Improving Access, Participation, and Relevance: An Assessment of Youth Needs and Opportunities in the Capitol East Neighborhood

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Abstract
With more than 30% of the neighborhood under the age of 18, Capitol East is a youthful community. Neighborhood residents value their young people. They want to see more opportunities for youth to develop skills, enhance their futures, and have fun. As a result, ‘Youth’ has been identified as a priority area for Capitol East’s neighborhood revitalization plan update.

Disciplines
Urban, Community and Regional Planning

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MEMORANDUM

Improving Access, Participation, and Relevance: An Assessment of Youth Needs and Opportunities in the Capitol East Neighborhood

Prepared for the Neighborhood Development Division
Office of Community Development
City of Des Moines

May 2014

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THE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT
Department of Community and Regional Planning
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
This memo was produced through the Neighborhood Project (TNP), a partnership between the City of Des Moines, Office of Community Development and the Department of Community and Regional Planning (CRP) at Iowa State University. TNP integrates place-based research, educational outreach, and community engagement to improve the development and design of urban neighborhoods, creating communities that are more sustainable, more equitable, and more robust. The heart of this effort is the CRP Community Planning Studio where students work with a designated neighborhood and neighborhood association to create an updated neighborhood revitalization plan.

Special thanks to Marie Louise Ryan who provided editorial assistance for the final version of this document.
INTRODUCTION

With more than 30% of the neighborhood under the age of 18, Capitol East is a youthful community. Neighborhood residents value their young people. They want to see more opportunities for youth to develop skills, enhance their futures, and have fun. As a result, ‘Youth’ has been identified as a priority area for Capitol East’s neighborhood revitalization plan update.

This study set out to investigate the existing youth activities and resources available in Capitol East. It asks four questions:

• What do teenagers and children in Capitol East like about their neighborhood and their community?
• What activities (formal and informal) do they participate in?
• What do they feel is lacking from the neighborhood in terms of infrastructure, activities, and services?
• What changes would make the neighborhood a better place for their families?

The Capitol East Neighborhood Association wants their community to be a place where young people want to live and where they have opportunities to build strong futures for themselves. The new neighborhood plan can better ensure that the young people of Capitol East will have improved access to opportunities and resources and the opportunity to improve their present and their futures in Capitol East. This memo identifies existing resources for youth, identifies gaps in these services, and provides recommendations to help ensure a stronger future for the youth of Capitol East and as a result, for the future of the neighborhood itself.

METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the existing situation and develop recommendations, we engaged neighborhood caregivers, school administration, and youth through conversation, in-person short surveys, and small-scale visioning activities. During September and October 2014, we held several meetings with decision makers in the community to identify existing resources and activities for youth as well as barriers to new or more opportunities. We also conducted a number of engagement activities targeted specifically at youth. The activities in Capitol East included three office hour events specifically focused on the topic of youth; over 60 in-person short surveys with caregivers and young people were conducted; five program directors, school administrators, and activity coordinators were interviewed; five youth outreach events were held; and over 70 existing activities and resources for youth were identified. Specific school personnel engaged include: Capitol View Elementary Dean of Students Rob Burnett, Community Schools Site Coordinator Lynette Marchant, and East High School Sociology teacher Lynn Hoff and her student teacher. These interviews used informal conversation and questions to determine what resources and activities they knew existed and their viewpoints on the situations of youth in Capitol East.
Specific youth engagement included the following:

- An anonymous youth who lives in Capitol East;
- Students of the English Language Learner (ELL) classrooms at East High School under instruction of Dan Ketchum and Ryan Hawkins; and
- The students of Lynn Hoff’s Sociology class at East High School.

The visit with a young anonymous resident of the neighborhood used informal conversation and questions to determine the teenager’s situations, opinion of the neighborhood, and available opportunities, and wishes for the neighborhood. The in-classroom event with ELL students involved small group conversations, asking students to share their experiences of recently moving to the United States (and specifically Des Moines’ East Bank neighborhoods), what activities they participate in, and their desires for increased opportunities. Further information can be found in Appendix E. The students in Lynn Hoff’s sociology class participated in a photo storyboard activity. First, students were given single-use cameras to document their neighborhoods and activities, and then a second afternoon visit involved the students creating posters with the photos explaining their reasons for taking the photo or why they thought it was a good or bad aspect of their neighborhood. Further information and photos of the event can be found in Appendix D.

We held two “office hour” events at Capitol View Elementary School on October 10 and 17, 2013. Office hours are unprogrammed periods of time when we are present in the neighborhood and available to talk to neighborhood residents about our planning efforts. Our events at Capitol View employed short, face-to-face surveys focused on available activities for younger children and gaps in services for neighborhood youth. An additional office hour event was held prior to the Friday night football game at East High School stadium on October 18, 2013, asking the same questions as at Capitol View Elementary. The survey can be found in Appendix B and survey results can be found in Appendix C.

At all of our office hour events, potential participants were approached in person, given an explanation of what our project was about and asked if they would like to participate. For our office hour surveys at Capitol View Elementary, we spoke to parents and caregivers picking up children from school. For our event at East before the October 18th football game, participants were spectators arriving for the game. As much engagement as possible was done in person to engender trust, to expedite results, and to ensure participants were stakeholders in the neighborhood. Short, in-person conversations were meant to ‘take the meeting to the community’, rather than asking busy adults and young people to take time out of their schedules to come to meetings on our schedules.

We also made contacts with staff at both Capitol View Elementary School and East High School who were able to provide information about available activities and resources at their schools. When we interviewed these individuals we also asked for names of other people we should talk to. As a result of this process, we were introduced to Lynn Hoff, who allowed access to her Sociology class for the photo storyboard activity.
FINDINGS: EXISTING YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES IN CAPITOL EAST

There are already a number of activities and programs available to youth in Capitol East, primarily through the schools. Still gaps in programming exist and many young people encounter barriers to participation. The barriers to participation (identified by both youth and parents/adult supporters) include a lack of knowledge of activities, cost of participation, transportation to and from activities, and relevance of activities to youth interests. Greater consideration needs to be given to how to develop youth access to existing programs, to youth participation in the activities and resources, and relevance of the activities and resources to the youth population of Capitol East.

This study identified three venues that offered activities and resources for young people in Capitol East: East High School, Capitol East Elementary School, and St. Peters Catholic Church. This section details those offerings.

Activities and Resources at East High School

East High School supports a student body of 2300 students, the largest in the state of Iowa. Additionally, the student body at East is among the most diverse in the state, with students of Hispanic, Ghanaian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Burmese, Thai, Nepalese and Sudanese backgrounds, among others. Furthermore, East students come from some of the most financially challenged families in Des Moines. As such, the school attempts to provide services and mentoring for students who face some difficult challenges and circumstances. Lyn Marchant, Community Schools Site Coordinator for the East High Feeder Pattern, helped us document activities and resources available to students and families at East High School.

