6 percent of the students responded that enforcement of discipline policies helped change student behavior. In addition 70.3 percent of the students said that they did not feel they were treated fairly when they were suspended. Students clearly feel that discipline policies are unclear and ineffective.

Are the effectiveness and impact of discipline policies being measured? Are students provided support mechanisms to stay on track with school once they are suspended? Or are these students falling through the cracks and becoming part of the drop-out population? These are important questions to answer if we are to address the crisis in our schools.

Suspension rates in Eastside high schools are dramatically higher compared to other high schools in the school district. For example, in the school year 2005-2006, 23 percent of the students at Garfield High School were suspended compared to only five percent of students at Cleveland High School, located in Reseda, a school with similar demographics. Students, schools like Cleveland with higher graduation rates and higher availability of A-G classes also have a significantly lower suspension rates compared with high schools in the Eastside. Students located in the Eastside have lower graduation rates and less A-G availability in addition to higher suspension rates. The question posed in whether there is a relationship among suspension rates, A-G availability and graduation rates.
RHS Tardy Survey Results
Earlier this year, Roosevelt High School began to implement a Tardy Sweep Policy. This policy involves issuing truancy tickets to students who are late to school for first period. Any student who is not in their seat when the bell rings is punished with up to three hours of detention.

If students are not on school grounds when the bell rings, they are subject to being ticketed up to $250 by the Los Angeles Police Department13.

Clearly the instructional goals of schools are undermined by their discipline policies. The district must implement policies that support students to change behavior, instead of creating a hostile climate for students. This can have a detrimental impact on students’ ability to succeed in school.

C. Family Engagement
Family engagement refers to the involvement of adults who play important roles in the development, education and well-being of a student14. It is recognized that family engagement contributes to students’ academic achievement15. Yet Eastside schools offer limited resources for building strong family-school relationships. The sentiment expressed by a local Eastside parent, Ángela Gutiérrez, echoes the feelings of many of the parents surveyed: “A parent really has to struggle to be engaged at school because schools don’t make it easy. Schools complain about parents not participating, but they must address the roadblocks put in front of parents especially regarding how available, approachable and open they are with us.”

In winter 2007, surveys conducted by InnerCity Struggle revealed that parents in the Eastside strongly value education. In the survey, 400 hundred parents whose children attend schools in the Eastside were asked, “Would you like your child to attend a university after graduating from high school?” The response was overwhelming in support of higher education. Cynthia Hernández, a 7th grader at Hollenbeck Middle School, relates: “My parents are on me all the time about my grades so that I can go to a good university and get scholarships. They tell me everyday that they are proud of me and give me positive comments.” Cynthia’s comment demonstrates that parents are playing an important role in shaping students’ outlook on school.

Although parent engagement is undoubtedly a responsibility of parents, schools play a critical role in facilitating this process by providing a welcoming environment, as well as opportunities and trainings for parents to make their participation more regular and effective. In particular, school communication with parents is key to sharing not only expectations of them in terms of roles and responsibilities at school, but also in publicizing critical information about policies, standards and requirements necessary for them to support their child’s academic progress.

Yet, parents raise the concern that they don’t receive necessary or adequate communication from schools. The majority of schools communicate with parents through letters sent home by mail or by automated telephone messages. Rarely do schools speak with all parents personally. According to Genoveba Padilla, an Eastside parent, “This is an inefficient method of communicating with parents because the information arrives late and is not always clear. Not having gone through this country’s educational system, I need information about how the educational system works here. I think parents would be much more motivated to participate if schools were more personable with them.” This statement reflects the sentiments of hundreds of other Eastside parents surveyed. Parents are not provided with sufficient information about school codes and policies, support programs, graduation and university requirements which in turn, hinder their ability to support their children’s academic efforts.

The survey responses reveal two important points: 1) Nearly half of the parents are not receiving critical information regarding the pathway to college; and 2) It is unclear where parents are suppose to obtain this information. Clearly there is a need to designate staff and resources at schools to specifically play the role of informing parents about college eligibility requirements and other learning supports for their children.

Communicating with parents needs to be a greater priority of schools. Parents need to be supported to play a more active role in helping to prepare students for college and the 21st century workforce.
Eastside Community’s Call to Action and Policy Demands

The policy demands that InnerCity Struggle proposes are based on research, surveys results of Eastside students and parents and proven best practices. The policy demands aim to eliminate the drop-out rate in our schools and ensure that all students are prepared for college. Strategies to support students to remain in school and excel academically must include new and pro-active approaches to discipline, opportunities for career and technical education, meaningful and authentic parent engagement and instructional programs that increase personalization for students. In addition, policies must be in place that ensures class size reduction and an increase in resources to Eastside schools.

Preparing all Students for College and the 21st Century Workforce

Students in the Eastside must be prepared and equipped with the skills to successfully complete the A-G curriculum in high school.

