This research brief is possible due to the commitment and effort of the following organizations that have contributed to the transformation of Roosevelt High School’s climate, wellness and nutrition:

- Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network
- InnerCity Struggle
- The Labor/Community Strategy Center
- Latino Equality Alliance
- Partnership for Los Angeles Schools
- Public Health Advocates
- Urban & Environmental Policy Institute
- Volunteers of America, Greater Los Angeles
- The YMCA

Prepared by:
Jorja Leap, PhD
Susana Bonis, M. Ed., PhD Candidate
Stephanie Benson, MSW, PhD Candidate
Karrah Lompa, MSW, MNPL
Introduction
Theodore Roosevelt High School (RHS) is located in the heart of the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles. Since its founding in 1923, it has served as an educational and community hub for nearly one century. At one point, RHS was one of the largest secondary schools in the country, providing an educational home to more than 5,000 high schoolers per year. Presently, RHS is a largely homogenous school in terms of student demographics, with 98% of the students being Hispanic or Latino. Over 50% of students had at one time been English Learners (ELL), but have since been reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. Over 20% continue to be ELLs. More than 80% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. For many years, RHS had an overwhelming number of suspension and pushout rates, as well as a large number of students disappearing from school, potentially undereducated and lacking the life and job skills they need to be successful.

However, over the last decade, RHS experienced substantial changes. In 2008, it joined the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a nonprofit organization that operates a network of 18 schools in Los Angeles with the intention of accelerating student achievement. Along with this affiliation there was a change in schedule. Up until 2009-2010, the school operated on a year-round calendar. Then, in 2010 it divided into seven small schools, each with its own principal, staff, and students. In the 2013-14 school year, five of the small schools combined into one.

While facing such adjustments and several enduring challenges, many students and faculty at RHS, as well as allied community-based organizations, have demonstrated a resilience and activism that long has characterized the school for decades.

In 1968, students at RHS joined their peers from four other Eastside high schools in student walkouts to push to improve the educational opportunity for Mexican American students in the city’s schools. Since that time, RHS has remained a site for student and community activism ranging from denouncing hate speech to supporting immigrant rights to speaking out about the most recent presidential election. There has been a firm understanding by talented and dedicated individuals and organizations that power building and advocacy are necessary to overturn inequity and injustice.

In 2010, these individuals and organizations united with a philanthropic foundation with a similar vision. The California Endowment (TCE) recognizes that inequities in health, economic, social, physical, and service environments have caused low-income communities and communities of color to suffer disproportionately. In its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, TCE selected 14 sites—among these Boyle Heights—to receive a substantial amount of investment, including both financial and technical assistance, over a decade to help reverse some of these inequities and build local capacity to continue fighting for transformation in the years to come. Policy and systems changes are the primary levers to transform the environment, and these levers are influenced by several drivers of change, including developing youth leaders, building resident power, collaboration, leveraging partnerships, and changing the narrative.

This brief will present the changes in both policy and practice that have occurred at RHS since initiation of BHC in 2010; it will also highlight the work of the organizations and partnerships that have thrived with BHC’s ongoing support. While many of these organizations had a strong presence at RHS prior to

1 School demographic data is taken from the California Department of Education’s DataQuest website: http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.

2 This brief is only reporting on the work done by organizations at Roosevelt High School that are funded by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative.
BHC, this brief focuses on accomplishments that were accelerated by foundation support. The document is not meant to describe in detail each campaign, but rather to elevate successes and lessons learned that could influence similar endeavors. The results are drawn from intensive qualitative interviews with representatives of nine organizations working at RHS.

The Role of Schools in Promoting Health Equity: Targeting Three Work Areas
In a socio-ecological model of health equity, schools are powerful institutions that can influence the health and well-being of students. Youth spend a significant portion of their day in the school environment, which shapes their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. For youth in marginalized and disenfranchised communities, schools could play an even greater role in helping such students reach their highest potential. Organizations working with youth, parents, and teachers at RHS identified three primary work areas of focus to help make the school more supportive of the health and well-being of students: the nutrition environment, a comprehensive wellness center, and school climate. Figure 1 provides an overview of the advocacy targets and their respective work areas at RHS.

School climate, wellness, and nutrition are interconnected and interdependent. Focusing on efforts collectively—across all three work areas—only helps strengthen outcomes within each area. To understand how interconnected the work areas are, and the benefit of focusing on these areas simultaneously, it is important to provide an overview of school climate, wellness, and nutrition. First, school climate is the complex, multi-dimensional environment that encompasses the physical, social, and academic well-being of students. Decades of research on school climate has taught educators, administrators and parents that a supportive school climate is critical in fostering positive behavior and academic outcomes. Evidence suggests that zero-tolerance policies do not improve school safety, but rather only punish the individual, disconnecting students from a learning environment and leaving them unable to maintain an academic focus (Losen, 2014). Moreover, policing in schools can contribute to increased student involvement with legal systems, thereby contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (Petrosino, Guckenburg & Fronius, 2012).