East High offers a wide selection of activities typically found at public schools in Iowa, including band, choir and orchestra, theater and speech clubs, art and photography clubs, as well as a number of sports for girls and boys. See Appendix A for a full list of activities offered at the school. These activities typically happen before and after school, although some occasionally meet during lunch sessions. Though the school and the activity leaders do their best to keep participation costs to a minimum by providing necessary uniforms and equipment for sports, band, and orchestra, etc, students are responsible to pay some costs for participation. Often teachers and activity leaders try to assist students in very tight financial circumstances, but that can be difficult for them. The $250 deductible currently allowed on taxes is often just a small portion of what some teachers contribute to student participation.

To assist students who are looking to work during high school or immediately after graduation, the Des Moines School District offers students the opportunity to take vocational training classes at Central Academy on Central Campus. Many of the classes that qualify for dual credit at Des Moines Area Community College are also held at Central Campus. East High School is currently building a volunteer-supported program that provides job application information, interview and job skills, and financial literacy to students.

To assist students with health and home concerns, East High School students have access to 5 free counseling sessions for emotional, mental, and substance abuse assistance. This service is
provided through Unity Point Health, and funding is through United Way. Also funded through United Way is the on-site childcare program for student parents; this program is currently limited to 8 children while they look to fill a teacher position. Even when the teaching roster is at capacity, there is a waiting list for students. This program provides childcare for students while in classes, early childhood education, and parenting education and tips. Because they had assistance with childcare, 17 young women matriculated in 2012 who would not have been able to otherwise.

The Des Moines school district offers incoming freshmen a transition and mentoring program through feeder middle schools. This year, the program will begin in November rather than its traditional start date of April/May, to provide more transition assistance to students. Interested or at-risk 8th graders are paired with a 10th or 11th grader at East High who will provide support and assistance with the transition and on through the first year at East High. A new program at East High, Voices to be Heard, is a support group for students of incarcerated parents. The Counseling Department is also piloting a program this year called Parent University which is intended to provide parents with support, assistance and tips to help improve their student’s home and school life; it offers opportunities for discussion on getting teenagers out of bed in the morning, holding a teenager accountable for their actions and behavior, as well as offering parents information on available services at the school or upcoming events.

**Activities and Resources at Capitol View Elementary School**

The only school within the boundaries of Capitol East neighborhood, the building is also the de facto center of the community, hosting the Neighborhood Association meetings and most of the youth activities for neighborhood children. Supporting a student body of nearly 600 students, Capitol View’s student population is diverse and also serves as the elementary school feeder for the Deaf Education program in Des Moines. From Mr. Robert Burnett, Dean of Students at Capitol View Elementary School, we learned that the school is always searching for funding for extra programs so they can provide more services to their students and their families.

Over 80% of Capitol View’s student population qualifies for free and reduced lunch and breakfast, and, as a result, Capitol View is a Provision 2 school. This classification allows the school to retain its status without making new eligibility requirements for a 3-year period following the base year evaluation of meal counting. All students in a Provision 2 school receive free lunch and breakfast without requiring individual families to prove eligibility. Currently, breakfast at Capitol View is served in the cafeteria from 7:40-8am and approximately 240 breakfast meals are served a day, to approximately 44% of the student population. The school’s administration is in the process of investigating a Breakfast in the Classroom program that would serve a breakfast to all students in the classroom after school officially starts to ensure that everyone has eaten before commencing studies. Presently, if a bus arrives after 8am, breakfast in the cafeteria will be held to ensure all students have an opportunity to eat; if a

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student arrives late, the front office stocks a breakfast or granola bar to ensure there is always something for a student to eat. Capitol View also participates in the Pick-a-better-snack program where a fresh fruit or vegetable snack is delivered to the school with enough for each child to at least try the snack. Additional education is provided on a monthly basis to teach students about different fresh foods – how to identify them, how to pick them at the market, and how to prepare them for a snack or in a meal.²

Capitol View receives grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education to support 21st Century Kids a curriculum-based after-school program that provides “academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.”³ Activities offered through this program are aimed at improving students’ core academic subjects, providing ELL students with individualized computer-based tutoring, and a variety of changing enrichment opportunities, such as Legos and Legos Robotic club. In its second year at Capitol View, 170 students (approx. 1/3 of the student population) currently participate in 21st Century. This is an increase of 70% over its first year participation rate of 100 students. Mr. Burnett believes that the impressive increase is due largely to the addition of a school bus route for the 5pm dismissal from the program. Presently, program attendance serves 32 kindergarteners, 17 first graders, 24 second graders, 37 third graders, 27 fourth graders, and 32 fifth graders.

Capitol View employs 10 teachers and 2 pre-service students from Drake for the program. As part of the 21st Century after-school curriculum After School Arts Program (ASAP) provides art enrichment to 20 third to eighth grade students during each of its 7-week sessions. During the 2013-2014 academic year ASAP is piloting a new hybrid model where about half of participant schools will send students to St. John’s Lutheran Church in downtown Des Moines for enrichment activities; participant schools will rotate so all students will have the opportunity to go downtown for one full session.

A Soccer and Scouts program is available at the school from February to April for boys 2nd-5th grades. Mr. Burnett is considering opening up the program to 1st grade boys in Spring 2014. Originally begun by Mr. Burnett himself when a new teacher at Capitol View, the club started as a character club for 5th grade boys that also played soccer. When Boy Scouts was looking to expand the success of its program in Marshalltown, Iowa schools, they approached Mr. Burnett and Capitol View about combining his program with theirs. Now Soccer and Scouts is a program that meets weekly for 20 minutes of scouting instruction followed by soccer training with volunteers from the Grand View University Men’s Soccer team. Each grade level meets on a different night of the week.

Chrysalis is a club offered at Capitol View Elementary for 5th grade girls. It is facilitated by one of the female teachers and is potentially supported through a grant from United Way, as well as

potentially using a curriculum available through United Way. Mr. Burnett was not fully clear on the specifics of the program. At this time, there is only enough support in facilitation for 20-30 girls to participate.

Another resource Capitol View makes available to its students is a non-curriculum based after-school program *Metro Kids*, which serves approximately 20 students at any given time. This program allows for parents to pick up their student anytime from 3pm to 5:45pm. Students may also participate in the mornings from 6:30-8:30am. This is a program that is funded by fees paid by parents based on participation. Drop-in participation is allowed with reliable contact information for a responsible adult and the option to pay-per-day.