Implement Policies that Guarantee that Every Student Develops and Follows a 4-Year Plan to Graduate and Fulfill the A-G Requirements

• Increase A-G classes to 75 percent offered at each of the four Eastside high schools
• Ensure that teachers are qualified to teach A-G coursework
• Ensure there are sufficient Math and Foreign Language teachers
• Increase access to advanced placement courses that integrate into career themed Small Learning Communities
• Improve current advertising of the A-G requirements and other laws such AB-540 which allows students to go to college regardless of their immigration status
• Send transcripts to student’s parents and/or legal guardian to support monitoring of their child’s progress in being UC/CSU eligible
• Increase college presentations and college recruiters on campus i.e. more college fairs and college tours
• Implement and expand programs that improve graduation rates and student achievement (Puente, Algebra Project, GEAR UP and AVID)
• Implement LAUSD A-G Social Science electives for Ethnic Studies

Implement Pro-active Discipline to Increase Graduation Rates

Research on discipline policies that automatically punish students for minor infractions through suspension translates into zero discretion and zero flexibility on the issues at schools. Instead, schools must reduce anonymity, alienation, and the impersonal character of schools and promote a climate of respect by responding consistently to minor infractions through counseling and communication. Schools must adopt a preventative approach to discipline utilizing strategies that encourage students to take responsibility for their behavior and learn from their mistakes.

Evaluate current discipline policies, and include student body voices

• Assess effectiveness of discipline policies through InnerCity Struggle surveys and research

Implement Pro-active Policies to Address Tardiness

• A tardy policy that combines intervention and prevention strategies: parent involvement, counselor intervention, community representatives communicate with parents, and monthly time management courses for tardy students

Implement Alternatives to Suspension

• Adopt a preventative approach to discipline utilizing strategies that encourages students to take responsibility for their behavior and learn from their mistakes
• Increase transparency of suspension data: schools should report reasons for suspending students by category along with number of suspensions per year
• Communities and schools should routinely use research and data to hold schools accountable

Increase Counselor Positions in Middle Schools and High Schools

• Ensure all high school students are provided with an ISP (Individual Graduation Plan)
• Each school should have one Guidance Counselor for every 200 students
• Middle schools and high schools have a college and career counselor or other staff assigned to focus on students’ post-secondary path
• Guidance Counselor ensure that students are enrolled in courses to fulfill A-G requirements

Prevention Strategies

• High schools and middle schools to have Saturday Academics and summer bridge programs focused on college readiness and tools for success in middle school or high school

Family Engagement to Support Academic Achievement

Families must be viewed as partners and allies by school and district officials. Eastside schools must engage families in decision-making and support families to navigate the school system.

• Include parents as key stakeholders and partners in new initiatives
• Develop a system for genuine information-sharing, shared-decision making rules and opportunities for parents, especially in areas that impact their children’s education
• Establish a viable means of on-going parent engagement to the schools
• Support innovative parent centers and parent education efforts
• Work with outside partners to inform and engage parents
• Value parent involvement and engagement in prioritizing schools’ budget

Funding

Ensuring that sufficient funds are allocated to Eastside schools is critical to successful reform. Students completing the A-G requirements for graduation, implementation of Smaller Learning Communities, increasing student learning supports will require additional funds.

• Utilize SB 1133 funds to reduce class size
• Increase 21st century technology for teachers and students
• Provide professional development for all school staff aligned with higher expectations
• Improve the rigor and relevance of vocational and technical classes
• Aggressive intervention supports for every child who is falling behind
• Allow Smaller Learning Communities autonomy over budget

School Re-design

A transformative K-12 reform plan is needed to re-design schools and create a system of educational access and equity for all Eastside students. The intent is that with the key elements below, students will be provided a quality education.

• Autonomy: Schools should be granted control over resources in five key areas: 1) Budget, 2) Scheduling; 3) Schedules; 4) Curriculum and Assessment; and 5) Governance
• Accountability: Higher levels of accountability in exchange for increased autonomy. Each school will undertake a review process based on a set of common benchmarks for a high-performing school
• Small Size: Schools must be small in size in order to facilitate students and teachers knowing one another
• Commitment to Equity: Schools will serve the unique needs of the Eastside’s student population (Gifted, RSP, English Learners)

“The policy demands aim to eliminate the drop-out rate in our schools and ensure that all students are prepared for college.”

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Notes and References


Additional References

- Maps and the analysis of California Department of Education data were provided by UCLA IDEA (Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access)
- Families in Schools & Communities for Educational Equity. The Schools We Deserve. May 2005.
- InnerCity Struggle student surveys conducted at Roosevelt and Garfield High Schools. July & August 2006.
- InnerCity Struggle student surveys conducted at Wilson High School. October 2006.
- InnerCity Struggle student parent surveys conducted at Lincoln High School. April 2007.