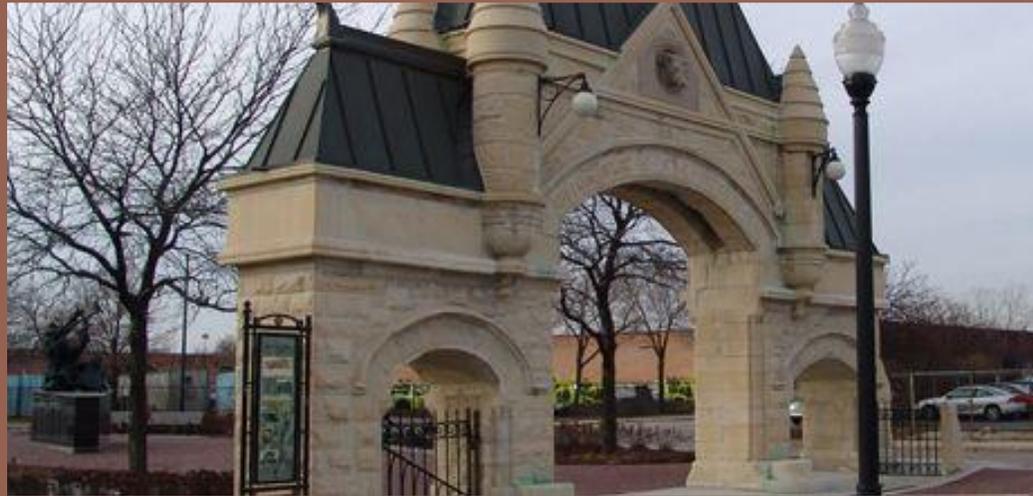


Empoderamiento: A Community-driven Needs Assessment for Youth in Back of the Yards



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Executive Summary

*If a community wants to transform a situation for the future, focus on the youth.**

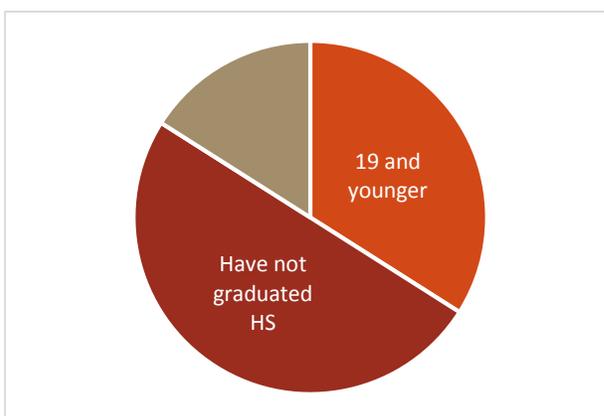
Back of the Yards is ranked 16th among Chicago's 77 neighborhoods for violent crimes, with 500 violent crimes in the past year including 18 homicides. Most of the crime takes place on the "street", and 58 crimes took place within the last 30 days in prime out-of-school time, between the hours of 3pm and 7pm. Located within the boundaries of New City, this area has a population of 44,377 with over a third living in poverty, according to the US census. Nearly half (49%) of the population is 29 years old or younger; over a third (34%) are 19 years old or younger. Of those 18 years old and older, half have not graduated high school (see figure below). Over half of families (51%) are headed by single parents.



This lack of apparent safety leaves some youth in danger and other youth sedentary, not being allowed to play outside, thus, limiting their physical activity and influencing their health.

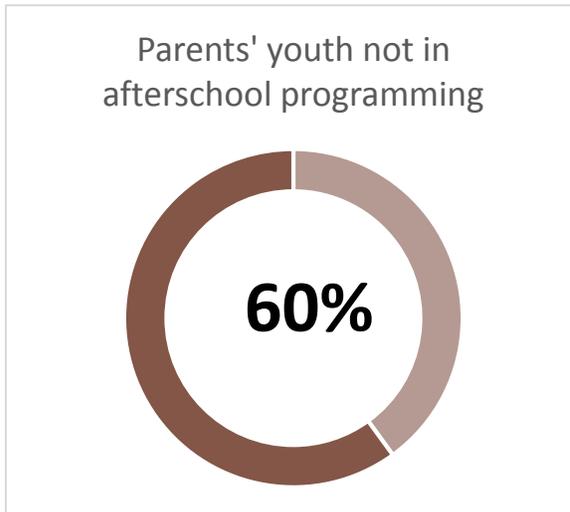
The combination of violence, a high percentage of youth, a high percentage of single parents, and low educational attainment makes Back of the Yards a place that could significantly benefit from strong investment in education and resources for youth's development and success.

Given the growing research findings and current circumstances in Back of the Yards, The Resurrection Project (TRP) decided to partner with Become: Center for Community Engagement and Social Change (Become), to conduct a needs assessment. This assessment focused on the potential need for youth services in the community as a first step in learning how to move forward in decreasing violence and bolstering youth development in Back of the Yards. Twenty local parents collected a total of 1,452 surveys, including 940 middle school student surveys and



512 parent surveys. They also conducted six parent focus groups at community locations with over 50 participants. We also conducted three focus groups with sixth through eighth grade students and eight interviews with parent leaders. Over 80 people participated in either a focus group or interview.

Back of the Yards' parents agree that the community needs more youth



programming. **80% of parent focus groups highlighted the need for more youth services. Over half (60%) expressed the need for parent workshops and family resources.**

This statement is significant, given that 60% of community parents' youth are not participating in afterschool resources, despite **80% of students who are in afterschool programming enjoying their participation and the researching supporting the benefits of this type of programming.**

Youth and parents identified numerous activities that they would like youth to participate in, including team sports, cooking and nutrition classes, art/music, and computer classes.

They also identified barriers to participation, including lack of knowing about available programs, cost, concerns about safety, and transportation.

According to the community, what is needed is an investment in the community youth with accessible youth and family resources, such as a community center, and targeted marketing.

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This project was driven by Mayra Lopez, a community organizer, at The Resurrection Project. She reached out to Dr. Dominica McBride to partner to make the needs assessment a reality. She also convened and supported the parent leaders throughout their work on the project.

The over 20 parent leaders were the stars of this project. They collected nearly 1500 surveys from their peers, neighbors, and other community members. They were bold, courageous, and hard-working, and they learned and grew through the process.

Regina Lee and Alicia Anderson assisted with conducting research on youth development and Back of the Yards. April Hasson assisted with survey development. Their ideas and input were invaluable.

Introduction

One kid came running, and then another, and another, until he was surrounded by 20 of them. He was only 11 years old with no space to run through in the human wall that now surrounded him, nowhere to go but to stay and wait until the moment was over. They closed in, step by step, until the step led to a kick and then a punch, and he was down. They beat him...and when his grandmother went to save him, they kicked her too.

This was the scene that Anjelica¹, a single mother with a full time job and raising two kids on her own, came home to after a full day of work. Many parents in Back of the Yards have experienced, seen, or heard of incidents like this one, leaving many caregivers in fear for themselves and their children.

Back of the Yards, located within the boundaries of New City, is ranked 16th among Chicago's 77 neighborhoods for violent crimes, with 500 violent crimes in the past year including 18 homicides.² Most of the crime takes place on the "street", and 58 crimes took place within the last 30 days in prime out-of-school time, between the hours of 3pm and 7pm. Located within the boundaries of New City, this area has a population of 44,377 with over a third living in poverty, according to the US census. Nearly half (49%) of the population is 29 years old or younger; over a third (34%) are 19 years old or younger. Over half of families (51%) are headed by a single parent. The great majority of people 18 years old and above have no college education.³

The combination of violence, a high percentage of youth, a high percentage of single parents, and low educational attainment makes Back of the Yards a place that could significantly benefit from strong investment in education and resources for youth's development and success.

