

AN EVALUATION STUDY OF RAVENSWOOD'S YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO
AND THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

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Doctor of Education
In
Educational Leadership

by

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San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *An Evaluation Study of Ravenswood's Youth Transitioning To and Through High School* by Avani Patel, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree: Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University.

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AN EVALUATION STUDY OF RAVENSWOOD'S YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO
AND THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

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2014

This study focuses on Youth of Color in the Bay Area neighborhoods of East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park who attended the Ravenswood City School District (RCSD), as they transition to and through Sequoia Union High School District (SUHSD). This is a three-part culminating project depicting the unique position of Ravenswood youth who lack the financial and social capital that their White and Asian peers enjoy. Part one explores my transformation as an RCSD educator, intertwined with historical background and policy implications for RCSD youth. Part two focuses on the experiences of former RCSD students who currently attend SUHSD schools, as they transition from middle school to high school. Finally, part three is a compilation of recommendations based on part one and two, with a specific call to action for educators, service-providers, and funders looking to close the achievement and opportunity gap between White and Asian students compared to Youth of Color.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.

Chair, Dissertation Committee

Date

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First and foremost, I dedicate my dissertation to the vibrant, brilliant youth in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park. Particularly to my students and the ones that participated in the focus groups: your persistence, courage, and love helped me be a better teacher and a better person. Your perspective and willingness to share your experiences has enabled me to continue to be an advocate by your side, demanding that schools systems and adults who lead them serve you better.

I'd like to also thank the heroes who are leading classrooms and schools with a social justice agenda, and *really* willing to do whatever it takes to better engage our young people in Ravenswood in a transformative educational experience.

The support of my committee members has been unbelievable. Barbara, thank you for seeing my vision for this work early on, and advocating with me to see it through. Jeff, your pedagogy, writing, and passion helped me stay focused on youth and constantly reminded me of why this work is so important. Ellen, you're my partner-in-crime. Thanks for taking this journey with me, especially with your guidance on when to step up and when to step back. We have our work cut out for us, and I look forward to continue to work with you in supporting our students.

To my 2011 cohort – I'm glad to have gained another family, and thanks for the laughter and tears along the way. Last but not least, I want to thank my family and friends for encouraging me. It certainly wasn't easy, but you all made it bearable. Thanks for your endless patience and love.

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Paper One: The Transformational Experience of a Ravenswood Educator

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to illuminate my experience as an educator in the Ravenswood City School District (RCSD). Specifically, I highlight my transformation from classroom teacher to lead educator and advocate for students, families, and the community-at-large. In addition, I provide a detailed historical context of Ravenswood¹ youth beyond their elementary years to the Sequoia Union High School District (SUHSD) schools. I began to understand how complex their situation is as it relates to geography, resources, policies, and practices. Ultimately, I hope that the historical background and my narrative can be shared with educators in both districts so they gain validation, perspective, and enthusiasm, and to allow us to chart promising next steps as we create a more articulated K-12 vision and program for East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park youth.

My story tells of a transformational experience as I worked with our sister district to support Ravenswood youth as they entered and progressed through high school. All too often, educators feel isolated in their work (Dussault, Deaudelin, Royer, & Loiselle, 1999), and many ultimately suffer from burn-out where they can no longer

¹ Ravenswood is a small community east of Highway 101 in California's Bay Area. The school district has maintained the name of Ravenswood City School District, and currently serves students residing in the city of East Palo Alto and eastern portion of Menlo Park. I use the term Ravenswood for the youth in these communities that attend RCSD schools.

give 100% (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). During my first year teaching, four different teachers filled the only other teacher position in my grade level. When I participated in collaboration meetings with teachers, professional talk was typically about particular students, lessons planning, and dissecting curriculum. There was little talk about mindset, philosophy, and our own well being as educators. Yet such conversations are pivotal in supporting educators in the deeply vested work done with children and youth on a daily basis (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). To change outcomes for Ravenswood youth, discussions must dig deeper and go beyond *when* and *what* to teach. Instead the conversation should shift to *how* to teach, *how* to inspire, and *how* to care about and for children and youth.

Conversations that focus on *how* to do this work will allow bridges to be built from one classroom teacher to another, to create lessons that are culturally responsive, and to play to students' strengths rather than perceived deficits. Principals in both districts can engage staff in difficult conversations about *whom* is left out of lessons and pushed out of schools on suspensions or expulsions. Communication can be strengthened between districts to create a comprehensive approach to support marginalized youth from transitional kindergarten through their high school graduation (and beyond).