Second, it is also clear that economically disadvantaged youth are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems resulting from an inadequate or poor quality diet and overall nutrition. Organizations interviewed have described how teachers at RHS understand that food directly relates to academic performance, noting that students cannot concentrate when hungry and sometimes become impatient in an effort to leave campus to buy food, which can result in behavioral issues. Lastly, wellness encompasses students’ physical and mental health. Students will be more engaged if their physical needs are being met, which can be achieved through an onsite wellness center that provides physical, vision and dental exams, as well as behavioral health services that help students heal from trauma.

To effect lasting change, students must be supported by a truly comprehensive range of services. Through the use of a community schools model—and an emphasis on transforming these three work areas—BHC and its collaborative organizations seek to increase access to a comprehensive coordinated system of care on the school campus. In this way, the needs of the whole youth can be met and students and their families can engage and advocate for policies and practices that benefit them in the present and in the future.

RHS student-led forum (Source: YMCA)
Transforming School Climate and Culture

The Challenge: Not too long ago, RHS was a place full of hurt, misunderstanding, and trauma on multiple levels. Students arriving to school even ten minutes late could be issued a truancy ticket by an officer from the Los Angeles Police Department—with each ticket starting at $250 and easily escalating to $1,000. Students eating breakfast a block or two from campus could also be picked up by officers in a truancy sweep and taken to the school cafeteria where they were met by gang intervention officials—whether they were a member of a gang or not. The message was one of punishment and low expectations. There was little effort to look at the factors that might cause a student to be late and what could be done, and to distinguish between someone who was simply late and someone with negative intentions to skip school.

The mentality taken to address truancy was also applied to other situations. In 2011, RHS had over 277 suspensions (Inner City Struggle\(^3\)), an extremely large number compared to neighboring schools. Furthermore, the “disappearance” rate at RHS had been historically around 60%. Not only were policies and practices harsh, but so was the relationship among students. For example, in a survey of students, it was found that 70% had heard homophobic remarks on campus and considered such remarks to be just a normal part of interactions. And then, it was not only students who suffered at RHS, but faculty as well. The various major changes at the school in a short time led to a divided faculty.

\(^3\) Inner City Struggle has been at the forefront of tracking suspension and expulsion data at Roosevelt High School.
uncertain about the best direction for the school. Conflict was common and left unaddressed. The relationship between faculty and the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools was also impaired in this environment.

**Organizations Involved:** With funding and support from TCE, six organizations took the lead in addressing these serious issues facing RHS. Inner City Struggle (ICS) has been working at RHS for well over a decade to reform discipline policies and practices. Labor Community Strategy Center (LCSC) has a long track-record working on similar issues in South Los Angeles. LCSC was invited to RHS to assist with efforts to stop truancy ticketing around 2010, and became an integral partner in other efforts to improve school climate. The East Los Angeles Weingart YMCA, Latino Equality Alliance, and Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA, formerly Gay Straight Alliance) Network are largely service organizations that made improved school climate and culture for all students, including members of the queer community, a centerpiece of their work at RHS. And finally, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools received funding from TCE to assist with implementation of a restorative justice framework. While different organizations may have taken the lead on different campaigns and activities, all organizations were involved at various times. Collaboration has been a strong characteristic of the BHC-funded organizations at RHS.

**Strategies and Tactics:** The fight to end truancy and tardy ticketing preceded the campaign for the School Climate Bill of Rights. Students were offered weekly political education and prepared to be spokespersons for the campaign. LSCS helped obtain significant media attention for the issue. Additionally, because truancy and tardy ticketing was traced to the city’s “Daytime Curfew Law,” the movement for change needed to expand beyond the walls of RHS. Youth often met with diverse students from across the city that had lived through similar experiences, receiving a chance to see that even though communities may be different, they often share problems and must work together to resolve them. At RHS, youth conducted outreach among their peers and led presentations on the issue. They also organized community hearings, shared testimonies, and attended large mobilizations to LAUSD and city offices. When the City Council voted on the truancy ticket issue in February 2012, over 100 students among the 400 present were from RHS. The historic vote of 14-0 amended LA Municipal Code 45.04 (“Daytime Curfew”) to curtail the punitive ticketing of youth for tardiness and truancy.

The truancy ticket campaign highlighted the policing and punitive environment present in many of the district’s schools. Additional manifestations of this climate were the large number of suspensions and expulsions and other harsh discipline practices at schools. Advocates for change, including organizations and teachers, began to explore alternatives like Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, and Restorative Justice—approaches that look more to providing support and healing to students who exhibit behavior challenges. Many of these organizations from Boyle Heights, South LA, and Long Beach, along with the youth that they work with, had the chance to come together to talk about the issues that they faced and to plan a campaign
through the BSS (Brothers, Sons, Selves) coalition, itself a component of BHC. Labor Community Strategy Center, Inner City Struggle, East Los Angeles Weingart YMCA, and GSA Network were the organizations from Boyle Heights involved in the BSS coalition.

The campaign to reform school climate called for the school board to adopt a resolution to enact positive and restorative approaches to school discipline and expand programs that support all students in becoming healthy, thriving adults. Key desired elements included the following:

1. Ending willful defiance suspensions;
2. Implementing restorative justice programs;
3. Creating a district-wide implementation plan for Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS); and
4. Developing new policy guidelines to limit the role of the police in school discipline.