*Everybody Wins, Iowa!* is another program Capitol View participates in. The school’s proximity to downtown makes it especially successful. Currently 40 professionals from downtown offices come to Capitol View every Monday to have lunch with a 2nd grade, 4th grade, or 5th grade student and then read together afterwards in the school library. Though the program has successfully matched 40 students with reading partners, 20 students at Capitol View who wanted to participate in the program are still without partners. Additionally, the school’s library and other free space for reading out loud is at capacity, so it would be difficult for additional participants to find an appropriate space.

As Capitol View is the elementary school in the Des Moines Public School system that hosts the elementary portion of the Deaf Education program, there is also a Sign Club that is available for 4th and 5th grades to participate in. This club meets Tuesdays after schools and occasionally gives performances. Capitol View also hosts a *HeadStart program* and a preschool called *Shared Visions* that each serve 20 students. These programs are separately funded and are under different administration from Capitol View Elementary.

Capitol View and Mr. Burnett would be happy to offer more activities and services, but funding is the consistent missing factor. Mr. Burnett’s particular wish list includes a boys and girls year-round sports program that would provide activity, instruction, and character training through a variety of sports options offered consistently throughout the year. He also noted that the school is about the only communal central gathering space in the community; a community center or YMCA type building could provide more outreach and opportunities to students and residents without taxing the school and its facilities.

**St. Peter’s Vietnamese Catholic Church**

The youth population of St. Peter’s is approximately 150 children. The offers four sets of programming for young people: Youth in Christ, Vietnamese Youth Society, Oovang, and Vietnamese language classes. While some of these programs are intended specifically for parishioners of the church, others are open and available to anyone who is interested.

The *Youth in Christ* program is for high school and college students. This program takes the form of a youth group where students gather to discuss religious topics and play games and

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volleyball. Vietnamese Youth Society, is a Vietnamese Catholic-based youth program similar to Boy and Girl Scouts. A co-educational program offers three levels for children and a level for leaders—about 60 children in the parish participate in these. This is a nation-wide program within the Vietnamese Catholic community and a uniform is part of participation, costing about $20. Summer camps and other regional activities are offered throughout the year. The focus of the program is on service to the church community and built around Catholic beliefs of service to humanity as well. The club within the parish meets once a month for small service projects. Parents provide logistical and leadership support for the program.

A youth dance group, Oavang, is also facilitated through the church. It is a new group that focuses on traditional Vietnamese dance. The group incorporates about 20 children, ages 4-13, and they perform within the greater Vietnamese community of Des Moines, at the Vietnamese New Year’s celebrations, at fall festivals, and at the Iowa State Fair.

The church has also begun to offer Vietnamese language classes that are open to parishioners and non-parishioners. Approximately 100 students, age 4 and up, are enrolled. At least two adult students are enrolled and two non-Vietnamese students are enrolled. The classes are meant to expand Vietnamese language and cultural awareness to youth born in the United States and others. There is no cost for participation. The classes meet every Sunday afternoon from 1-3pm at the church’s former school building.

DISCUSSION

The previous provided an accounting of the wide range of programs available to young people in Capitol East through East High School, Capitol View Elementary School, and St. Peters Church. We were unable to speak to staff at Hiatt Middle School, but we can expect a similar range of activities, but also similar challenges and barriers for students in accessing these activities. This section discusses the data we gathered while engaging with the young people of Capitol East as well as the teachers, administrators, service providers and caregivers who work with them.

Feedback from Teenage Residents

One of our engagement conversations occurred with a teenaged woman who had been recommended to us by Officer Lori Neely. This young woman is known to Officer Neely because of incidents involving a few of her family members. This young woman is also known to be friends with a group of young people who spend a lot of their time at or outside the residence at 1550 Dean Ave. We took part of a Thursday afternoon to speak to her one-on-one. She told us that she mostly liked the neighborhood, in particular the food options that were available – though her favorite taco truck was the one in Capitol Park, as it puts more meat on the tacos. She does not like the violence in the neighborhood and finds it frustrating that the teens who are now fighting with each other were friends only a few years ago. Many of these teens are her friends or her cousins. Her association with one of the groups of teens causes her problems. She attends Scavo High School in downtown Des Moines, so she takes a DART bus to get to class. She told us she will soon start attending classes only in the afternoon, so she can ride the bus and arrive at school with her cousin. She has previously been in altercations with other
female youth on the bus or upon arriving at school because she is associated with one group and these other young women are associated with a different group.

This young woman is concerned about her family’s and her friends’ safety; she does not want to see them hurt or go to prison. She would like to see more activities and sports in the neighborhood for young people, and thinks that a community center would be a good place for teens to go. Though she recommends that there be more than one gym so youth who want to play sports can, but without having to play with other teens whom they do not like.

During an activity at East High School in the English Language Learners’ classrooms, four members of the engagement team were able to engage with newly-arrived ELL teenagers and discuss their impressions of their new neighborhoods. We met with four of Dan Ketchum’s and Ryan Hawkins’ classes, talking to approximately 40 students. These students are of Karen, Karenni, Kachin, Eritrean, Mexican, Nepalese and Sudanese descent. The majority of the students engaged had been refugees at some point in their lives. They had all been in the United States for less than 3 years. The students lived in many different neighborhoods on Des Moines’ East side. Though not representative of the student body, they provide a unique insight into the East Side neighborhoods given their experiences as immigrants and refugees.

A number of the students, primarily the male students, spoke of interest in after-school jobs and work after they graduated from high school. “One Karen male said he worked at an Asian market, another that he had worked at McDonald’s but that his parents asked him to quit and focus on school.” Two Mexican students said they work part-time on the weekends at local Mexican restaurants. Many students said they couldn’t work a job because they didn’t have reliable transportation to get themselves to their jobs, and that they typically had to get rides from friends and family. After graduation, many of the students were unsure what they would do; most identified that they did not know how to afford college or vocational training programs, and many are unsure of what possibilities exist for further education.

Several of the students told us that their families use local parks during nice weather to picnic and gather together, including Easter Lake, Grey’s Lake, Saylorville Lake, and fishing on the Des Moines River. Most of the time, the food is prepared before hand and taken to the park, though a few students said their families barbeque at the park. The families will sing, play volleyball or other games, and talk during their picnics. The students said that they sometimes use the parks to play soccer or volleyball, but that the parks and open spaces near East High School lacked the proper facilities for such sport. One Mexican female student indicated interest in women’s soccer, and a few of the male students, various ethnicities, indicated that they participated in men’s soccer at East High. The Thai and Burmese male students stated that they didn’t understand why there was women’s volleyball, but not men’s at the high school. Most of the students played sports casually with friends, but often had to travel some distance to play with their friends, including going to North Des Moines.