The time that youth spend away from home can positively or negatively impact their character as they grow up.⁴ Equipping youth during this phase with important skills can be protective in the face of threats such as violence and negative social influences. Thus, interventions like afterschool programs seek to provide key skills and safety during this time of need. Research shows that high quality afterschool programs enhance academic success and performance⁵ and

¹ Note: this is a pseudonym with minor details in her story changed to protect her identity

² Chicago Tribune (2015). *Crime Reports in New City*. Retrieved August 5, 2015 from <http://crime.chicagotribune.com/chicago/community/new-city>.

³ US Census Data for Back of the Yards. Retrieved July 5, 2015 from <http://www.realtor.com/local/Back-Of-The-Yards-Chicago-IL/lifestyle>. Note: other sources included the boundaries of New City.

⁴ Durlak, J.A, Weissberg, R.P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *Am J Community Psychology*, 45, 16.

⁵ Posner, J.K., & Vandell, D.L. (1994). Low-income children's after-school care: are there beneficial effects of after school programs. *Child Development*, 65, 440-456.

improve social/emotional skills.⁴ These benefits are especially important to youth facing challenging issues, such as poverty and violence.

Context

Given the growing research findings and current circumstances in Back of the Yards, The Resurrection Project (TRP) decided to partner with Become: Center for Community Engagement and Social Change (Become), to conduct a needs assessment. This assessment focused on youth services in the community as a first step in learning how to move forward in decreasing violence and bolstering youth development in Back of the Yards. Emphasis was placed on early adolescence (middle school students) for student data collection due to their relatively vulnerable stage of development and transition around identity and peer pressure⁶, making this a critical time in their young lives.

Organizations

TRP is a 501c3 nonprofit community development organization founded in Pilsen in 1990. TRP's mission is to build relationships and challenge people on their faith and values to create healthy communities. They achieve this through organizing, education and community development.

Become is a 501c3 nonprofit organization with a mission to nourish communities affected by poverty and injustice to make their vision of a thriving community a reality. Through training, education, coalition building, and Dynamic Evaluation, they demonstrates their commitment to creating thriving communities for a socially just world.

Community

Back of the Yards is a community located on the southwest side of Chicago and is part of the larger community area called New City. Many reference Back of the Yards and New City as one and the same because Back of the Yards encompasses the largest area of the New City community.⁷ This area is known for its rich history of the Union Stock Yard establishment in 1865, and having had the largest livestock yards and meatpacking center in the country. Its geographic location near the Union Stock yards is where the community gets its name.

The community has a history of diversity and transition. It was first settled by Irish and German immigrants in the late 1800s. Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, and Czech communities were the

⁶ Barone, C., Aguirre-Deandreis, A. I., & Trickett E. J. (1991). Mean-ends problem-solving skills, life stress, and social support as mediators of adjustment in the normative transition to high school. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(2), 207-225; Eccles (Parsons), J., Midgley, C., & Adler, T. F. (1984). Grade-related changes in the school environment: Effects on achievement motivation. In J. G. Nicholls (Ed.), *Advances in motivation and achievement*, (Vol. 3, pp. 283-331). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press; Mizelle, N. B. & Irvin, J. L. (2000). Transition from middle school into high school. *Middle School Journal*, 32(5).

⁷ Back of the Yards extends from 39th to 55th Streets between Halsted and the railroad tracks along Leavitt Street, just south and west of the former Union Stock Yard and adjacent packing plants.

predominant groups throughout the early 1900s.⁸ In the 1910s, the first major group of Mexican people migrated to Chicago. Many people in Mexico experienced economic hardship and political displacements from the Mexican Revolutionary years. This phenomenon along with the increase in industrial and agricultural employment in the US led to people seeking opportunities.⁹ The community began to decline after the closing of the Stock Yards and decrease in employment prospects.

Today, census data shows that the Back of the Yards' population is predominantly Latino/a (53%). In addition, 46% are White (non-Hispanic), 30% Black/African American (alone or in combination), and 1% are of Asian descent (alone or in combination).¹⁰ Back of the Yards is a particularly young population, with an average age of 32 years old; half of the community is 29 years old or younger; 34% are 19 years old or younger. The great majority (75%) of the community has only a high school diploma or less (see Figure 1).³

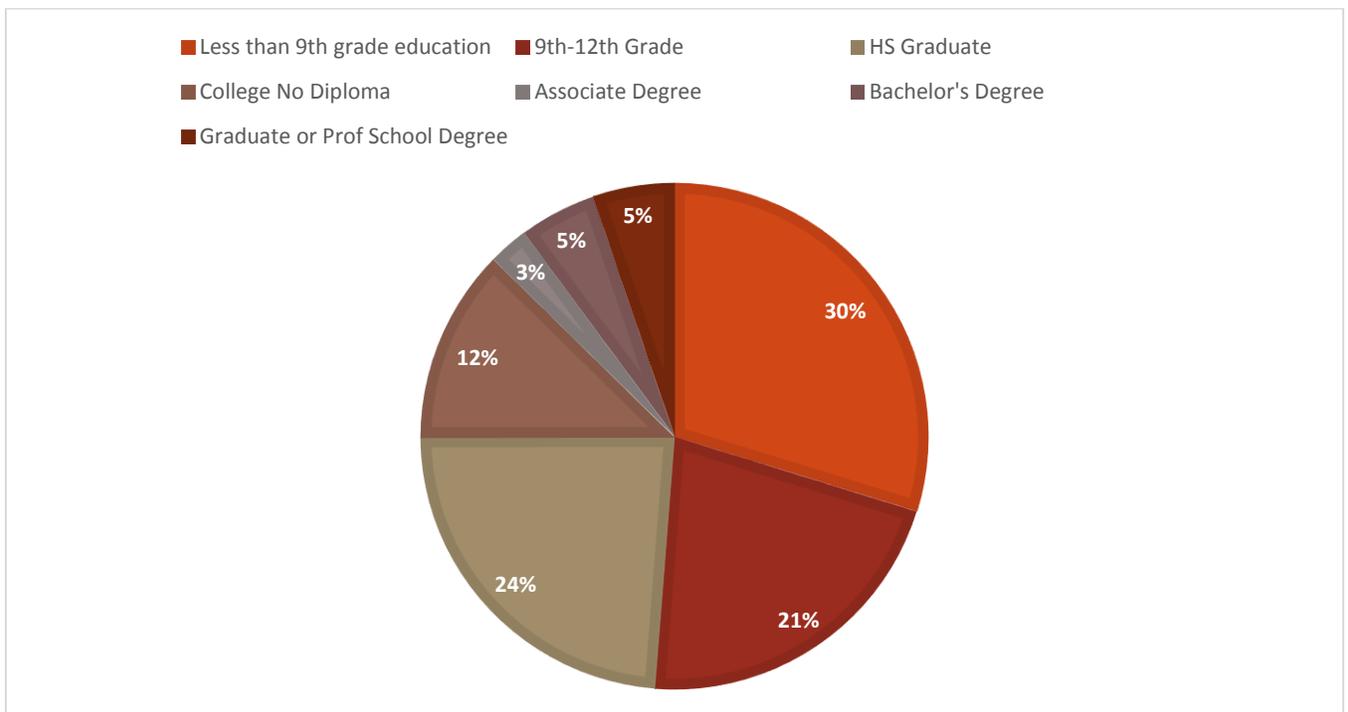


Figure 1. Education breakdown

The median household income is \$37,690, over \$10,000 less than the city average. A third of the community lives in poverty (see Figure 2).³

⁸ Chicago Historical Society (2004). *Encyclopedia of Chicago: Back of the Yards*. Retrieved January 15, 2015 from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/99.html>.