In May 2013, the LAUSD school board passed the School Climate Bill of Rights incorporating these components on a 5-2 vote. The day of the vote, only two votes were certain to be in favor of the resolution. The large presence of hundreds of youth and allied adults at district headquarters on the day of the vote is credited as being pivotal for securing the remaining votes needed for passage. For both the truancy ticket campaign and the campaign for the School Climate Bill of Rights, the size and diversity of the coalitions significantly influenced decision makers.

The passages of the Amendment to the LAMC 45.04 and the School Climate Bill of Rights were significant moves to decrease the punitive environment present in too many schools in Los Angeles. Moving beyond simply passing policy, implementation of these policies—to help initiate culture change—was the next step. Culture change requires intentional, consistent, and sustained actions to change artifacts (visible manifestations of culture), espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions (Edgar Schein, 2010). At RHS, the BHC initiative made available significant support to assist with implementation of a restorative justice framework, an important component of the School Climate Bill of Rights. “Restorative Justice is a
Youth leaders were extensively engaged in planning and implementing at all stages in both the truancy and school climate campaigns; leading survey and petition drives to build support; developing a foundation for “artivism” among students; mobilizing students and their families to attend campaign events; and serving as spokespeople targeting media outlets and decision makers.

Organizers and activists held Town Halls and Teach-Ins—one of which was attended by LAPD Chief Charlie Beck, Monica Garcia (School Board Member), and Superintendent Michelle King. Data was shared from a needs assessment survey completed by students. Also powerful was presentation of data that demonstrated that there were racial disparities in the implementation of school discipline measures.

Early in the school climate campaign process, the Restorative Justice Coordinator assembled a team of diverse stakeholders—early adopters, believers and champions—that continues to meet monthly to guide implementation of all activities to promote restorative justice. The Restorative Communities Team (RCT) consists of teachers, youth, parents, community-based organizations (many part of BHC), and when possible, members of law enforcement (e.g., school police, probation officer). The RCT has planned campaigns and efforts to bring awareness and raise interest in restorative justice.

Campaigns led by teachers and students were used to build community and demonstrate the value of restorative justice. This helped ease reluctant teachers into the process.

Throughout the year, week-long campaigns were held around different values like acceptance and unity and themes like self-image and self-confidence. For example, during Educational Justice Week, the focus was on showing what restorative justice looks like in a classroom. Different groups on campus would take the lead on campaign activities. In the case of the “You Are Beautiful” campaign, the members of RHS Parent Center wrote—by hand—messages of positive affirmation for every student on campus and delivered them personally.

LEA has made important inroads towards being able to offer professional development to teachers on how best to support LGBTQ youth, and offers a regular workshop series for parents.

LEA and the GSA Network provide support to the local GSA club at RHS. LEA also hosts a Youth Council off campus—for those students who may be less comfortable at school—that facilitates discussions on themes of interest to students and includes mentoring and leadership development.

Youth are being prepared to lead future campaigns at RHS to improve student awareness of the School Climate Bill of Rights.

There has been advocacy to ensure that funds from the Local Control Funding Formula designed to benefit at-risk populations (ELL, foster youth, or low income) go to supportive services rather than policing in an effort to improve school climate.
Rather than forcing an introduction to restorative justice through tools like promotional videos and mandated training, the decision was made to invite teachers to participate in campaigns and activities and encourage others through modeling of restorative practices. Week-long campaigns around different values including “acceptance” and “unity” were held each quarter. The idea for campaigns came from students; participation by teachers was voluntary. This took pressure off teachers and offered them the chance to see that restorative justice is really about improving conditions for students.

Restorative justice was also reframed within the context of restorative communities. While some teachers struggled with the idea of restorative justice limiting consequences for students, nearly all could embrace the idea of restorative communities—communities where all people feel welcomed and valued, where their talents are celebrated and developed, and where they enjoy spending their time. There was less push back when the focus was on building healthy relationships and creating a positive, nurturing, and safe school culture.

Through these various approaches, school staff could come to see the value of restorative practices on their own and make the choice to be a part of the effort. As more teachers became comfortable with the idea of a restorative approach, both terms (restorative justice and restorative communities) could be used. The RJ Coordinator has been at RHS now for four years. She has tried to build the capacity of members of the Restorative Communities Team to plan and implement campaigns on their own. This has now given the RJ Coordinator more time to work directly with teachers and students. Several teachers have begun to incorporate restorative justice practices into their classroom.

**Impact of Wins:** There have been significant results from these policy and practice changes. Since 2010, the following changes have occurred:

- There has been a reduction in the number of truancy tickets issued.
- Additionally, there has been a reduction in the number of out-of-school suspensions (see Table 1).
- RHS has been on WASC probation. However, during the most recent site visit observers noted significant improvements in conflict and shared vision for direction of the school. Practicing restorative justice approaches is credited with contributing to this change.
- The GSA represents a continued example of a safe and inclusive space. It has grown in size this year and includes trans and queer youth along with their friends who come to support them.
- There has been increased participation among teachers in campaigns to promote restorative communities. For instance, the “You Are Beautiful Campaign” was conducted twice. The second time many more teachers wore the campaign shirt—a noteworthy symbol of culture change.
- Teachers, especially in ethnic studies classes, are embedding restorative justice into their curricula—by their own choice.
Other substantial consequences have grown strongly apparent at RHS. One can walk around campus and randomly see community building activities being done: administrators can be observed taking the time to work with students, teachers stand outside their doors to greet students, and community organizations are welcomed as partners and have a voice in decision-making. One might overhear more people at the school talk about ways to create a healthier, safe, and inclusive culture.