In terms of entertainment, many students said they spent a lot of their non-school time at home, often per parents’ requests or because they lacked transportation options other than walking. The students commented on the issues with trying to cross 14th St near East High after
we asked them about it, as we had seen upon arrival how busy it was. None of the students reported using bicycles for transportation and most were unfamiliar with DART and its routes. The students did say that while they do not have Internet access at home, they use the computers at East High and at the Des Moines Public Library downtown. They use the internet and the library to get access to movies, some in their native language and dialect; some of the Asian students said they were able to rent movies from their home country at the local Asian markets. We also asked the students about fights at the school, or near the school – particularly as we’ve heard there are often fights in the Walgreen’s parking lot. They were surprised we knew about the fights, but confirmed that parking lots on 14th Street near East High were popular locations for such incidents.

**Feedback from Adult Residents and Administrators**

Each of the administrators and officials in the neighborhood we spoke with had their thoughts on what is missing from the neighborhood and what would improve Capitol East. Capitol East lacks a central, communal space where people can meet and activities can take place. There also exists a lack of participation. More people from the neighborhood are needed to take part and support activities, and more investment from outside the neighborhood is needed to support the activities where neighborhood residents do not have the financial or time resources. An organized and staffed community center or neighborhood YMCA for Capitol East would provide a gathering space for residents, play and social space for teenaged residents, and the staff would provide supervision and programming for youth and adults. A community space could also support activities provided by outside organizations and could provide space for mentors to work with youth. Educational classes and programs on parenting for families, single parents, and teen parents could also be provided to residents through a neighborhood community center. A community center with several enclosed spaces could also provide locations for immigrant groups to congregate with one another for support and camaraderie, as they typically live in smaller affordable housing units that do not allow for gatherings beyond small numbers. The center could also provide staffing who would assist newly-arrived adults with job applications and training opportunities, etc.

Those who work with youth in these neighborhoods see that what is most needed after a gathering space is more programming and mentoring. Youth in the neighborhood need more positive role models who can share with them knowledge on college and job experiences; who can provide tutoring; or even informational and recruitment sessions from colleges and businesses who are looking to hire. While more involvement from parents and adults within the neighborhood is desired, increased participation from adults and professionals outside the neighborhood is also wanted. In particular, there was a desire to see greater involvement from the East High School Alumni Association. It is the largest High School Alumni Association group in the nation and they have an important gala each year, however it is not clear how the Association’s efforts actually impact the students currently at East High. In both cases, building some sort of stronger presence from Drake students was indicated as a possible option to bring more interaction and engagement to both Capitol East and Capitol Park. Capitol View Elementary staff also mentioned their desire for a larger sports program that allowed all
students to participate continuously throughout the year in physical activities that did not incur individual participation costs.

Increased cultural awareness and mentoring is something many administrators and officials stated they think would benefit the community. Providing all residents with a chance to explore a new culture, or their own culture, would build a stronger community as well as draw more people from outside the neighborhood into Capitol East. More neighborhood pride was also cited as something that would benefit the community. One suggestion was that rather than having Habitat for Humanity tear down one house and build just one house in its place, a program of repainting is needed. By painting 10 houses over a two or three block length (with donated paint), it might inspire more residents to take pride and improve their own houses. A homeowner educational fair or workshop, specifically targeting maintenance, could go along way, particularly if it included potential sources of financing. Repairing roofs in the neighborhood, through educational measures and information on funding, might also instill greater home and neighborhood pride.

One active parent in particular is interested in getting a Parent-Teacher Association started at Capitol View Elementary in response to what she has seen as a lack of communication between the school and parents, particularly in the case of Capitol View which operates on a year-round curriculum. This type of scheduling has also created distinct problems for her as a parent with one child in year-round school and the other on a traditional school year calendar. As a result, she would like to see an organization at the school that provides more communication to parents on such topics as the rules associated with student bussing, what a teacher or the school can and can not inform parents of, tips for parents on how to deal with the issues that come up (ie: head lice), and resources that are available to parents.

Both parents and youth would like to see more physical activities and sports made available, but they would have to be free or extremely low cost and transportation to and from activities is often a barrier for participation. Some parents were also concerned about the security and intention of programs that are not facilitated through the school district or city. Parents were interested in seeing safer, or better, parks that offer more programming, a community recreation or youth center that offered free or low-cost activities. Interest in art and fine art activities is also fairly high. Parents also stated that there needed to be more communication about available activities in the neighborhood.

We spoke to one Hispanic father who has organized his own informal/unofficial soccer league at Ashfield Park. This type of informal initiative by an adult is the type of activity the neighborhood could use more of; however, given the socio-economics of most households in the neighborhood this is likely quite difficult for most adult residents. While it would be ideal to encourage more neighborhood adults to do the same, both additional, outside support would be needed and some sort of affiliation with the City or the schools or another vetted program would likely be helpful in supporting the program and getting participation from local youth and adults.
Challenges facing the schools

Although both East and Capitol View offer a range of activities for their students, gaps in services exist. Certain activities and programs are not available to students and the schools have wish lists of programs they would like to offer in the future. For East High School, the barriers for student participation are chiefly financial or transportation related. As previously mentioned, many of the students come from lower-income families, so they are often needed to work after school to help support the family or to watch younger siblings. Students have difficulty getting to and from activities. Currently there is not a school bus route after activities are over; however, the bus lines alone are not enough when they are available. Students must be outside of a 3-mile radius to qualify for district bus options. Many students also do not know that they can use DART after school with their student ID.

The school is also limited in space and facilities as to what they can offer. New programs often are faced with the issue of where and when their activities could take place. If an activity is a particularly specialized one, the appropriate space might not be available on the East High campus. Any new programs that the high school or the administration might like to offer also need leaders and it can be difficult to find adults who want to be involved. Getting parent involvement has also been a specific challenge, in part because so many parents are single parents, or are working multiple jobs or jobs that require they work when many of these activities would take place. Though the school tries to ensure that all students are aware of available activities, students often do not realize there is a particular activity or that they can be involved with it; “advertising” is also a problem.