As educational leaders in the state of California, it is imperative to act with a lens of equity. Given recent strides forward, it is clear that the new leadership of both

districts possesses this lens. The superintendents are leading the districts, guiding shifts in policy and mindset in a positive direction for East Palo Alto youth. There is still a great deal of work ahead, yet I am confident that collectively a vast majority, if not all, educators and children who continue to feel isolated and left out can be reached.

Families, students, and community members rely on the collective leadership, vision, and courage of the districts. For the first time in a long time, communication is strong and there is a general willingness to serve students in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park better. There is an incredible opportunity looking ahead to directly impact the life trajectories of youth from Ravenswood.

The Transformational Experience of a Ravenswood Educator

October 2007

It seems unusually colder than it should on an October morning in my portable classroom in East Palo Alto. I'm wearing grey pants that are too long for me, and they sweep the floor as I dash frantically around the classroom to set up for my lesson.

Today my mentor is coming to observe my 8th grade Algebra I lesson and he hopes to see an improvement over the lesson he observed a month prior.

Up next is my boys' class. I am teaching in one of the nation's first established single-gendered schools, where girls are taught separately from boys. Yet this model is failing our students. The year I start at the school, the Academic Performance Index (API) is 597; in sharp contrast, the same year, the school I attended as a child, and that

is only four miles away, has an API score of 961, one of the highest in the state for middle schools this year (California Department of Education, n.d.).

As the bell rings, I give a quick, awkward smile to my mentor before I scold the group of boys who charge into my classroom, “Boys! Boys! Back outside! Re-enter the classroom as though you have some sense!” Well after the final bell rings, there is still chattering and joking going on throughout my class of 18 boys. My class’s capacity, given this different model of schooling, is 20 students, and although I started with 20, two boys, Niguel and Angel already left the school. Angel is in juvenile hall, and Niguel is waiting on a court date for his sentence. Both boys earned the highest two class scores on the diagnostic exam I gave the first day of class only five weeks prior. Their empty seats take a toll on me every single day. I imagine how class would be different with their presence; their sense of humor, intellect, and maturity added another level to my class. When I scan the room and take attendance, I try speeding over their names that still appear on my roster; some days it is easier to breeze on by than others. Yet not a day passes that I don’t think about each of them and his potential to bring value to my class, to his community, to the world.

A week flies by before my post-observation conference with my mentor. I never expected what would come next. Going into the meeting I have several questions about algebraic concepts that are coming up in the unit on which I need clarification (not having a math background and with my only resource a student textbook, I don’t quite

feel confident in teaching the subject). But instead of discussing the mathematical content, my mentor opens a laptop, loads a DVD, and says, “Watch.”

As my eyes are glued to his bright Macbook screen, I throw my hands over my face, and start tearing up. I am mortified. The video shows my back to the class while I write some Algebra problems on the whiteboard. In the 40 seconds I was turned around, two students punch each other, the class reacts, and I yell “SHHHHH” all while my back stays towards them. I had no idea the punches were ever thrown – I was too busy making sure I had the right problems written on the board.

Teach For America told its newbie recruits that things would get much better after the holidays. They were wrong. They never did. How could they? Word got back to me that Angel was being deported to Mexico, and one of my girls stopped coming to class because she got pregnant. The 8th grade English teacher would be replaced three more times before the end of the year. I was the only 8th grade teacher that my students had for the entirety of the year. If things weren't getting any better for my students, then they certainly weren't getting any better for me.

Niguel isn't proud of landing himself in juvenile hall, but in a society that expects him to end up there, combined with the stresses he carries at such a young age, it is almost inevitable. Still, I knew that this wasn't right; that there was no way the situation my students were in was fair, yet the year continued with business as usual. One day at lunch a group of girls comes into my classroom, “Ms. Patel, how come

everyone always leaves us? What did we do?” I cannot remember how I answered, but I know in that moment that any thoughts of quitting or thinking I was failing my students were selfish. I want things to turn out differently for my students, but change needs to start with me – with my expectations and mindset. I have to show them through my actions and commitment that I care – they are just as worthy as my middle school classmates and me. In a nearby community, my classmates and I had endless opportunities afforded to us – my students deserve the same.