There are still challenges at RHS, but individuals also now have tools to transform negative circumstances into something positive. For example, two years ago, twenty teachers were let go due to lack of funding. Using a restorative justice approach has helped people understand and deal with these changes, and learn to navigate conflict in a healthy and respectful way. RHS is well on its way to serving as a model of how to embrace a restorative justice framework as an integral part of school culture and is also the flagship for restorative justice implementation among the 18 schools operated by the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools. Lessons learned at RHS influenced the design of a new training program, Restorative Communities Leads, designed to support implementation of restorative justice in other Partnership Schools.

Organizations Involved: Three key organizations are partnering with BHC in an effort to reform the school food environment and advocate for food justice at RHS. The Healthy School Food Coalition, housed within Occidental College, strives to achieve food equity in the RHS cafeteria by ensuring that all kids—at all times of day—are afforded the same

Table 1. School Discipline Data for Roosevelt High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th># of Students</th>
<th>Single Student Suspension Rate</th>
<th>Instructional Days Lost to Suspension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>1,894</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>1,567</td>
<td>0.13%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transforming the Food and Beverage Environment

The Challenge: In a school district that serves more than 700,000 meals per day, food justice and food environment is a significant concern for schools serving traditionally at-risk youth. Some advocates of food justice and improved school food environment are quick to point out that LAUSD is a progressive district in terms of on paper policy, yet even more advocates note that implementation of policies is where the real challenge lies and where work needs to take place. Advocates acknowledge a significant need at RHS noting that the population consists of predominately low-SES students, many of whom might only have access to one meal per day, making their meal at RHS all the more important. Moreover, given its age, cafeteria facilities at RHS are in need of renovation and sometimes unable to effectively serve its student population. Additionally, RHS has struggled with vendors who found “loopholes” wherein they superficially complied with the LAUSD policy, but were not held accountable for other practices, such as packaging food in smaller portions or selling “baked” Cheetos instead of traditional Cheetos while still failing to offer healthy options in vending machines such as fruit.

Organizations Involved: Three key organizations are partnering with BHC in an effort to reform the school food environment and advocate for food justice at RHS. The Healthy School Food Coalition, housed within Occidental College, strives to achieve food equity in the RHS cafeteria by ensuring that all kids—at all times of day—are afforded the same

“"It’s about who we are, where we are going, and how we treat each other on the way there.””

--Michelle Ferrer, Restorative Justice Coordinator
healthy food options. Public Health Advocates strives to encourage a healthier nutrition and beverage environment through implementation of improved snack laws and use of hydration stations. Volunteers of America Greater Los Angeles engage students and community to understand how LAUSD policy affects food equity and food justice at RHS and throughout Boyle Heights.

**Strategies and Tactics:** Each organization works both independently and in collaboration—with each other and other BHC partners—to achieve mutual goals and improve the overall school food climate at RHS. While each organization undertakes targeted primary activities directed at a range of stakeholders, including parents, administrators and teachers, all acknowledge that their work starts with students and generating awareness of existing LAUSD food policy. Whether it is grassroots organizing to engage student’s families using RHS’s Parent Center, on-campus student groups such as Healthy Teens on the Move, or the Wellness Taskforce that provides resources for both students and parents, all organizations acknowledge that education is the most effective means of changing the school food and beverage environment. These three organizations work collaboratively to disseminate targeted information and provide a foundation to empower students and their families to advocate for change. Additionally, the following actions and practices utilized by the three collaborating organizations have been instrumental in transforming the food and beverage environment at RHS:

- Advocated for a “Smarter Lunch Rooms” model within the RHS cafeteria. This is an evidence-based model focused on how the physical environment positively or negatively impacts selection and consumption of healthy food.
- Provided technical assistance and training to students, parents, teachers, administration and cafeteria management.
- Conducted menu tastings with cafeteria managers to highlight new offerings and also identify popular meals in an effort to reduce food waste and improve nutrition.
- Developed a procurement pledge, requesting that vendors buy local when possible and support stores with better labor practices.
- Worked with students and conducted quarterly vending machine audits to track the type of food served and sold.
- Surveyed students, teachers and administration to assess readiness for a “water revolution” and readiness for hydration stations.
- Conducted extensive data collection, including three years of surveys on food improvement within the cafeterias and student consumption.
- Created a photo journal project with students wherein daily pictures of breakfast and lunch options are documented and posted online. The purpose of the photo project was to document the reality of the food available to students and how it often differed from stated LAUSD policy, particularly in terms of freshness of fruits and vegetables.
Implementing the above approaches required each organization to build support among and across students, parents, administrators, and teachers. Building this supportive base took considerable time, effort, and patience. Public Health Advocates noted that initially, generating buy-in from youth was difficult. Yet, through continued work with the Associated Student Body—which incorporated a measure in the constitution that class Vice Presidents would work with Public Health Associates—progress was made. As a result of this partnership, years later the group Healthy Teens on the Move continues to advocate for a healthy school food environment. The Healthy Food Coalition also described the grassroots organizing that was critical in the early days at RHS and noted that their “first in” at the Parent Center on Campus was important in their organizing and outreach efforts. Also, their position as a “watchdog” and advocate helped build support for the organization among both students and their families. Then, Volunteers for America Greater Los Angeles explained how important it was to have teacher support and buy-in for the success of the work. For example, teachers on one hand understood how food related directly to student performance; on the other hand, they would violate LAUSD policy and often provide or sell unhealthy food items in their classrooms in a perceived effort to support their students. The situation had all the makings of a “catch-22” with students hungry because they were not eating campus food and because they were hungry teachers provided less than ideal alternative options in their classrooms, consequently perpetuating the cycle of school food waste and poor nutrition.