Of the activities that our respondents from East High would like to see, those that complement the school’s motto, “In the service of humanity” and those that help students prepare for life after school are high on the list. These include expanding the East High School Humanitarian Cord for Service program, getting more assistance for ELL students, more mentoring and involvement from parents, adults and professionals, tutoring programs, more student participation in EHS’ growing financial training/literacy program, more engagement and recruiting efforts from area colleges as well as colleges farther afield, and more cultural mentoring and awareness clubs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major themes that emerged from this study include: access, participation, and relevance. While many activities and resources are currently available to the youth of Capitol East, a comprehensive list of activities and resources is both necessary and desired. Families are not aware of many of the offerings in their neighborhood and do not know where to find this information. Furthermore, young people and there families continue to ask for additional resources and activities that are relevant and accessible. Finally, location matters. Families want programs in locations that they are familiar with and that they trust. A community center in the neighborhood would provide a location for activities that reach a broad range of ages outside of school hours.
Access

This set of recommendations addresses barriers that are preventing young people from taking advantage of existing programs. Access in this context includes awareness as well as the ability to get to and take advantage of existing programs. This includes addressing shortfalls in the dissemination of information as well as a need for resources.

Awareness
Potential avenues for disseminating information about and concerning various activities and resources should be investigated and could include:

• Create a comprehensive list of activities and resources available within a school or neighborhood organization. Provide this to the City of Des Moines and other schools and organizations in the neighborhood
• Create Smartphone apps for East High School
• Create Smartphone apps for Capitol View Elementary
• Improved websites for each school
• Create Twitter accounts for each school about upcoming events, activity meetings and bitly links where more information can be made available
• Continue with Parent University at East High School on a monthly or twice a monthly basis
• Have an activities and resource fair at Parent/Teacher Conferences. Students can earn Humanitarian Cord points for manning booths
• Engage students in awareness through fun festivals themed around what activities are available and how they can get involved.
• Create a passport program: as students learn about different programs, how to get involved etc, they get a stamp in their book and once full, get a prize

Resources
Youth and families in Capitol East often lack the ability to get to and from, or get children to and from, existing activities. Since the addition of the bus route for the after-school program at Capitol View Elementary, 70 additional children are participating in the program. New and existing programs need to consider ways to assist students getting to programs. These methods could include:

• Provide students with more information, via flyers and school orientation programs, about using DART including information on routes, passes, and directions on how-to ride the bus
• Initiate ride-share programs that encourage students with cars to help their fellow students who live in the same neighborhood. Incentives could include a points system for Humanitarian Cord for Service or improved and reserved parking spots in the school lot (similar to the HOV lane)
• Provide more bussing possibilities for organized activities and before/after-school programs at Capitol View
Participation

Getting students involved, particularly teenagers, is a challenge for any available activity, but getting youth involved is not enough. For youth activities to be successful, adults need to participate as well. Parents for students need to be involved and to encourage their children to participate. Adults – even those without youth in the neighborhood – are needed to support youth programs. Several of the same methods for getting and retaining participation of students can be used for parents and adults.

- Utilize a rewards system or “loyalty card” system to encourage participation and continued participation
- Require participation for graduation, ie: students must complete one extracurricular activity per semester to graduate. This could be something as simple as participating in one sponsored volunteer activity that also gains them points for Humanitarian Cord (ie: packing food for relief efforts over their student lunch hour or being one of the student helpers who records student participation for this requirement (so the paperwork does not fall solely to already overloaded staff and administration)
- Highlight and reward mentoring and participation from adults outside the community at an annual gala or banquet, such as the Alumni Association gala event
- Ask The Des Moines Register to have a featured mentor or volunteer once a week/month to encourage greater participation and support from the larger community
- Ask local businesses to ‘sponsor’ a parent by allowing a parent 2 hours of paid time off to help at school activities or mentoring events. Larger area businesses could sponsor a parent through financial support to a small, local business or developing a dedicated mentorship program that allows an employee paid time off during school hours to go to a classroom for direct in-class assistance

Relevance

Many of the existing programs and activities target youth of certain ages or situations, and mostly they are appropriate for their intended audience. However, as with any gateway community that is experiencing rapidly changing demographics, constant re-evaluation is needed. For example, as more male Southeast Asian students enroll at East High School, it could be worthwhile to the school to provide a competitive team for male volleyball or at least a small intramural league of co-ed volleyball. Methods of checking for relevance could include:

- Survey student interests 2-4 times a year (at the beginning and end of semesters)
- Use the comprehensive list of existing programming and document trends in participation. This could be a project undertaken each semester by the East High Statistics class.
- Have cross organization/institute meetings where community, school, and religious groups meet once or twice yearly to compare participation notes and changing demographics in the neighborhood and discuss how these changes could require new or fewer types of programs. City planning assistance could ensure accurate knowledge on demographic changes
Regardless of the strategies and actions chosen by the neighborhood, it is vital to remember that there are a number of programs, resources, and activities already in place within the community. Many of these simply need some assistance to keep reaching the audiences they are already working with, rather than being disregarded, eliminated or overhauled.

**Community Center**

A community center that offers plenty of space and flexibility, as well as staff to provide programming, is likely the best delivery method and most desired outcome for the youth in the neighborhood. This center would offer residents, adults and youth alike, with meeting and activities spaces for a variety of events such as sports and exercise; classes and workshops on a range of topics from parenting to financial matters to pinterest parties and fantasy football leagues; and community or family events that exceed small group sizes. This center would provide access to the Internet as well as specialized media of interest to different ethnic groups, space for individual study and activities, and assistance finding jobs or legal services. Programming for younger children would be available during scheduled breaks in the year-round school calendar, while it would work with older children and teens to provide conflict resolution and mediation strategies as well as encourage volunteerism and service to the community. The center would also assist with some sort of transportation program to get children to and from the center or associated activities. If possible, the center could also serve as a youth shelter for teens who are tenuously housed.
APPENDIX A. ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES

East High School (2300 students)
Note that participation is not actively recorded

Education
Academic Decathlon
ACE Mentoring (Tech Ed)
Debate Team
Educational Talent Search (ETS)
French Club
Iowa High School Speech Association (Group and Individual Speech)
Japanese Culture Club
Mock Trial
Science Bound
Spanish Club
Upward Bound
DMACC, Central College, and Simpson College

Leadership
Humanitarian Cord for Service
National Honor Society
Scarlet Mentors
Student Government
Senior Board

Co-curricular Classes and Performances
Band
Color Guard
Concert Choir
Drama Club
Handbells
Jazz Band
Marching Band
Concert Band
Drumline
Mixed Choir
Orchestra
QUILL
Scarlet Singers
Theater Arts

Art
Art Club
Photography Club
Scarlet Studio

Special Interest
“The Journey”
4-H club
Anime club
Book Club
Chess Club
Fashion Show Committee
Fellowship of Christian Athletes
Gay Straight Alliance
IJAG
Job Skills and Money Management Training
League of Legends (Gamers)
Movement 515
Project Sewing Machine

Athletics
Cheerleading
Steppers
Boys’ and Girls’ Basketball
Boys’ and Girls’ Track
Boys’ and Girls’ Golf
Girls’ Volleyball
Boys’ Football
Boys’ and Girls’ Cross Country
Boys’ Wrestling
Boys’ and Girls’ Rugby
Boys’ and Girls’ Bowling
Special Olympics
Girls’ Softball
Boys’ Baseball
Boys’ and Girls’ Soccer
Boys’ and Girls’ Swimming
Boys’ and Girls’ Tennis
Capitol View Elementary School (573 students)

After school programs
*Metro Kids* is a non-curriculum program that operates on the school property before school and after school to 6pm. Participation ranges from 10 – 20 students.