My Initial Understanding of East Palo Alto Students

In this section I describe my experience as a first year teacher in the community, and my attempt at serving children. The well being and success of children in East Palo Alto has become my life’s work since I began teaching in the community seven years ago. I grew up privileged, only four miles away from the community, in the town of Los Altos. I first became cognizant of the deep inequities and the sheer difference in life experiences between my East Palo Alto YMCA girlfriends and me during my adolescent years. These stark differences didn’t make sense to me as a young girl, and they still don’t make sense to me today. I will do what I can to push boundaries and critique policies and practices that harm children. I will advocate for more inclusive, equitable policies and practices in school systems.

My first year teaching in Ravenswood was tough, similar to other first-year teachers throughout the country. I was straight out of college, committing two years via

Teach For America (TFA) to a community situated only four miles away from my home community. The context in which I worked took a tremendous toll on my mental and emotional well being; I was exhausted every single day. In just nine months, I went to the doctor's office eleven times. I'm sure I wasn't the only TFA recruit who felt they worked so hard, gave so much, and yet made such small gains and tiny strides with students. I *thought* I was working hard, and I *thought* I was giving so much. I had no idea what that actually meant. I fell victim to the marketing and campaigning that organizations all around me touted: help *save* the children. I felt bad for the children, I knew the children deserved better, and I was there to right all the wrongs in their life. I was wrong. In a matter of months, I was ashamed. I felt like I was set-up, that I was drinking some kind of Kool-Aid that put me in a place of power to *save* my students with a missionary's zeal.

I started declining all TFA-related events, and instead, spent my weekends going to my students' sporting events, or meeting a group of students at the East Palo Alto public library. I definitely needed to work on the content delivery of my lessons, points TFA made clear; yet, in order to teach a lesson that my students could actually learn from, I needed to understand my students individually first, to cater lessons in a way that deliberately engaged them. As much as TFA talked about the need to build relationships with students, I discovered I needed the time and space to actually build them — not because TFA told me, but because I wanted to. I wanted to better

understand why Mauricio was so tired in my class and why Valerie never talked about her father. I wanted to know why Juan was called “El Jefe” on the soccer field, and what music influenced Darnell.

When I started connecting with my students on a more personal level, I realized I had to stop feeling sorry. That was the last thing my students needed from me. Instead, they needed a committed and strong teacher who cared about them as individuals. They needed a teacher who saw them as humans first and students second. I learned this from what they shared with me, and from some veteran teachers in the district whom I grew to admire. These teachers not only had students achieving, but also were earning students’ respect.

After my first year teaching in Ravenswood, my emotions changed. I went from feeling devastated and sad because of the situation my students were in. I moved to feeling frustrated and angry with larger societal issues such as poverty in addition to specific school and district policies that burdened students. How could their lives be disregarded? Why were the circumstances that children face in Ravenswood tolerated, when it would never be tolerated in my hometown? Why were teachers allowed to quit after only two months? More importantly, why were these teachers *hired* to begin with? Some of the teachers I had to work with gave me a better understanding as to why some of my Algebra students had difficulty adding and subtracting. Some of my students were victims of poor teaching; not just poor, but really bad, inadequate teaching. I

began learning that in addition to some of the worst teachers in front of students, there were also some terrible leaders in charge of schools and district departments. I knew that weak leaders and bad teachers would certainly not have a place in the Los Altos School District, my hometown district, where educators seemed to stay in their positions for a lifetime, literally, a lifetime.

I started understanding all the strikes against innocent youth early on – many were “underprepared” and “underachieving” because of pervasive and systemic issues, such as poor leader and teacher quality. Yet amidst the broad negative press about the community and its constant ties to gang violence and drugs, there was magic happening in some classrooms. Some teachers in the district were truly amazing, inspirational, and motivating. They were incredible in how they taught and how they were able to create a warm, welcoming environment – one could *feel* it upon entry. On a visit to a classroom, I asked the teacher, “How were you able to establish such an empowering community of learning?” She replied simply, “My students create our classroom culture; I just help facilitate.” It was clear that she believed so much in her students and expected so much from them, and they, in turn, easily rose to the challenge. Students deserve to have teachers like this every single year of schooling.

This shift in mindset, from feeling sorry for my students to feeling frustrated (yet determined) had a tremendous outcome on my delivery as a teacher, and ultimately my students’ learning. In my first year of teaching, my students’ test scores and overall

life skills were shameful. I had not yet learned my craft. My second year teaching, I made sure to get to know my students, connect with them, and spend more time guiding their development as people first and students second. As a result of these authentic relationships, my students earned the highest test scores across the district in three of the four subjects I taught. Over the course of that year, shy students became confident and apathetic students became engaged.