**Impact of Wins:**
As a result of the joint efforts of these three organizations, real change has taken hold at RHS. Since 2010, the following changes have occurred:

- More salads are being served and eaten at RHS’s cafeterias.
- RHS cafeterias now are organized using the “Smarter Lunch Room” model, which is meant to help build a lunchroom environment that makes healthy food choices the easy choice.
- Relationships between students, cafeteria managers and administrators have improved.
- Students can more effectively articulate their food needs (e.g., fruits are not fresh or consistently available, vegetables are over or under-cooked).
- On-campus trainings have resulted in improved understanding of LAUSD food policy and how to advocate for its implementation.
- The RHS modernization plan now includes hydration stations in new buildings and a community wellness center.
- Water is the beverage of choice at all RHS events.
- The vending machines contractor is now local.

These wins have directly improved the on-campus food and beverage environment. Organizers state with confidence that students at RHS have a better understanding of food disparities and have learned that where you live often determines “the resources that you get”. Perhaps more importantly, however,
youth are driven and equipped to take action and advocate for their individual and collective health.

Transforming Access to Health Care
The Challenge: While RHS has a health clinic on campus, it is small, offers limited services, and is accessible mainly by students. The clinic is opened to the community during the summer and at certain times of the year to offer vaccines. An opportunity for expanding wellness services on site presented itself when RHS was one of ten schools LAUSD selected to be upgraded with funds the district receives from Measure Q and other bonds sales. RHS was set to receive $137 million. The goal became to develop a comprehensive wellness center at RHS High School for students, parents, and community members that will provide a safety net for families by providing access to preventative and health services, including mental health.

Organizations Involved: Inner City Struggle (ICS) took the lead in advocating for a comprehensive wellness center at RHS. ICS sees an important connection between restorative justice, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, and comprehensive wellness—for students and their families. This vision came to be shared by other organizations on campus who provided support at different points in the campaign. Public Health Advocates in particular stepped in to reinforce key messages around the wellness center during its own meetings to push for hydration stations as part of the modernization plan at RHS.

Strategies and Tactics: Relationship building, community organizing, research, and holding decision makers accountable were particularly important in this campaign. The district superintendent at the time was not very supportive of a comprehensive wellness center at RHS. He maintained that a clinic already existed on campus and that few healthcare providers would be interested in working at RHS. ICS had to step out of its existing network and develop relationships with healthcare providers who could potentially do business at RHS. Two of these providers attended a community meeting convened by LAUSD around modernization at RHS—countering the position that no healthcare provider would seriously be interested in running a comprehensive wellness center at the school. This community meeting also saw over one hundred students and residents turn out in support of the wellness center. Students and parents were well prepared to speak on behalf of a wellness center, which was not an agenda item for the gathering. Over 500 students also made their wishes known through petitions which were presented at the same meeting—a significant demonstration of power. Such a large and well-prepared turnout was unexpected by the district and helped overshadow an opposition group that did not wish for the clinic to be open to the public.

The campaign also had to push against the district’s position that only 2,000 square feet was possible for the center. Research shows that a comprehensive wellness center needs at least 5,000 square feet to be successful. Realizing the district was concerned about future funding of a wellness center, ICS successfully linked the size of the center to sustainability—a larger center could offer more services and have more foot traffic, and thus be eligible for more reimbursements by which to help support the center.

While an important event, the community meeting was one among several strategic moves. Activists needed to monitor the district and hold it accountable for next steps. It was necessary to keep the pressure on. So, ICS prepared a letter to the district, asking that they put out a call for interested providers. Ultimately, AltaMed was selected, but communication among all stakeholders was slow.

Water is the beverage of choice at RHS events (Source: Public Health Advocates)
ICS again stepped in, this time using its convening and brokering power to keep all stakeholders in the loop. This helped not only ensure accountability on the part of the district, but also to encourage authentic engagement of students and parents.

**Impact of Wins:** All demands set by the community in this campaign were obtained: a 5,000 square foot wellness center will be built at RHS over the next five years. It will be accessible to students, parents, and community members. The policy win resulted in funding for the building needed for the wellness center, but not for the services it will provide. To that end, AltaMed, with ICS support, is now trying to identify service needs through surveys and community research and looking into funding opportunities.