⁹ Chicago Historical Society (2004). *Encyclopedia of Chicago: Mexicans*. Retrieved January 15, 2015 from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/824.html>.

¹⁰ Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 Decennial Census and 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimates program

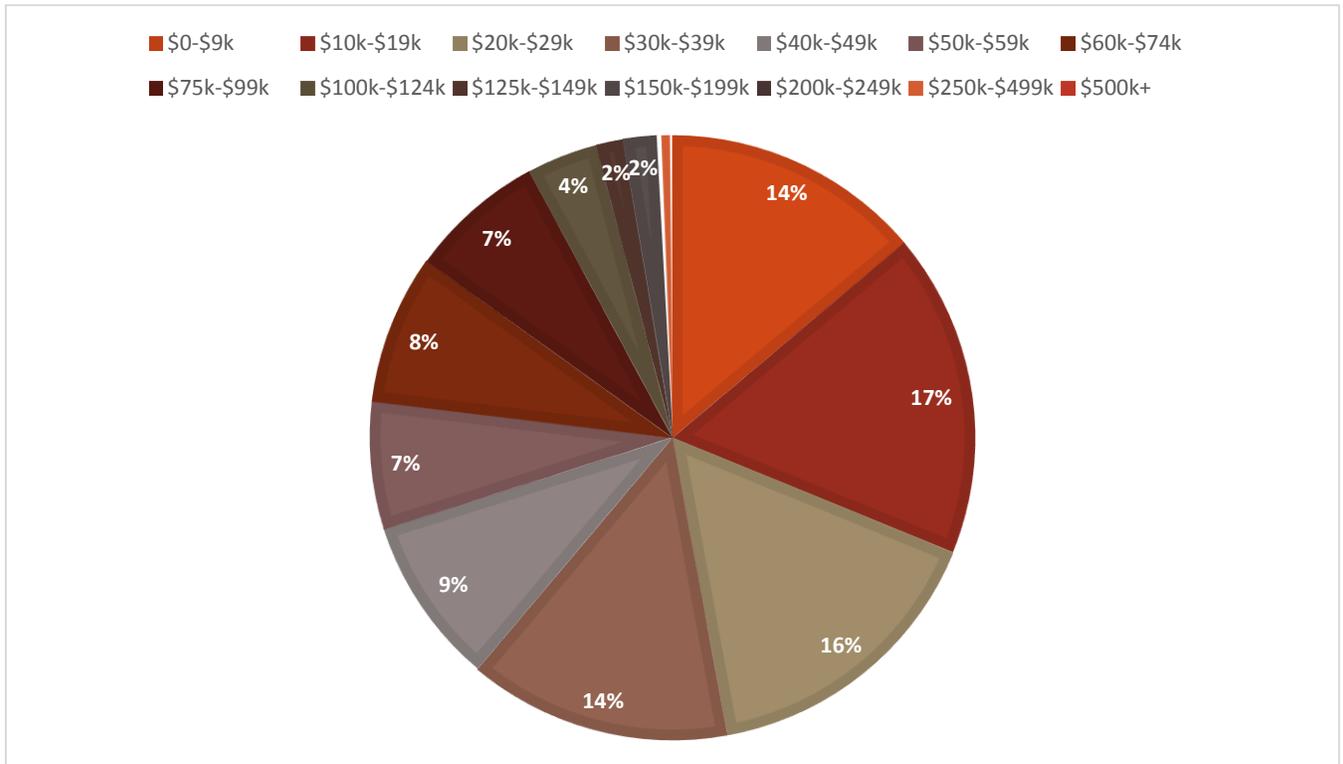


Figure 2. Household income breakdown

Even with all the challenges the community faces with economics, education, and violence, it has strengths that can be used to overcome these challenges and flourish.

First, although few, there are programs for youth in the community. Listed below are 15 programs/organizations for youth that service Back of the Yards and surrounding areas. Of those youth programs, 10 programs (bolded) are located in the Back of the Yards neighborhood and of those, four appear to be non-religion affiliated.

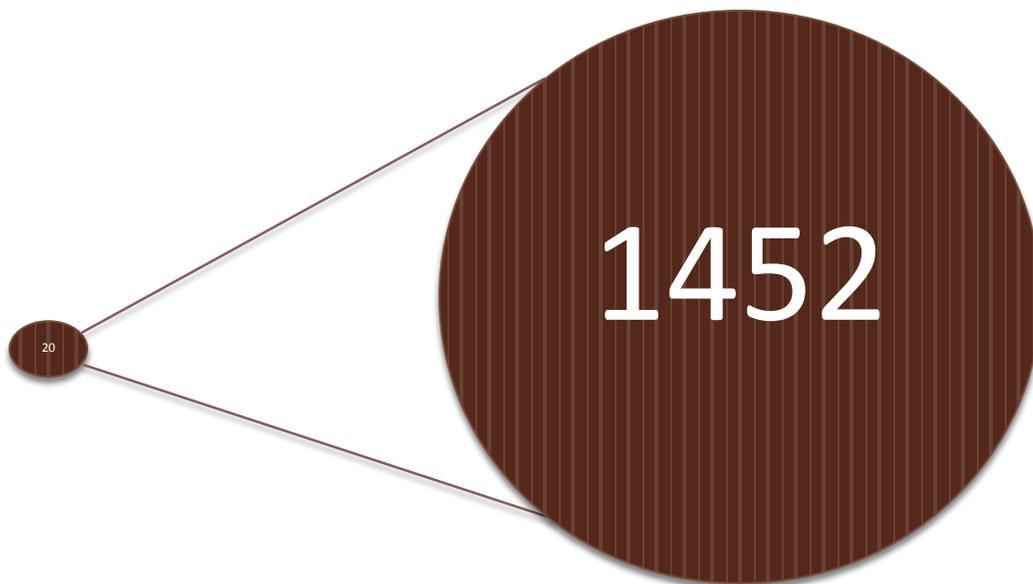
1. **Bishop Shepard Little Memorial Center Youth Career Development and College Preparation services - 5230 S Halsted**
2. **Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council - 1751 W 47th Street**
3. **Chicago Commons Paulo Freire Center – 1653 W. 43rd Street**
4. Casa Juan Diego Youth Center - 2020 S Blue Island Ave
5. Centers for New Horizons Incorporated - 3950 S State St
6. **Chicago Public Library (Back of the Yards) - 2111 W. 47th Street**
7. Firman Community Services - 144 W 47th Street
8. **Holy Cross/Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish - 4541 S Wood**
9. **Immaculate Heart of Mary Youth - 4545 S Ashland**
10. **Port Ministries - 5013 S Hermitage Ave**
11. **R.B.C. Community Service Center - 1159 W 51st Street**
12. School Children Aid Society - 3532 W 47th Pl.
13. **St. Joseph - 4821 S Hermitage**
14. **St. Michael the Archangel - 4821 S Damen**

15. St. Rita Parish – Good Counselor Center Tutoring Program - 2700 W 59th Street

Furthermore, Back of the Yards has a history of community involvement and community members continue to work on strengthening their community. However, even with the existing services, we found that there is still a need for additional youth and family resources and outreach.