The Deficit Mindset that Harms Ravenswood Youth

Disadvantaged, underserved, low-achieving, underprepared.

These are typically the words used to describe Ravenswood students. In this section I describe my shift in lens and care for my students during my second year teaching. I also show how disadvantaged, underserved, low-achieving, underprepared, and an overall deficit frame of mind by adults serving Ravenswood youth has impacted their educational journey.

After I crossed the hurdle as a first year teacher, I experienced many interactions with educators and non-profit leaders in the community. In my second year teaching, I realized that many people serving in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park describe students and the community-at-large in a deficit frame. However, the undertone was different, deeper, almost overt, when I started to connect with educators from surrounding communities. Repeated interactions with educators from surrounding

communities made me understand the systemic issues even more. People felt sorry for Ravenswood youth, similar to how I had felt my first year.

During my second year teaching, I wanted to make sure that I better understood my students' experience beyond middle school, and also to see if I could learn from the teaching style of high school teachers to improve my own practice. My mentor scheduled a visit to the different high schools for us to observe classrooms. In each of the high schools, I saw some of my former students who were in advanced courses or college track courses cowering low into their seats. These were the same students that were vibrant, curious, and eager less than a year ago in my classroom – how were they even *allowed* to not participate? Why wasn't there a classroom culture established in which the teacher ensured *all* students felt welcomed and valued? I remember a conversation with one of my shining Algebra students who was in a Geometry class at Menlo Atherton High School, a school in SUHSD. She entered the class 20 minutes late; when she saw me, I could see her eyes light up with joy, and then suddenly her head lowered and her eyes hit the floor. Even though she was thrilled to see me, she thought being late would disappoint me. I knelt down next to her and asked, "*Are you okay?*" She said, "*Kinda, sorry I'm late,*" as if she wanted to ease my disappointment. I responded, "*Don't be sorry, what's going on?*" because I wanted to understand her situation. She explained, "*My mom's car broke down so I had to walk to school, but you know that I have a lot of brothers and sisters so I had to walk them to school first.*" I

said, *“Thank you for being a great older sister, and I’m happy to see you.”* In that moment she smiled and she knew that I was not disappointed at all, and that I still cared about her life outside of school. I still don’t know why her own teacher never inquired about her well being that morning.

After my years teaching, I served as a district administrator, and then most recently, as a school administrator. As a district and site administrator, I coordinated several teacher groups from M-A to come to observe Ravenswood classrooms. At the end of the observations, we met as a group to discuss what we observed. I was dumbfounded when one teacher said that she was surprised to see that all the students were sitting in their seats. I remember thinking to myself, *“Sitting in their seats? That’s what you noticed? Of course they do! Why wouldn’t they?”* It was in that moment I realized the expectations in Ravenswood for Youth of Color were different than the expectations for the same Youth of Color just over the freeway at M-A. This comment reminded me of my visit to M-A, when I saw classrooms full of Youth of Color, with a new teacher desperate to gain control of the class. In addition, during my observation at M-A I could guess the type of class I was going to observe by just peeking into the classroom. Advanced Placement (AP) and college track classes were mainly filled with White and Asian students, while remedial courses were filled with Youth of Color. My students were being isolated and tracked into low non-college track classes with new teachers. I knew this wasn’t fair, and this isn’t what education experts suggested;

instead, researchers assert that the best teachers teach students that need their support the most (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). If this was already known, why weren't school practices at M-A and other schools aligned to these recommendations? I figured it was a matter of lack of courage, and the unwillingness of leaders, teachers and staff members not willing to do whatever it would take to best support students. After all, I experienced this in Ravenswood, too.

Another M-A staff member chimed in stating that she noticed so many students were participating in class. I also was perturbed that someone noted students participating. I thought to myself, "Of course students participate; they should be leading the class!" I remembered the advice I got from a superb Ravenswood teacher during my first year teaching, that the classroom should be student-led. The words of some M-A educators continue to haunt me and make me realize that there is a lot of work to be done on the part of adults in order to ensure better outcomes for the youth.