---

**Success Factors and Lessons Learned**

Various lessons can be learned from the successful campaigns at RHS—insight around effective organizing and advocacy for policy changes, and for changing organizational culture. These factors for success and lessons learned are outlined below, along with examples of their application at RHS.

**Organizing and Advocacy:** The following figure introduces the success factors identified for organizing and advocacy which will then be discussed in greater depth subsequently.

---

**Take time to develop relationships with youth.** It is essential to invest time in youth. Public Health Advocates (PHA) provides political education to youth on campus, but also takes youth on fun activities that can be related to advocacy. For example, the PHA organizer took youth to see the movie Hidden Figures. After the movie, they had a dialogue about the importance of advocacy. While she could do something similar in a lesson plan done at school, by taking them on a field trip she helped them build relationships with one another and showed the youth that she too cared about them. She also provides youth information on getting into college and scholarships. This is yet another way to connect to students and retain them, and contribute in another way to building leadership in Boyle Heights.

**Prioritize student voice.** Decisions are all too often made without student input or understanding of the issues from a student’s perspective. When students are trained to become critically conscious and are given specific language and tools to address issues, they will become empowered to use their voice. Most organizations working at RHS included youth in campaign planning meetings and in meetings with decision makers.

**Be relevant and attune to student needs.** Advocacy organizations need to be sensitive to the fact that sometimes, there may be issues that need to be addressed before the target one can be confronted. For example, Public Health Advocates, the Healthy Food Coalition, and Volunteers for America Greater Los Angeles wanted to focus on Breakfast in the Classroom. However, students pointed out that given limited time in the morning and the fact that for safety reasons the only restrooms open to students were at the front of the building, many students opted not to participate in Breakfast in the Classroom. Ultimately, the inherent lack of time and distance between the only open restrooms and breakfast in the cafeteria forced students to choose using the restroom before class over participation in the breakfast program. Thus, the issue of increasing access to restrooms had to be dealt with before emphasis could be placed on the breakfast program.

**Prepare thoroughly for community meetings.** This brief has highlighted several large community meetings convened by organizations. These successful gatherings have a few points in common:
recruitment and preparation of residents must be given enough time, be culturally responsive, and be intentional and strategic. Recruitment may need to involve culturally-sensitive print materials strategically disseminated, along with one-on-one interactions. There is also a need to prepare individuals for the meeting—both to understand the content and to be able to serve as effective spokespeople. Then, consideration also must be given to transportation and food. Too often, the effort that has to go into preparing for a large turnout—and for that turnout to productively push a campaign forward, is overlooked.

"Do Homework." When facing resistant decision makers, it is important to be prepared. Inner City Struggle encountered unexpected resistance when it first met with LAUSD’s former Superintendent to discuss a comprehensive wellness center. ICS was told that a comprehensive wellness center at RHS was not feasible—there would be no provider interested in taking on the role. To counter this, Inner City Struggle took time to build relationships with local health care providers so they could demonstrate to the district that there were indeed interested providers.

Understand the structure and life span of a project. Doing so can help determine where and how a project can be influenced. A common argument presented by decision makers is that it is too late in a process for changes to be made or to obtain involvement. This can be avoided by knowing about a project, including its timeline and implementation needs. In the case of the wellness center, Inner City Struggle realized that it had to become part of the modernization conversation early on if there was to be any chance of inclusion of a comprehensive wellness center in the plan. Then, once the district agreed to include the wellness center, it was still necessary for ICS to check in periodically to make sure the project was on track—and to take action if it was not.

Get in Front of An Issue. The district was initially opposed to a 5,000 square foot wellness center, but ICS was able to turn the conversation around by taking control of an issue important to the district—sustainability. Through communication channels made possible by years of delicate relationship building, ICS learned that the district was concerned that a comprehensive wellness center could not be sustained. ICS moved to the front of the discussion and presented its request of a 5,000 square foot center as the right solution to this concern about sustainability. A larger wellness center could provide more services for reimbursement. The
argument was successful, and there was a win for both sides.

**Identify champions to help a cause.** The presence of a core group of teachers interested in finding alternatives to the punitive discipline climate at RHS was fundamental to beginning to adopt a restorative justice framework at the school. The same was true with the truancy ticket campaign, where teachers themselves often took time to take photos of students who were being ticketed. Then, in pushing for the School Climate Bill of Rights, having the school board president as a champion was a significant factor in allowing the bill to pass.

**Continuously educate and build relationships with administration and district officials.** Campaigns can be long, and turnover in schools and districts necessitate continuous action. For example, work around food justice was impacted by a change of principals at RHS and a change in leadership at LAUSD’s Food Services Division. The new leaders didn’t know the history of what had gone on at the school or in the campaign before the arrival of new staff. Each leader also brought their own strengths and interest areas to the work, some of which did align with the campaign and some of which did not. Thus, it is essential to provide education and focus on relationship building.