Methods

Any successful and sustainable project should have the community at its center, driving the efforts and owning the process. Therefore, parent leaders from Back of the Yards were the main drivers of this assessment. We trained over **20 local parents** in survey research and focus group facilitation. The parent leaders went out and **collected a total of 1,452 surveys**, including 940 middle school student surveys and 512 parent surveys. They also participated in data analysis and developed recommendations.



For parent surveys, they went to their neighbors, door-to-door, congregations, local grocery stores and other community locations, and community events. For student surveys, they went to local middle schools. They also conducted six parent focus groups at community locations with over 50 participants. We also conducted three focus groups with sixth through eighth grade students and eight interviews with parent leaders. Over 80 people participated in either a focus group or interview. We also reviewed the research literature on youth development programming.

Table 1 presents the demographics for those who reported their demographic information. (Note: some participants did not want to report their demographic information or be recorded. We also omitted some demographic information on surveys for the sake of brevity.)

Table 1*Demographic Information*

Demographics	Percentage
Student Survey	
School	
San Miguel	9.3% (87)
Daley Academy	18.9% (177)
Richards Career Academy	5.2% (49)
Seward Academy	24.5% (229)
Robert Fulton	7.9% (74)
Hamline	12.5% (117)
Chavez	21.6% (202)
Age Group	
Under 9 years old	.1% (1)
10-14 years old	69.7% (650)
15-18 years old	29.8% (278)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latino/a	82.3% (774)
Black/African American	8.8% (83)
White	1.7% (16)
Other	2.3% (22)
Parent Survey	
Child's School	
San Miguel	6.1% (31)
Daley Academy	22.2% (112)
Seward Academy	22.6% (114)
Robert Fulton	7.9% (40)
Hamline	3% (15)
Chavez	9.3% (47)
Lara	5.1% (26)
Back of the Yards High School	1.6% (8)
Hedges	10.5% (53)
Uno	1.8% (9)
Household income	
5,000-10,000	39% (162)
10,001-20,000	35.2% (146)
20,001-40,000	21.2% (88)
40,001-80,000	3.4% (14)
80,001-100,000	.2% (1)

100,000+	1% (4)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latino/a	93.6% (439)
Black/African American	4.5% (21)
White	1.7% (8)
Other	.2% (1)
Parent focus group	
Gender	
Female	91.4% (32)
Male	8.6% (3)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic/Latino/a	97.1% (34)
Black/African American	2.9% (1)
Marital Status	
Married	80% (28)
Separated/divorced	5.7% (2)
Widowed	2.9% (1)
Single	11.4% (4)
Education	
No formal education	28.6% (10)
High school	48.6% (17)
Some college	11.4% (4)
Bachelors or 4 year degree	2.9% (1)

Other schools listed by parents but with very low numbers included ISHCA, Curie, Benito Juarez, Orozco, Namaste, Octavio Paz, Nightingale, San Jose, Kelly, Maria Saucedo, Phoenix, Hernandez, Daniel Zizumbo, CVCA, Horizon, Henderson, Basil, Lane Tech, Dunbar, Beethoven, and Disney.

Results

Given the stark problems Back of the Yards faces, including the violence and education, the need for supporting youth was apparent even prior to the assessment. However, the assessment affirmed the need and desire for additional youth and family services. Community members want the services to help prevent violence, provide educational opportunities for youth, give guidance outside the home, and offer a safe place for constructive physical and social activity – health and vitality.

“I think we need more resources because there needs to be a lot more activities for children because then, if they have something to do they’re not going to join gangs. And we’ll be able to do away with that. That’s why they join gangs because they don’t have things to do.”

-Parent leader

Although research on afterschool programming is not extensive and relatively new, there is an emerging body of research that shows its positive impact on youth and addressing the aforementioned problems Back of the Yards is facing. Research shows that participation in afterschool programs can protect youth against safety concerns and help prevent engaging in violence or crime.¹¹ Durlak and colleagues found that misbehaving and maladaptive behaviors were decreased for children who participated in afterschool programs.¹² Problem behaviors, such as aggression, noncompliance, and misconduct, can contribute considerably to crime, violence, and risky behavior. Fortunately, Nicholson’s research shows that youth make more positive choices due to their participation in programs and reduce problem and risk behaviors.¹³

VIOLENCE WAS THE MOST IDENTIFIED PROBLEM FOR YOUTH

100% of focus groups targeted violence as a major hindrance for their youth and families.

75% of parents interviewed highlighted violence as a significant challenge for their youth and themselves as parents.

100% of youth focus groups identified the lack of safety as a barrier for constructive outdoor activity.

82% of parents identified safety as the priority in a youth development program.

¹¹ Little, P.D.M., Wimer, C., & Weiss, H. B. (2007). After school programs in the 21st century: their potential and what it takes to achieve it.

¹² Durlak, J.A, & Weissberg, R.P. (2007). The impact of after school programs that promote personal and social skills. *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*, 1-50

¹³ Nicholson, H.J., Collins, C. & Holmer, H. (2004). Youth as people: the protective aspects of youth development in after-school settings. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 55-71.

Research also shows that quality afterschool programs positively impact academic success and performance¹⁴ and improved social/emotional skills.⁷ These benefits are especially important to youth with additional concerns such as poverty and violence.

Back of the Yards' parents agree that the community needs more youth programming. **80% of parent focus groups highlighted the need for more youth services. Over half (60%) expressed the need for parent workshops and family resources**, such as parenting skills training and recreational activities for parents and families.

"...even a typical day, it's hard. It's hard. It's hard to be a parent and to still steer your children in the right direction."

-Parent leader

Not only did parents express this need but the number of youth accessing out-of-school time programming was low, with 60% of parents and nearly half (46%) of middle school students reporting that their youth are not participating in programming (see Figures 3 and 4).

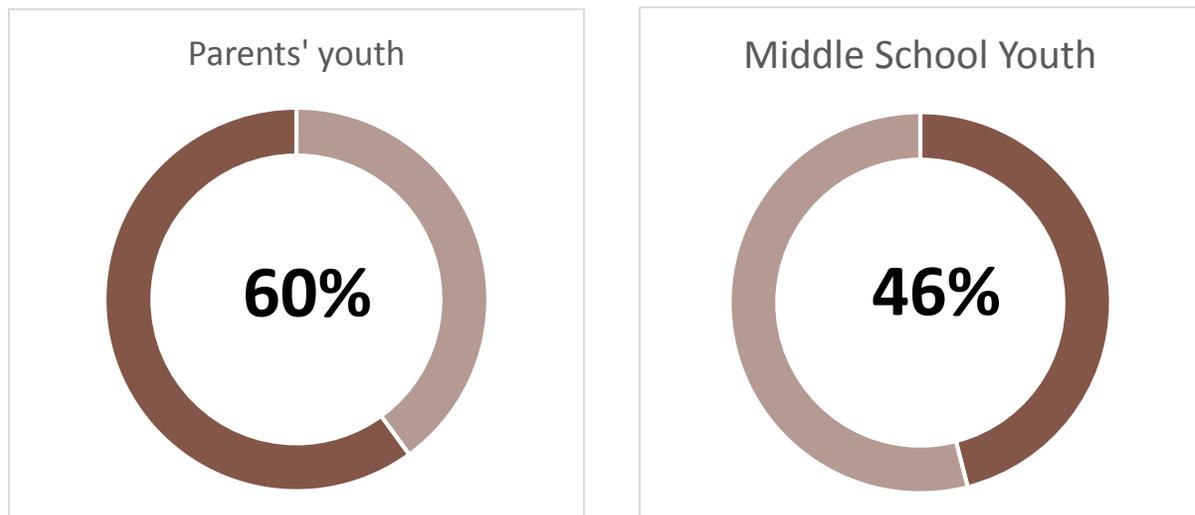


Figure 3. Youth not participating in regular afterschool/youth programming

¹⁴ Posner, J.K., & Vandell, D.L. (1994). Low-income children's after-school care: are there beneficial effects of after-school programs. *Child Development*, 65, 440-456.