*21st Century Kids* is a federally funded, curriculum-based program in its second year. Currently, 170 students participate. It runs from 3-5pm. Staff includes 10 teachers and 2 pre-service teachers (from Drake). The school district added a bus route for after program release. Includes Soccer and Scouts for boys and Chrysalis for girls.

Soccer and Scouts
- 50 boys participate
- Currently open to 2nd-5th grade boys (Intends to open to 1st graders fall 2014)
- February to April
- Meets weekly, different grades are held on different nights
- Cooperates with Boy Scouts
- Grand View University’s Men’s Soccer team volunteers

Chrysalis
- Likely partially or completely funded by United Way
- Curriculum based (possibly provided by United Way)
- Limited to 20-30 girls because only one teacher

Nutrition programs
*Provision 2 school*
- ALL students automatically given free lunch and breakfast

*Pick a Better Snack*
- Enough snack is delivered for all students to at least try it

Mentoring programs
*Everybody Wins, Iowa!*
- Open to 2nd, 4th and 5th graders
- 40 students participate
- Has a waiting list

Deaf Education
Capitol View is an elementary feeder school for DMPS’ Deaf Education program. This draws students from outside the neighborhood. Students in Deaf Ed continue to Hiatt Middle School and then East High School. Capitol View hosts the Early Access (birth to 3 yrs), Preschool (3-5 yrs) and Elementary (Kindergarten to 5th Grade) Deaf Ed programs. These include play group and preschool, as well as kindergarten and 1-5th grade. Capitol View has Sign Club available for 4th and 5th graders and the Des Moines Public School provides free Parent Sign Language classes with child care in the evenings, according to their website.
### APPENDIX B. YOUTH ACTIVITY SURVEY

**Where does your child (do you) play?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashfield Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redhead Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart Square</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What activities does your child (do you) do?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Piano/music lessons</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>soccer</td>
<td>gymnastics</td>
<td>Boys/Girls Clubs, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Art club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>Science club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swimming</td>
<td>wrestling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dance</td>
<td>hike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What activities would you like to see in Capitol East?**
APPENDIX C. YOUTH ACTIVITY SURVEY RESULTS

We surveyed approximately 70 parents at three different events: Capitol View Elementary during school release, during after-school program release, and at an East High School home football game. About 60 of these individuals were from Capitol View Elementary.

1. Where children play

Home: 21  
Ashfield Park: 7  
Redhead Park: 4  
Stewart Square: 7  
Capitol View playground: 7  
Other: 13 (Union Park, Gray’s Lake, parks and trails in Pleasant Hills, splashground near SE 19th, Grandview Park, Columbus Park, park on Hubbell)

Summary  
Most children play at home. Many parents said they did not feel the parks are safe or clean. Parents will not let children (typically 10 and under) go to parks alone.

2. What activities children do/like to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Soccer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Basketball</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Volleyball</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Track</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Cross Country</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Cheerleading</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Debate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slides</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumping</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Century after-school program</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Scouts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing/coloring</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress up</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trampoline</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badminton</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with cousins/friends</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary  
High School Basketball is most popular among our respondents at East. Among youth, most popular are soccer and basketball (9), drawing/coloring (8), and the current after-school program and biking (4). Because many of the children whose parents responded were still in lower elementary, older elementary ages might be unrepresented.
3. Desired/requested activities for youth in Capitol East

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More sports: 1</th>
<th>Tutors: 1</th>
<th>Gymnastics: 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More attendance by community members: 3</td>
<td>Swings: 1</td>
<td>Softball: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture clubs/groups: 1</td>
<td>Soccer: 5</td>
<td>Football: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More arts/music: 1</td>
<td>Bookmobile: 1</td>
<td>Volleyball: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More swimming/soccer leagues: 1</td>
<td>Bike trails/activities: 4</td>
<td>Baseball: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls’ football: 1</td>
<td>Wrestling: 1</td>
<td>Swimming/pools: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/rec center: 5</td>
<td>Tetherball: 1</td>
<td>Science club: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free activities: 3</td>
<td>Hobby clubs: 1</td>
<td>Community/park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation programming/activities: 3</td>
<td>Music clubs: 2</td>
<td>programming: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports: 11</td>
<td>Bowling: 2</td>
<td>Lunch club (for summer): 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fix up/add parks: 5</td>
<td>Art club: 7</td>
<td>Dance classes in neighborhood: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs: 1</td>
<td>PTA: 1</td>
<td>Theater club: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to extra activities: 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe environments: 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis

- Art club had a high response (7) and if activities such as Hobby, Music and Theater clubs are added to Art club, the response grows to 11.
- Interest in new/fixed up parks (5) and safe environments (5) and community/park programming (2) and lunch club (1) combine to (13).
- Another mixed theme is Lunch club (1), community/park programming (2) and vacation programming (3) combines to total (6).
- The response to have a community/recreation center was strong (5).
- Access themes included: safe environments (5), free/cheap activities (3), and transportation to activities (2)

Summary

In general, parents and youth would like to see more physical activities/sports, though they were not specific as to which sports. Arts/Fine arts actually had a lot of interest. Parents were interested in better and safer parks with more programming or a community/recreation/youth center with free or cheap activities.

4. Quotes from Youth Activity Survey

“no activities to do outside;” “needs to be more community activities, in parks;” “who’s going to take the kids to these activities?” “I haven’t really thought about what they’ll do when they’re older (parent of kindergartener and younger children).” “There needs to be [a different] space for kids who aren’t in after school activities but come [to Capitol View playground] to hang out.” “There’s a lack of information on available activities and sports.” “involvement with community;” “parks aren’t safe;” “parks here (meaning Capitol East) are dirty;” “Redhead Park doesn’t have anything interesting.”
APPENDIX D. PHOTO STORYBOARD ACTIVITY WITH EAST HIGH SCHOOL SOCIOLOGY CLASS

Introduction
In order to get a better understanding of how young people view the neighborhood and to ensure the presence of their voice in the community planning process, a youth activity was deemed necessary. After researching various engagement methods for youth, it was decided that a photo documentary method would provide both an informational and fun event for all involved.