**Involve the media and pay attention to messaging.** In the truancy ticket campaign, the power of the media was critical. Labor Community Strategy Center was able to bring much press to capture the intensity of what students were facing. Photos and video footage of morning sweeps picking up 15-20 students evoked strong emotional responses. Many of these photos were taken by teachers who were deeply dismayed by what they witnessed, and who became active leaders in the campaign. While youth were being given tickets in various parts of Los Angeles, only at RHS were large groups of young people targeted by police minutes from school. Capturing images of these sweeps took the campaign to a new level. A wider audience could see what was happening and begin to question the use of police force on youth trying to get to school.

**Hold decision makers accountable.** The onus to keep momentum and keep a process moving that may have been agreed upon with decision makers often falls to advocates. Decisions makers may not have the will or the structure and systems to do so. In the case of the comprehensive wellness center, after the highly attended community meeting where the district agreed to consider inclusion of a wellness center, it was advocates who had to push for the next step of the district putting out a call for interested providers. Later, it was advocates who convened meetings between the district, providers, and other stakeholders.

**Build coalitions.** In this space provided by Building Healthy Communities, youth were able to share what was going on for them at school. Their stories and experiences were lifted up in a way that might not have been possible otherwise. Then, organizations from different regions could come together here: Boyle Heights, South Los Angeles, and Long Beach. Collectively, they planned a district-wide campaign to have greater impact. The victory of the School Climate Bill of Rights does not belong to any one organization, but rather to a coalition strongly supported by The California Endowment.

**Changing Organizational Culture**

Changing organizational culture requires consistent, intentional efforts on multiple fronts over time. It is among the most challenging undertakings because of the complexity involved. RHS’s success in taking strong steps to transform its culture into one that is more positive, nurturing, and safe for all students merits closer attention as more schools in the district try to do the same using a restorative justice
approach. The following are success factors and lessons learned based on four years of deliberate actions to alter school culture. (It must be noted that the change process at RHS is not complete, however, so this list must be considered emerging.)

**Take time to build trust.** It is very difficult to accomplish much as a group if trust is absent. Since RHS had experienced so much hurt and trauma over the years, unaddressed harm was the biggest challenge to overcome if a culture shift was to occur. Including teambuilding activities in meetings, trainings, and events was important. Often, the temptation may be to skip these activities so tasks can be completed more quickly, but this is counterproductive. Once there is trust in a group, it will be more effective.

**Provide strong leadership without using a top-down approach.** At RHS, the Restorative Communities Team took the lead in planning strategies and activities to promote culture change. The team included a diverse body of stakeholders. This horizontal leadership model was more effective than a vertical model with the RJ Coordinator at the top. In terms of the school food environment, it was critical to engage students, parents and cafeteria management in lieu of a top-down approach from administration. Working with parents to educate them on LAUSD food policy empowered them to get their children involved with the school meal programs and also advocate for holding administration and cafeteria management accountable for implementing existing policy.

**Encourage “early adopters” to be a model for others rather than mandating all faculty and staff to be involved immediately in formal training efforts.** At RHS, there were a few teachers who were interested in Restorative Justice even before BHC and the School Climate Bill of Rights. These, and other interested faculty and staff were encouraged to identify and implement activities that could build restorative communities. Their successful efforts inspired others to participate. Once there was greater awareness and interest, more intensive professional development could follow.

**Show how the proposed change is tied to, and can enhance, existing efforts.** Restorative justice was made a central element of the School Climate Bill of Rights, and it is closely aligned with Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports. Teachers were reminded of these connections and of the fact that all of these efforts were not designed to make the work of teachers more difficult, but rather to respond to students who indicated that the school was not meeting their needs. Restorative justice was

---

**Figure 4. Success Factors for Changing Organizational Culture**

- Invest in a full-time Restorative Justice Coordinator
- Take time to build trust
- Provide strong leadership without a top-down approach
- Encourage early adopters
- Tie change to existing efforts
- Model change at different levels
- Meet people where they are
- Offer quality, continuous professional development
- Make and keep visible core principles

---

**Invest in a full-time Restorative Justice Coordinator who is present on campus daily.** This point was underscored in almost every interview conducted. The RJ Coordinator is the facilitator of a group effort to modify culture, not the “expert” trying to carry out the change.
presented as a way to build community and in that way, help students.

**Model change at different levels.** Today, a restorative communities approach can be seen in how the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools treats school administrators and teachers, how several administrators treat teachers, and how various teachers treat students. The changes in attitude and behavior must cascade throughout the organization.

**Meet people where they are.** While there were early adopters at RHS, there were also those who were more resistant and had strong feelings against implementing restorative justice. Some felt that the approach limited consequences for difficult behavior. One strategy used to help influence hearts and minds was code-switching: restorative justice became restorative communities. This small modification shifted people’s attention to the primary aim of restoration—to lead to healing. And once individuals had the opportunity to experience the benefits of developing restorative communities, the initial resistance diminished and the two words could be used almost interchangeably. By this time, more teachers and staff were ready to call their efforts to build community by the term restorative justice.