As a site administrator, I became more involved in articulation meetings for 8th grade students. I would do as much as I possibly could to get the most up-to-date information from all the high schools so I could accurately inform parents and students. At times, I had to call the school as an anonymous caller to get particular information. Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) courses were dismantled in SUHSD because the district felt they were not serving students well (a policy I was thrilled to learn about since SDAIE courses created heavy cases of tracking in the

schools). During high school registration, I called a school to inquire about SDAIE courses as they related to the following school year. To my surprise, I was told over the phone that although SDAIE courses were no longer technically offered, the bilingual teacher was “hand-picking” students to fill two classes. More recently, after a decision had been reached to offer a regular-track geometry course at all high schools in SUHSD for freshmen, I found out that M-A still had not put this into practice. After reviewing data, having joint meetings for a couple of years, and agreeing on next steps to support students, change was still hard to come by.

A combination of my own experiences and observations, in addition to purposely avoiding practical changes to benefit all students, has made me understand that the *hardest* work is still ahead. The deficit mindset, putting adults’ needs before students’, and sheer lack of courage has kept real change from happening. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell’s (2008) statement sums up some of the issues that continue to plague both districts, “Because the education system in this country has the knowledge and capacity to provide a quality education to all children and chooses to act as though it is tirelessly trying to figure out how to do that, we have systemic cowardice” (p. 187). I started to understand how vast the sense of hopelessness was spread amongst stakeholders. Ravenswood students’ needs are placed low on the totem pole when non-profits and districts make resource decisions. The deficit framing of Ravenswood students was so deep and pervasive; it was as if there wasn’t much reason to make

things just since Ravenswood students would fail anyway. In a recent SUHSD board meeting discussing boundary lines, a community member from Atherton kept referring to Ravenswood youth as “those children” in a way that allowed her to keep her own children separate from East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park youth. Despite the negative views on the community and children, I know that the community of Ravenswood is filled with richness. It certainly is not the same kind of wealth that surrounded my friends and me who grew up just four short miles away in Los Altos. Yet the assets of Ravenswood are obvious to community members and educators who have deeply connected to the youth in profound ways.

The Richness of Ravenswood

The way in which Ravenswood students inquire about the world they live in, regardless if they have ever been on an airplane, or have gone to summer camp every summer, exceeds my curiosity about the world at their age. I couldn't see the globe as an interconnected place as a young teenager, where cultures and traditions collide, even though I was privileged enough to travel halfway around the globe at my students' age. My first year teaching in 2007, I was fortunate to host members of the United States Army in my class. One of my students asked directly (a question I was dying to hear the answer to myself), “*So why are we fighting in the war anyway? Do you believe it's the right thing to do?*” Although the soldier gave a trivial answer, I was proud of my student for having the courage to ask a question many of us in the room were thinking. I

was not exposed to this type of courage growing up in a sheltered community. Many of my classmates and I followed the rules as they were given to us, whether we thought they were fair or not. Thinking outside of the box was not necessarily encouraged in our homes or at school.

Students in Ravenswood are mostly Latino, with a sizeable number of African American and Pacific Islander students. The demographics of the city of East Palo Alto have shifted significantly over the past 30 years. In the early 1900s, the community was overwhelmingly white, then between the 1960s and the 1990s Black, and now in the past 20 years, it is majority Latino (Edwards, 2001). Although the city has had significant shifts in demographics, the community is vibrant with each culture's traditions, clothing, and food, which permeate throughout East Palo Alto. On any given day across the different school campuses, you can find a group of students playing Double Dutch, another group cooing to the sounds from their ukuleles, and another calling out "¡Pásale!" on the soccer field. If we tap into this cultural wealth and look at youth through a lens focused on the assets they carry, we may be better able to serve them. An asset-based approach is one that should be shared by educators and leaders from East Palo Alto and its neighboring cities of Palo Alto, Atherton, and Menlo Park. This way, youth are embraced and educators build on their strengths, regardless of their background or their home community.

Historical Background and Policy Implications for Ravenswood Youth

In this section I describe the evolution of district policies that have situated Ravenswood youth differently from their peers in surrounding communities for years. I explain my experience in understanding the plethora of issues students from Ravenswood face when transitioning to high school. I also include comparative data within RCSD schools and between other feeder schools to the Sequoia Union high schools.