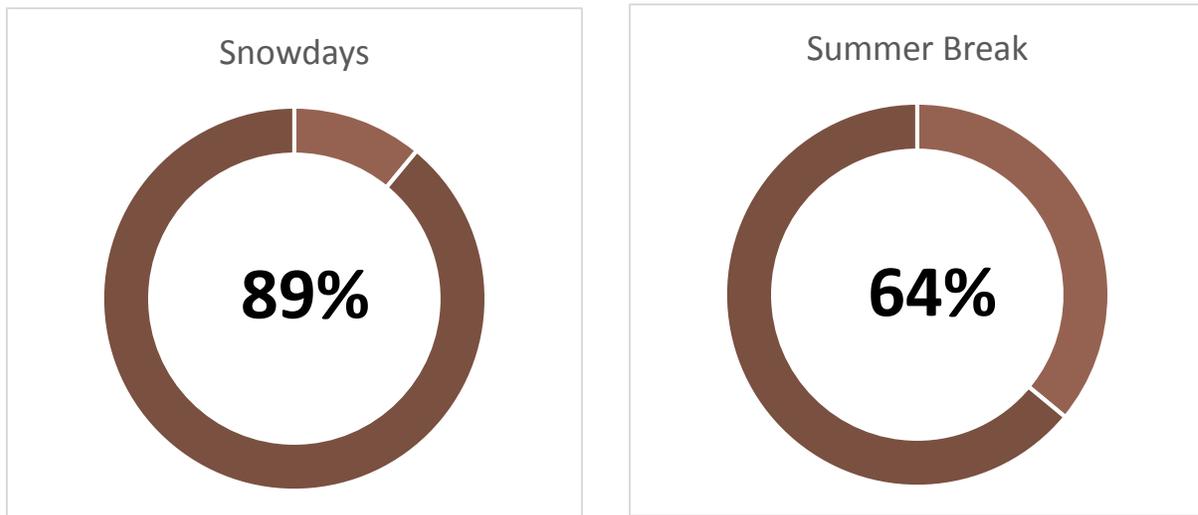


Figure 4. Youth not participating in programming during snow days and summer breaks according to parents

There is not only a desire and stated need for more youth resources but also a logistical need. For the over 3,000 parents like Anjelica who are single with little support in raising their children and have hourly wage jobs, programs that offer assistance in out-of-school time, including on snow days and summers, can be quite helpful. One parent expressed that youth programming is providing some stress relief for her, which is in turn enhancing her relationships with her children, as stress in the home has decreased. Furthermore, 11% of parents reported that their children are at home without supervision and 13% reported that their children are at least sometimes left in the care of a sibling or other minor.

Fortunately, parents who do have their children in youth programming are comfortable with the programs. Over 80% feel at least somewhat comfortable, with 60% feeling very comfortable with their youth's development programming. **For youth in programming, nearly 80% expressed enjoying their participation.**

Interests

Parents stressed the importance of having a variety of youth resources, including for different age groups and for different personality types and interests. Parents and youth provided their interests in topic areas and priorities for youth programming. Figure 5 through 8 shows parents' and students' preferences for youth activities and priorities for youth programming. Note: Parents and youth could choose more than one activity on their survey.

Parent leaders also emphasized the need for teaching other parents in the community the variety of critical skills necessary in holistic positive youth development.