Methodology
The majority of the high school-aged youth in Capitol East go to East High School (East). During an interview concerning available youth activities and resources at East, we asked Lynette Marchant if she knew of a teacher who would be willing to help facilitate the activity. She recommended Lynn Hoff and her Sociology class for the project. Because this course was open to all grade levels in the school, it provided the opportunity for broad participation from many different students.

We visited the class two times. The first involved providing students with a presentation on the basics of planning and a briefing of the project they were being asked to participate in. Single-use cameras were distributed to students who were willing to take photos; they were reminded to take photographs of aspects of their neighborhoods that they liked, didn’t like, wanted to see improved, and places where they spent a lot of time. Lynn Hoff collected the cameras over the course of the next week and took them to Walgreens for development. The prints were collected prior to the second visit when students were allowed to look through them and select the photos they wanted to use. Students were provided with poster boards and supplies (ie., tape, markers, etc) and asked to create a poster with the photos. While they were not given specific themes, general ideas and prompts such as ‘things you like vs. things you don’t like’ were verbally given. Members of both Capitol East and Capitol Park Engagement teams were available to answer questions, provide assistance and have conversations with the students; members of East High School staff including Lynn Hoff, her student teacher, Lyn Marchant, and others visiting the school library were available for guidance and conversation. After the students finished their posters, they were asked to give a brief presentation of their work.

Findings
Most of the students’ posters followed the casual suggestion of ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ and photos were used to show what students were defining as good and bad. Scans of the posters can be seen in following the conclusion. General themes coming from these posters show that the neighborhood youth value maintained spaces, diversity, and their proximity to downtown and the benefits of that location. Students wanted their neighborhoods to look better than they currently do, frequently commenting on the run-down or boarded up housing and buildings, that they wanted more facilities that were maintained to allow for outdoor or group activities, and better infrastructure such as fixing potholes or improving sidewalks.

Examples of “good” as defined by the students included: photos of well-maintained buildings and space, green open spaces, the designed pedestrian bridges over the interstate, parks with
good signage, foreign foods stores, examples of economic vitality, new housing options, nearby health services, and close access to the Capitol Complex. Comments of “hard work!” “Trees are good for the environment!”, “Asian church – different church from the others”, “lots of shade”, “nice Architecture”, “botanical center – nice view”, “foreign foods”, “sightseeing”, “nice houses”, “kids being able to play outside”, “Restaurants near East; Built Subway close”, “sightseeing – downtown”, “quick snacks”, “new housing”, and “healthcare (hospitals)”.

Examples of “bad,” or needing to be fixed, as defined by the students included: photos of boarded up or run-down houses and buildings, broken play equipment, locked public bathrooms, potholes, graffiti gang signs, litter, overgrown lawns, shoes on electric wires, and locked up playgrounds. Comments of “bench is broken”, “no sidewalk!”, “Union Park – women’s door locked”, potholes and why they need to be fixed, “things that need improvement”, “Boarded up Houses: Make it look like no one wants to live here. Redo the houses”, “trash”, “gang signs”, “overgrown grassy areas”, “no locked up playgrounds”, “ghetto houses”, “boarded up houses”, “shoes on electric wires”, “need crosswalks”, “more playgrounds”, “wider streets”, “more sidewalks”, “better space usages: community soccer or football field, baseball, softball”, “Remodel so they don’t look scary”, “Reopen school”, “It smells bad”, “Tear it down and make something useful”, “Remodel bridge”, and “tear down and Remodel these buildings”.

**Analysis**
The youth likely had preconceived ideas about what constitutes a good neighborhood having been influenced by the various adults in their lives. Regardless, most indicated that they wanted improved infrastructure in and appearance of their neighborhoods as well as more opportunities for green or play spaces. When students were individually asked what they planned for their future, the answers ranged from uncertainty, finding a job to higher education opportunities including DMACC and Drake or other as-yet unknown colleges. A handful of students, most of whom seemed to have once lived elsewhere, also indicated that they did not intend to stay in Des Moines after graduation. But regardless of their intentions most students wanted to see improvements in the physical appearance of their neighborhoods. Only a handful of photos ended up showing human activity and likely as a result, there was not much discussion about available activities – or lack of – in the posters or during the activity.

While they liked that Subway was close to East, they also mentioned the difficulty of crossing E. 14th Street to get to it and the high number of jaywalking tickets students received. In addition to Subway, Quiktrip and Walgreens were indicated as being something they liked having nearby so they could get snacks during breaks or after school; that they enjoy these benefits likely indicates that they understand the importance of strong economic drivers such as these stores. Though not directly stated, it seems that the young people believe that improving the physical appearance of the neighborhood would go a long way in creating a stronger, better place for the residents, as well as bring more people and opportunities to the neighborhood.

**Summary**
Though students acted typically of their age and portrayed reluctance to get involved with the project, they seemed to enjoy the opportunity to share their opinions, particularly after they
were told that city officials would be shown their work. The facilitating teacher, Lynn Hoff, was enthusiastic about the project and partnering with the team from Iowa State University, indicating that she would like to assist with similar projects in the future. The objectives of the activity were successfully met as the students were made aware of planning, given a voice in community planning, and physical documentation of their views were produced. Students were allowed to share their voice and their opinions in a fun and educational way, demonstrating that they believe physical appearance and infrastructure are important factors in maintaining and improving their neighborhoods.

Scans of student work
Fix our Neighborhood

Things That need Improvement:

- Potholes: They make our streets look worn out and like they aren't maintained properly. Fixing these would make our neighborhood appear to be more well maintained. It will also help save people money from getting flat tires due to these potholes.

- Trash: Make the neighborhood look bad. We need more trash cans to fix this issue. It makes it seem bad.

- Boarded up houses: Make it look like no one wants to live here. Redo the houses.
Dostart, THE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT

Things We Like!

It is very cool to be in my school.

My hood.

We should tear it down and make something useful.

Remodel Bridge.

Remodel so they don't look scary.

Remodel Bridge.

We should tear down and remodel these buildings.

In small beds.

Student crossing bridge over a river (last high school!!)

Remodeled school.