My involvement in high school transition started seven years ago as an 8th grade teacher when I began to identify students who were misplaced in math courses in high school. That is, my former students who received high grades of A's or B's in my Algebra class *and* scored proficient or advanced on the Algebra I California Standards Test (CST) were forced to repeat Algebra I in high school. I wrote teacher recommendations, which were disregarded during the emotionally charged high school registration day. Many high school guidance counselors ignored the recommendations and placed students differently. Not only did counselors place students differently, but at times, literally placed them out of college-ready classes. Instead of encouraging my students to enroll in college credit classes like Spanish for Native Speakers, they were counseled out of these and placed into courses such as Ceramics. I saw it happen every single year I worked as an educator in Ravenswood between 2007 and 2013.

My heightened frustration led me to ask questions, but few were able to give me direct answers. I dug deeper to understand the problem district-wide. After asking teachers and principals at other RCSD school sites about their process to help transition students to high school, I learned that there was not a comprehensive approach to this process. Each school operated on their own, with some schools able to provide much more support than others. Clearly, a more concerted, collective effort on the part of both districts was needed to ensure greater success of students through the transition.

The divide.

Students residing in the Ravenswood attendance area are assigned to one of three traditional comprehensive SUHSD high schools via a boundary map adopted in 1986. Through many conversations with RCSD and SUHSD staff, I learned about the rationale behind the boundary map. I got an original copy of the 1986 map, and noticed that the region of East Palo Alto was divided differently than any other community. This is where I began to understand the issues that plagued Ravenswood students at a much deeper level.

Visibly, one can recognize the peculiar boundaries drawn on the eastside of the map (see Appendix A). East Palo Alto, though less than three-square miles, has been assigned boundaries that divide the city to send students to several high schools. The boundary map gives insight to how surrounding neighborhoods are divided in comparison. The map shows the proximity of each high school to corresponding

Ravenswood addresses. In a community where the main mode of transportation for many students is a public school bus or walking, proximity to a school plays a pivotal role. The community of Ravenswood, when compared to surrounding areas, is sliced the most. In other words, the community is divided by sending students to three different high schools. Additionally, families in Ravenswood have high mobility rates; many families move multiple times during the course of a student's elementary schooling. Although they may move within their community and remain at the same elementary school, their high school assignment may change multiple times. M-A is by far the closest high school and only about one mile away, yet some students are assigned to Carlmont, which is about eleven miles away (up to a 45 minute bus ride) from the community.

This boundary map shows that not only are students from East Palo Alto involuntarily bussed to the public high schools in SUHSD, but they are also split up so that a critical mass of Ravenswood students are not attending any single high school. The way students from the eastside are split up and sent to schools far away provides a starting point for understanding the inequities that exist within the district. Because of the divide: (1) students are involuntarily-bussed to schools far away from East Palo Alto, and further are unable to attend high school with peers with whom they had been attending school since grade school; (2) parent access to high school campuses is limited; and (3) teachers and principals from across the two districts are unable to

effectively collaborate. The policy cycle and context of high school assignment in SUHSD has its roots in a decision made decades ago.

The history.

The saga of the boundary map dates back to the 1970s when Ravenswood High School (RHS), a public high school in East Palo Alto, was still in existence. The school opened in 1958, enrolling students of many different ethnicities including whites, Blacks, Japanese, Pacific Islanders, and Latino. In 1963, enrollment soared to over 1,200 students. More than half the school's population was Black by the late 1960s and by 1970, nearly 90% of students at RHS were Black (Jones, 2006). Soon after, student enrollment plummeted. In an effort to diversify the student population and increase student enrollment at Ravenswood High, the SUHSD devised a plan to integrate high schools in the area. In 1971, reforms to create a more robust educational program and introduce two-way bussing brought students of color to the SUHSD schools and white students to RHS. The new and improved RHS lasted only a few years. RHS closed in 1976, citing issues of low attendance and cost savings as its primary considerations². Once the school shut down in 1976, it was determined the children of the Ravenswood community would attend schools in SUHSD by way of a desegregation mandate.

Finally, in 1986 the district adopted a boundary map for the entire attendance area of

² The history of Ravenswood High School is noted by several sources, as its' opening and eventual closure was a highly politicized affair. Each source, however, cites attendance rates and money savings as primary reasons for the schools' closure (Edwards, 2001; Jones, 2006; Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, 2013b).

SUHSD. The policy has been in effect for nearly thirty years, and yet the process is still messy and unfair. Coupled with this unjust policy, there were unjust practices from high school guidance counselors that complicated matters even more.