**Offer quality, continuing professional development.** Once more teachers and administrators were exposed to restorative justice and ready to examine it further, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools developed and implemented a thirty-hour training program, with ten additional hours of homework. In addition, model classrooms were identified and supported at RHS that could be used for observation and learning. Then, ongoing coaching was available. Currently, the Partnership is developing pilot lessons that teachers can use in classrooms to promote the development of socioemotional skills. Additionally, in the food environment, engaging with cafeteria management by offering opportunities for both training and connecting directly with students in meal planning creates buy-in and cooperation from students and cafeteria personnel alike.

**Make and keep visible the core principles to be embraced.** At RHS this has been done in various ways. The quarterly week-long campaigns on themes tied to restorative communities is one strong example: the campaigns are consistent, of sufficient duration to have impact, and present a concise yet powerful message. Then, the physical environment has been used to remind students and staff of restorative practices, e.g., posters are displayed with guidelines for restorative circles and signs are posted on teachers’ doors that invite students to enter. Finally, daily actions also reinforce the restorative approach. For example, some teachers stand outside of their doors and greet students and in their classrooms, convey messages that promote socioemotional growth.

---

**Building Healthy Communities as a Catalyst**

Several of the organizations working at RHS today had been doing so before the advent of BHC. The arrival of investment from BHC, however, helped to accelerate, expand, and deepen much of the work being done. Restorative justice is a prime example. Some teachers and organizations on campus had interest in restorative justice, but little training and support. BHC secured early training from the California Conference for Equality and Justice. Then, it provided funding to organizations to work towards implementing restorative practices at RHS. Many individuals interviewed doubt that restorative justice would have taken such a deep hold at RHS without TCE backing.
For many organizations, the investment from BHC enabled them to hire an organizer who could spend more time at RHS. Having a consistent presence on campus enabled work to progress more quickly and effectively. Organizations were able to meet with youth weekly to build their political knowledge and leadership skills, to discuss issues on campus, and to jointly develop and implement strategies and actions to address issues. Many organizations also did similar work with parents. As a result, a larger number of youth and parents at RHS began to have voice and power related to decisions that affected the school environment. Then, presence of various organizations at RHS with different focus areas and strengths permitted youth and adults to work with more than one organization, if they desired. This additional support reinforced what was being learned, and gave youth, in particular, role models in different professions.

Not only was capacity and power built among youth and adults, but also among organizations. New programs were developed, and existing ones were refined, that could better support leadership development and organizing, and could build greater power in the community, now and in the future. In addition, the BHC initiative encouraged the development of strong and enduring relationships across organizations in the collaborative.

Organizations could build on one another’s assets to make a greater impact. Each organization has different connections with teachers and administrators on campus, which is helpful in opening doors and moving actions forward. One organizer from Inner City Struggle succinctly stated: “having more partners gives us more support to address issues.” This organizer went on to comment on the initial burden of being the one who “has to house everything” but felt relieved when other organizations were able to take action to support their efforts. Another organizer from GSA stated: “What’s cool about RHS and BHC space is that there are a lot of different people and it’s good to have the space to combine efforts.” Additionally, the collaborative exposes organizers to “different methods of working with youth” or “different strategies” to engage students and their families. For example, policy advocates are working alongside camp directors or lawyers or organizers, each bringing a unique skillset to the table.

The support from the foundation for organizing and advocacy has been long-standing and most organizations have received several rounds of funding. Investment in organizing and advocacy by a philanthropist, along with long-term investment, are very unique—and extremely helpful in efforts to change structures and systems that contribute to inequity. It takes on average three years for a program to make an impact. Efforts like culture change can take even longer. Having a funder make this level of sustained commitment has been central to the victories achieved and to the capacity built to continue working for community transformation.

While direct funding from the foundation was integral, the indirect support was also vital. Technical assistance from organizations with expertise in policy analysis and education, among other areas, enabled the design of stronger campaign strategies. The foundation also has a robust communications arm that proved helpful on occasion to carry campaign messages to wider audiences. This was important since the targets for many of these campaigns were at the district level.

Conclusion
At RHS, BHC has elevated the fact that students must be supported holistically—translating this into meaningful practice. Access to proper nutrition within a healthy school food environment is critical to supporting the physical needs of students to encourage academic success. A positive school climate—one that embraces restorative justice—is paramount in establishing an environment that sets up students for success rather than punishing them for failure. Ensuring access to an on-campus wellness center also helps students thrive by providing resources and services that directly improve a student’s quality of life, from physical exams, reproductive health, or even behavioral health services to support those with a history of trauma. The need to approach change holistically is best summed up by one policy advocate and organizer: “The world children live in is not divided up into different mission statements; it’s about everyday experiences at school…”
There is still more work to be done at RHS and new challenges arise. For example, the district recently approved bringing back flavored milk to the lunch menu. Enduring change takes time. While there are improvements in relationships on campus, and in how people feel, there are still systems in the school that need to be reviewed from a restorative justice perspective. And the school is part of a larger system that has great influence on it—the district. Finally, bricks and mortar are a fundamental step but more must follow. While the building for the comprehensive wellness center is assured, the services within it face an uncertain political landscape, particularly at the Federal level. As a result of BHC, however, organizations and individuals have developed knowledge, skills, and relationships that can overcome these and other trials to continue to work towards transforming RHS into a positive and supportive learning environment for the whole student.

Works Cited