Debora Doss

Trend King
Dostart, THE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT
APPENDIX E. ACTIVITY WITH EAST HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER CLASSES

Prepared by Jon Wolseth, October 2013

On Friday, October 18th, Eric, Johnny, Katherine and Jon went to East High School to do an activity with Dan Ketchum’s ELL classes. We were also able to work with Ryan Hawkins’ ELL classes for a total of four different classes across all grade levels. In total, we reached approximately forty students of Karen, Kareni, Kachin, Eriterian, Mexican, Nepalese, and Sudanese descent. With the exception of the Mexican students, all had been refugees at one point in their lives and had been in the United States at most for the past 3 years; many had been in the country for a year or less (honestly, I was surprised to see Spanish speakers in the classroom; they seemed misplaced given the level of English spoken by them. I am kind of wondering what the district policy is). While the students lived in many different neighborhoods across the Eastside, there was a sizable majority that lived in River Hills. It was unclear to me which River Hills this was the one south of I-235 or the one in Capitol Park. Regardless, a great many of the students walked through the southern part of Capitol Park on their way to and from school each day and were familiar with this part of the neighborhood. The experience living in an affordable housing complex would also be somewhat representative, regardless of which of the River Hills they lived in, especially considering the two complexes are owned by the same company.

It is important to recognize that these students are not necessarily representative of the student body as a whole. They come with a unique perspective, especially given their experiences as immigrants and refugees. While they come from low income households, the perspective and experience of being an immigrant with immigrant parents who are training for jobs versus low income households of nativeborn Americans is undoubtedly unique. These households also experience a degree of social isolation, not interacting much with households outside of their community. That being said, however, these ELL students are not unaware of what goes on in the school among students. They interact across ethnic boundaries (as evident from their association with other students in the ELL program), and also have some mainstream classes in the school. They participate in some extracurricular activities. They utilize social media. In other words, in some ways they are just like many of the other students at East and cannot be wholly lifted from the social fabric of the school. In what follows we will try to point out where there is good reason to believe that these students’ experiences at East and in their neighborhood may be atypical. We have organized these notes by themes.

Work Experiences
Many of the male students mentioned the desire for employment. They expressed concern that they had applied at various area fast food places and had not had success. One Karen male said he worked at an Asian market, another that he had worked at McDonald’s but that his parents asked him to quit and focus on school. A Karenni male mentioned that his older brother worked in a meat packing plant. Two of the Mexican students, a male and female, reported that they worked at Mexican restaurants on weekends, as a cook and a hostess respectively.
Although they did not have access to cars themselves, they got rides from friends or family to work. Future job prospects for these students seem bleak because many did not express the desire (because of self-identified lack of funds or linguistic resources) to continue on to college, like DMACC. They were not aware of votech programs, although some of the males expressed wanting to work as mechanics or other skilled professions. Even the teacher was unaware of what existing skills training programs might exist, either within the skills program available at Central Campus, or through DMACC. Greater awareness and presence of votech programs is definitely needed.

At least two of the girls we spoke to expressed an interest in nursing.

**Sports**

Universally it was expressed that there were not enough spaces to place soccer and volleyball near where they live. The Karen, Kachin, and Karenni boys played soccer in the River Hills common areas that, in their estimation, are poorly suited for play (they described the picture of the empty lot as like the ground where they played soccer). They are not tied in to any citywide league; it is unclear whether such a league of Thai and Burmese refugees exists like the league organized by Latinos. A couple of the males played soccer on the East High Team and used the East High facilities to practice and play. In general, however, if the males wanted to play soccer, they had to travel great distances to get to a suitable field. One Sudanese male went to North Des Moines to play with friends on weekends.

Volleyball was also a big sport, especially for females (although a few of the Asian males expressed dismay that it seemed to be a sport that only girls were allowed to play at East High). One Karen female knew about the volleyball nets at Burke Park, but several of the other females wanted to know where there were nets, especially for winter.

**Use of parks**

Visiting park space with family was reported as important, especially among the Asian students. The Karen female that knew about the volleyball nets at Burke, reported she and her family picnic at Burke frequently during the summer. It does not appear that parks are utilized by these students without family being present. In many cases this is because the parks they reported going to were far from their neighborhood Easter Lake, Grey’s Lake, even Saylorville Lake. In these cases, going to a park is considered a destination trip, to get away from the home and from the neighborhood. The Asian males all reported fishing in the Des Moines River as an important individual and family past time.

For some, this would be going to the Southside to fish off the bridge with uncles or brothers. Others reported climbing down the banks of the river behind River Hills to fish. Obviously this is prohibited access steep, unstable slopes not meant for use. Would providing river access at this point (as opposed to having to go up to the Birdland Marina in Union Park) be too much of a liability?
Transportation
Public transportation was mostly described as confusing and under utilized. Some youth had access to family cars, but the great majority relied on walking. None reported using bikes on a regular basis. Lack of use of public transportation curtails employment options and recreational possibilities. It also adds to the relative isolation of these youth from the rest of the city. It is surprising that no excursion program exists within the ELL program or refugee services to teach these youth bus routes.

Relative Isolation
As mentioned above, lack of transportation options leads to relative isolation, especially of the nonLatino/a youth. Asian youth described spending most of their free time at home, near their apartment complexes, either because of lack of options to do otherwise or because directed by their parents to do so. Any participation in extracurricular activities and jobtraining opportunities that take place away from the school would have to be within walking distance or have transportation provided.

Media consumption
Because many of these youth spent so much time at home, they reported high levels of media consumption, especially movies. For the Southeast Asians, films in regional languages could be rented at some Asian markets. In other cases, media consumption in native languages was also aided by internet access. A mobile lending library with non-English materials would be well used, if the resources available were kept recent.

Access to Internet
None of the students reported having computers or internet access at home. They accessed the internet at school, the school library, and Des Moines Public Library. This was also a primary way for them to access media in their native languages. A mobile internet and computer unit either literally on wheels or through access to East High facilities with extended hours would be well used (There are several mobile technology programs in the US and abroad used as a way to bring access to communities wouldn’t have access otherwise. Sometimes these are run as part of a mobile media lab program through the public library). There is no public library facility in CP and East High library is open only to students.

Walking and Safety
On a purely observational note, traffic both vehicular and pedestrian around East High is a mess. This whole area along 14th north of 235 is a knot of traffic in the morning, as students are arriving at East High and Amos Hiatt Middle School. Traffic gets jammed at the stoplights and cars trying to make left hand turns into the schools’ parking lots. Pedestrians (students) compound this problem as they are trying to cross streets where no light or cross walk exists (especially right at East High). It is amazing more students are not injured. We need to get Joe to give us traffic accident reports for this corridor to confirm this observation. As we left at 10:40 in the morning, students who were “on release” (had a free period—what awful terminology. Makes it sound like they are in prison instead of school) were trying to cross 14th in large numbers to get to the Subway shop. There should be a pedestrian crossing at this point.
Fights
Finally, the ELL students confirmed that there are quite often fights between students in the parking lots on 14th. This seems to be a popular destination for a show down. They seemed surprised that we knew about this.