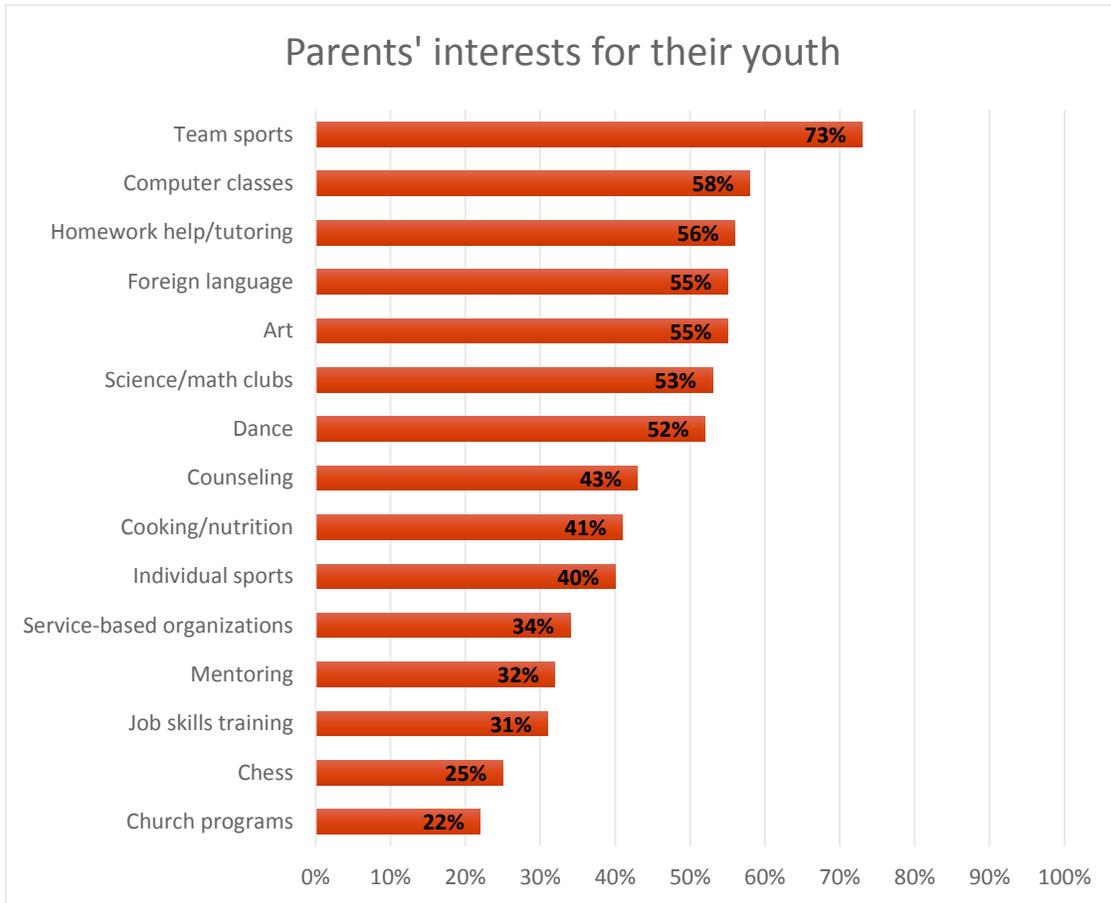


Figure 5. Parents' preferences for activities

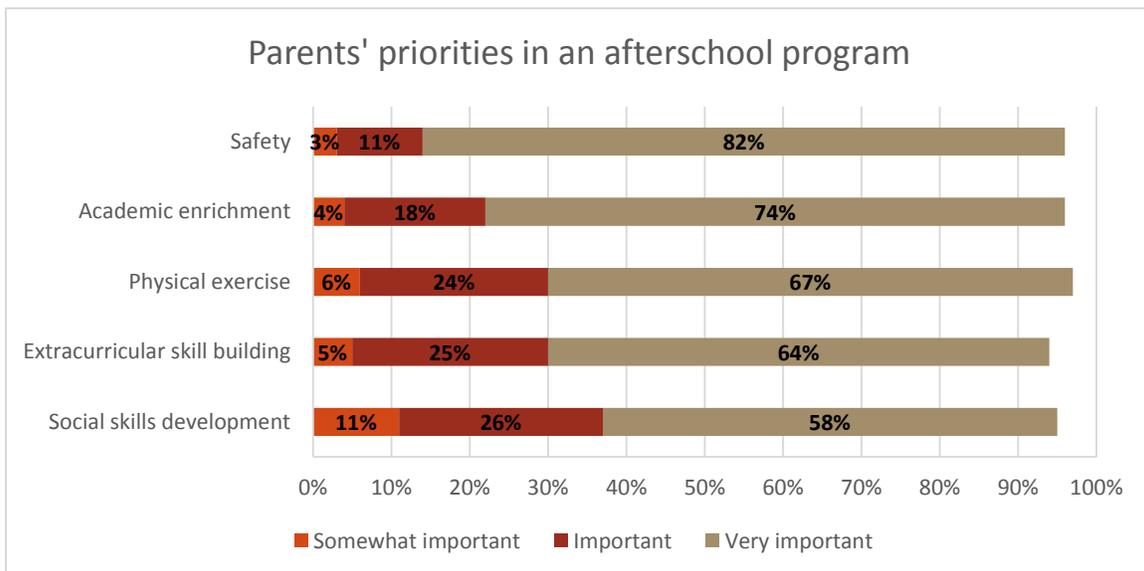


Figure 6. Parent Priorities in youth programming

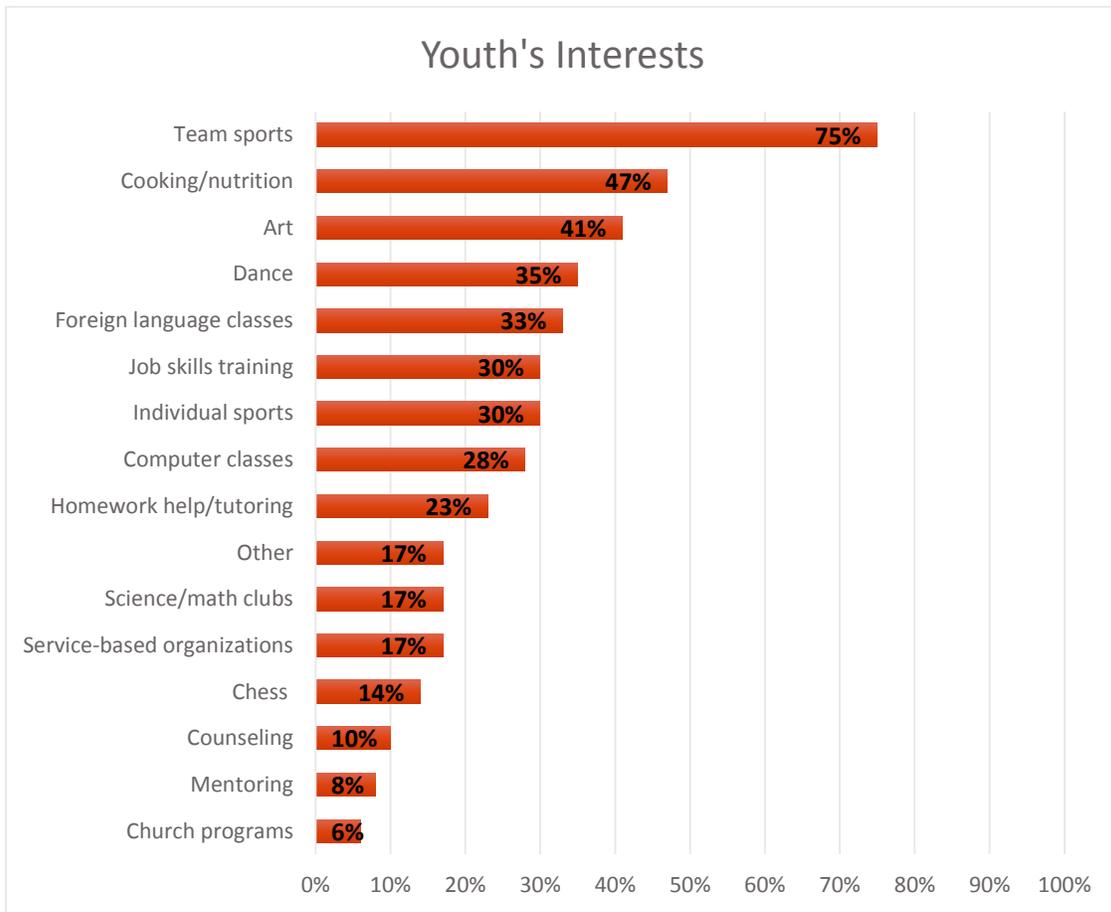


Figure 7. Students' preferences for activities

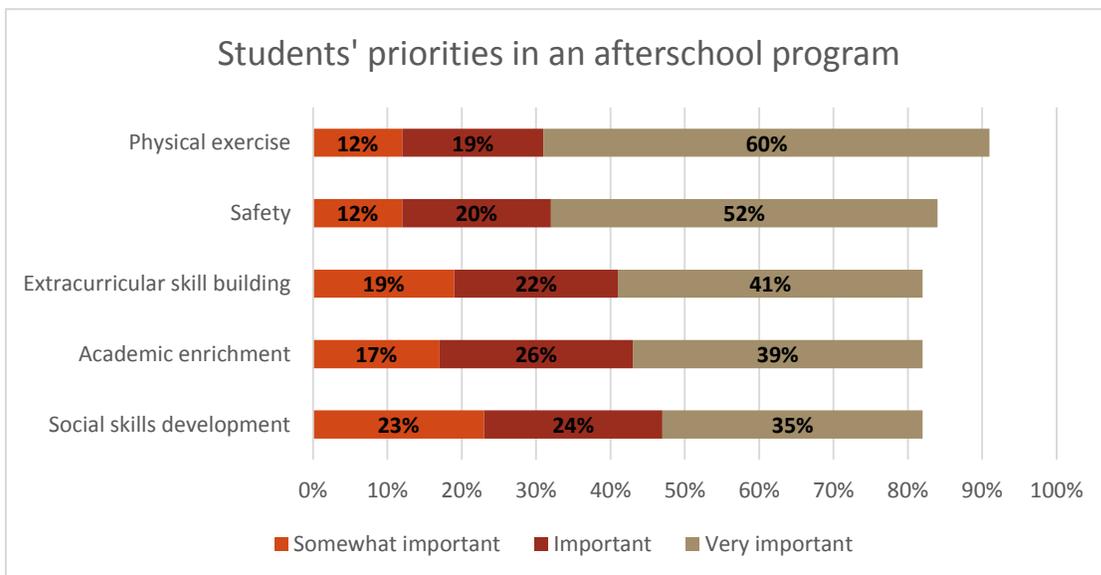


Figure 8. Students' priorities in youth programming

Regarding activities, both parents and students' agree that youth participating in team sports and physical exercise is paramount. Physical exercise becomes even more important when there is a lack of opportunity for healthy activities; 75% of parents interviewed expressed that they did not allow or feel comfortable with their children going outside. One mom said that she does not allow her son to walk two blocks to a friend's house. This propensity to be protective given the perception of violence is decreasing opportunities for physical exercise for youth.

Furthermore, youth focus group participants expressed that team sports provided more than mere exercise. It gave them opportunity to meet new people, make new friends, strengthen relationships, have a sense of belonging, and showcase their talents.

Barriers

Parents and youth also identified reasons for a lack of participation in programming. Figures 9 and 10 present the barriers they face to accessing youth services.

Parents' main barrier was cost. For those who do not have children in afterschool programming, 50% said that cost was a barrier, versus 36% who do have their children in programs. Table 2 shows the breakdown by income bracket for parents who have youth in programming and those who do not. Parents in the lower income brackets appear to face greater barriers in their children receiving these youth development resources.

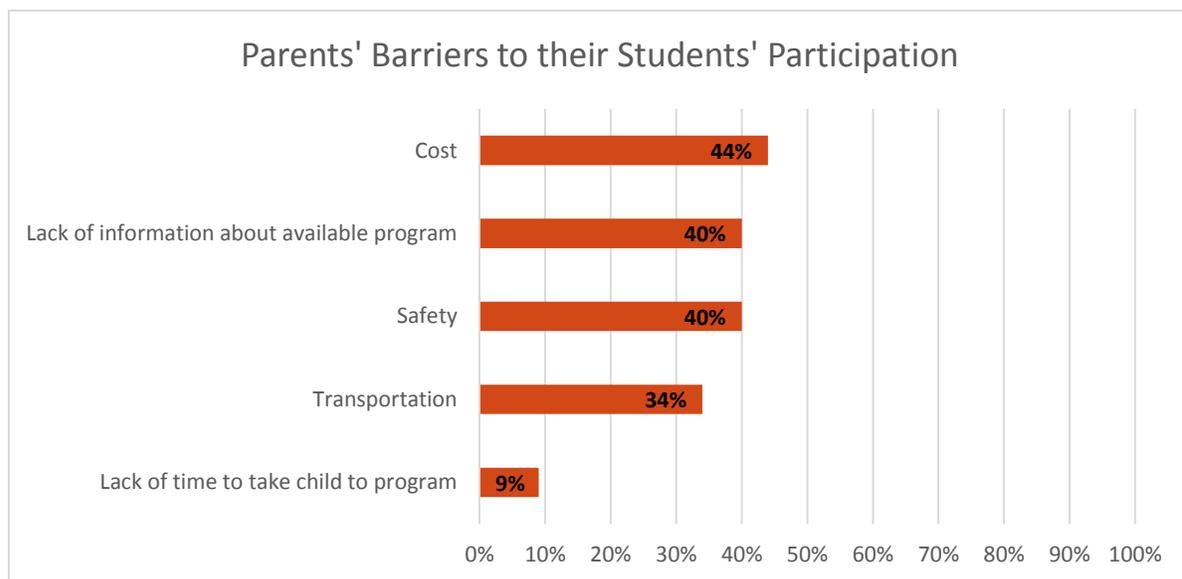


Figure 9. Parents' barriers to their children participating in youth services

Table 2

Parents' youth participating in youth programming by income

Participation	5,000-10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001-40,000	40,001-80,000
In programs	33% (52)	38% (54)	44% (37)	71% (10)
Not in programs	67% (107)	62% (90)	56% (48)	29% (4)

Transportation was also an area of significant difference between those who had children in programs and those who did not. For participating youth's parents, 39% said that transportation was a barrier, but for those in programming, 26% said this was a barrier.

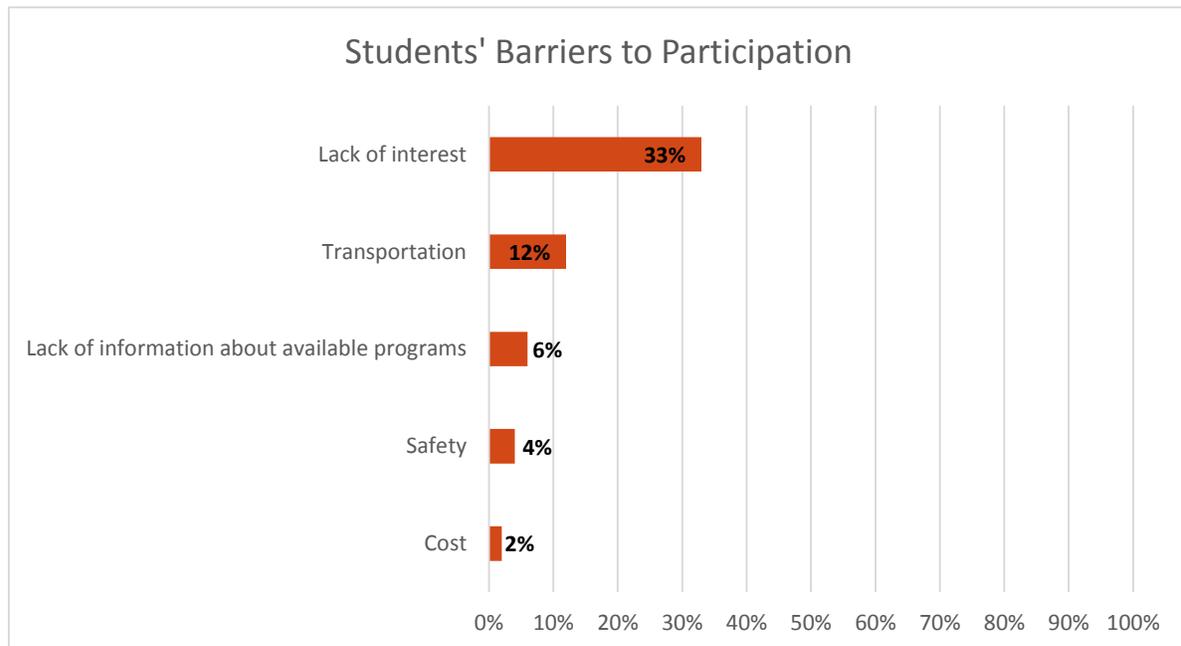


Figure 10. Students' barriers to participating in youth services

The main barrier for the lack of students is interest. This indicates the need to have engaging programs that peak students' interests. The parent focus group participants stressed problems of money and transportation. The most frequently identified problem was that of marketing. Safety, according to parent leaders, also included on program site, such as security guards.

Many parents said they did not know of local youth resources. Figures 11 and 12 present parents' and students' preferred modes of receiving information about programming.

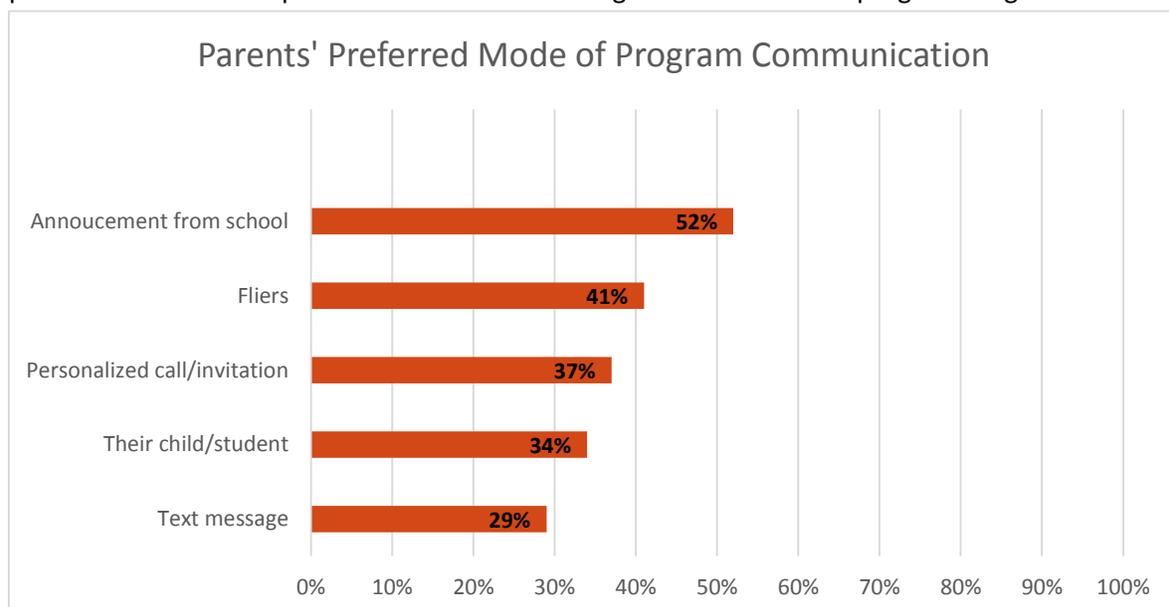


Figure 11. Parents' preferred marketing method

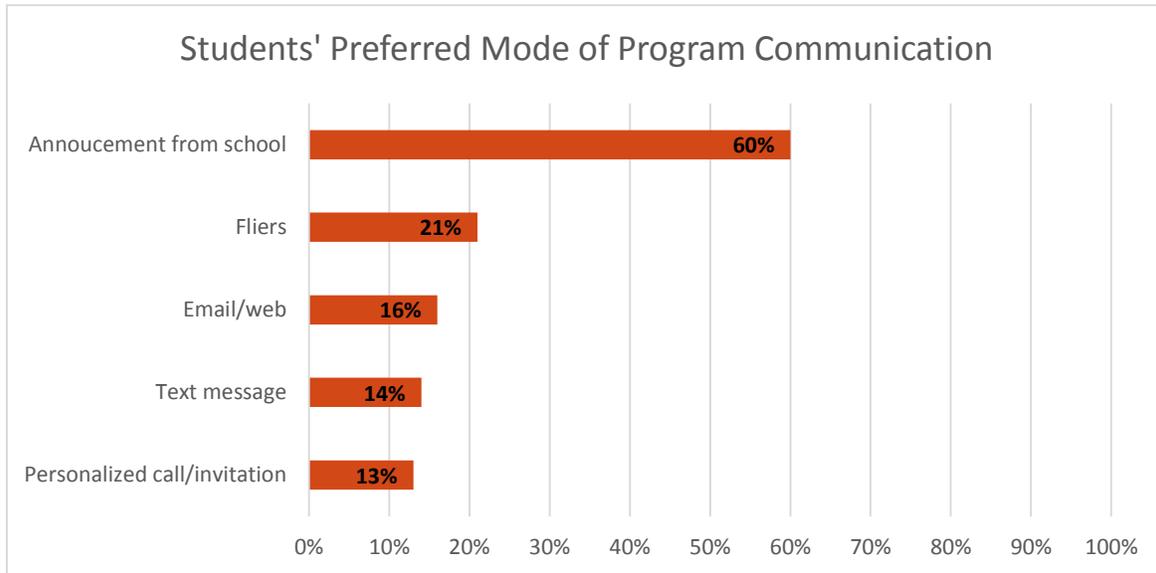


Figure 12. Students' preferred marketing method

Both parents and students agree that the school is the best way to receive information. Therefore, schools should begin to see themselves as conduits of community resources and hone their ability to market local programming for youth and parents.

Recommendations

Regardless of activity, program quality is most important in regards to effectively preventing violence and supporting positive youth development. Vandell and colleagues define high quality after school programs as programs with an emphasis on fostering relationships among students and staff and positive relationships between students and their peers.¹⁵ Such programs provide activities that are both academic and non-academic and build adaptive skills in youth with a high level of student engagement and participation. Students exercise autonomy and choice, and the programs are appropriate to the ages and development of the youth involved. There is also emphasis on mastery – not just teaching, but applying the skills and lessons taught. High quality afterschool programs improve behavioral outcomes and pro-social skills for building relationships with peers and mentors. Below is a list of recommended next steps for community leadership, organizations, and government officials:

1. Invest in the youth: Increase funding and resources to provide additional, engaging and a variety youth development programming for youth of all ages within the boundaries of Back of the Yards. Parent leaders emphasized the need for funding and support to **build a community center**. While the center is being built, increase programming in existing

¹⁵ Vandell, D., Reisner, E., & Pierce, K. (2007). Outcomes linked to high-quality afterschool programs: Longitudinal Findings from the study of promising practices. Irvine, CA: University of California and Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. Retrieved on January 4, 2015 from: <http://www.gse.uci.edu/docs/PASP%20Final%20Report.pdf>

- institutions, like churches and other community buildings. Ensure existing and new programming is safe, with funding for security guards, for example.
- a. Note: we attempted to engage local youth-serving organizations in the assessment process and asked them to complete a survey on their services and capacity; however, we received little response and return. Given there are few local programs and hundreds of youth not accessing them, there needs to be strategic and collective efforts to ensure sufficient programs or capacity to serve the youth.
 2. Educate parents: Parent leaders observed a lack of parents' knowledge about the necessary skills in youth development. Invest in parent workshops for parenting skills training and education. There are existing parent workshops provided by some local schools; however, these workshops are limited to those schools' parents, according to parent leaders. These workshops should be more open and accessible to all community parents within the limits of the school's capacity.
 3. Market: Place more focus on marketing the available resources to parents and students. Invest in efforts to ensure that local families know about the program offerings. Convene the local schools and build marketing capacity as well as knowledge of local resources for schools to disseminate information to parents and students. Consider also using existing marketing channels, such as radio and television. In the marketing, ensure that programs and the messaging spark youth's interests.
 4. Guarantee accessibility: Develop a strategy to either raise funds for or decrease costs for available programming. Ensure local programs are open and accessible to curb the need for transportation. Parent leaders emphasized that a community center would fulfill this gap.
 5. Evaluate: Confirm that there are *high quality* local programs and activities. Provide funds for evaluating existing and new programs in order to ensure they are effective and meeting the needs of community, preventing violence, and bolstering health. Evaluation can also be used to further develop existing programs for improvement.
 6. Utilize strengths: The community's biggest strength is the people. Through this process, 20 parents showed that they could engage over 1400 of their fellow community members. They expressed feeling more confident, able to use their voice to advocate for themselves and their community, and becoming more knowledgeable about the needs of their community and youth. Develop a strategy to partner with community members for marketing, providing structured, positive role models and implementing youth activities.

Conclusion

Back of the Yards is a hard working community with significant potential thrive. However, there are stark barriers that stand in the way of the community flourishing. Violence is the main obstacle, as Back of the Yards faces one of the highest rates of violent crimes in the city, with 18 people dying in the last year. Those people were someone's brother, daughter, son, or father. Many of those who are living in the community are scared to walk outside or go to nearby parks,

leading to children feeling trapped in their houses and stagnate. This stagnation affects the health and positive development of youth. High quality youth programming has been shown to be an effective strategy in addressing these issues. They enhance health, self-esteem, social and emotional skill development, and curb aggressive behavior. The community has spoken: they want high quality, accessible programs for youth and supportive services for families.