I noticed that my former students were being placed in courses below their ability in high school, and my concern increased. As I dug deeper into the issue of misplacement of my students in high school classes³, I began to understand the history of practice and policy that has not provided appropriate guidance to youth and families in East Palo Alto. Whereas high school staff members and counselors inspired and challenged me to take more difficult courses when I was in middle school, the SUHSD high school counselors were telling Ravenswood middle school students to back out of classes they wanted to take. Again, I didn't understand why my support from high school counselors as a middle school student was so different, almost opposite from the support my students were receiving from their high school counselors. I knew I would have to keep pushing to understand the reasoning behind this *counseling down*⁴ of

³ A full report was issued by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area with the support of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation addressing math misplacement for Students of Color by Bay Area high schools (Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, 2013a).

⁴ I use the term *counseling down* to illustrate the process my students endured when working with particular high school counselors. These counselors used their power and low expectations of East Palo Alto youth to suggest classes that would not earn them college credit. Often times, *counseling down* occurred even when objective measures such as the California Standards Test (CST) scores showed these students had earned academic merit to enroll in the college-track courses. Essentially, students who earned academic merit to be in particular classes were placed in classes below their ability level based on perceptions and assumptions held by SUHSD staff.

Ravenswood students, and furthermore, to see if there were other policies or practices harming Ravenswood youth.

With the advent of the boundary map in 1986, students in SUHSD have been assigned to schools based on their home address. Students and families also have the option to submit a transfer request via the school's Open Enrollment Policy, which allows them to request placement in any of SUHSD's traditional comprehensive high schools. Although the Open Enrollment Policy, commonly misconceived as "school choice," gives the illusion that families have the option of attending the high school that they choose, this often is not the case due to enrollment numbers. Approximately 75% of requests are met in SUHSD each year (Lianides, 2014a), though there is no distinction between first, second, and third choice. The SUHSD superintendent revealed at a recent meeting that proximity to a school played a powerful role in family participation in the transfer request process (Lianides, 2014b). Specifically, the majority of transfer requests from RCSD were from families requesting to transfer out of Carlmont, the high school furthest away from the Ravenswood community. In addition, RCSD students who opted to attend East Palo Alto Academy, a Stanford New Schools public charter high school, are mainly students who were assigned to schools other than M-A, which is the closest in proximity to Ravenswood. These trends provide two data points that reflect how Ravenswood parents and students are voicing their concern about Carlmont being too far from home.

The impact of policy.

Although SUHSD established the boundary map in response to a desegregation mandate in 1986, this order has had adverse and perhaps unintended consequences on Ravenswood students. Ravenswood, a small close-knit K-8 district, sends about 250 eighth grade students to the SUHSD comprehensive high schools each year (see Appendix E). Ravenswood youth are split across several high schools in predominantly White, affluent neighborhoods vastly different from their own. The freshman class of the 2011-2012 school year attended the following schools by number:

Table 1

Distribution of Ravenswood 9th grade students in SUHSD, 2011-2012 academic year

Menlo-Atherton	Woodside	Carlmont	Sequoia	Total
113	56	53	10	232

Few Ravenswood students attend Sequoia High School because this high school is not included in the Ravenswood boundaries (see Appendix B). Those students who attend Sequoia High School are likely to have had their transfer request granted. The following table shows the high school breakdown of each feeder school in Ravenswood for the 2011-2012 freshmen class.

Table 2

Distribution of RCSD 9th Grade Students in SUHSD by their Elementary School

	Menlo- Atherton	Woodside	Carlmont	Sequoia
Belle Haven	28	6	4	7
Willow Oaks	24	5	3	0
Chavez	24	24	19	1
McNair	31	7	19	0
Costaño	6	15	7	1
Total	113	56	53	10

Therefore, even within the same school, Ravenswood students have been assigned or granted a transfer request to any of the four district high schools. In sharp contrast, some other feeder *districts* feed almost entirely into a single high school.

Table 3

Following a Cohort of Students from an Elementary District to their Dominant High School

District	Dominant HS	# of students who attend dominant HS/Total students in district
Las Lomas	Menlo-Atherton	71/73
Menlo Park	Menlo-Atherton	132/136
San Carlos	Carlmont	168/192
Woodside Elementary	Woodside	17/18

Given the data from tables 1-3, the treatment of Ravenswood youth is vastly different from any of the other communities within the district. The bussing policy appears, then, to serve the desegregation mandate of the mainly White high schools in the 1980's and 1990's across SUHSD, and not the needs or preferences of East Palo Alto families and youth today.

Aside from the actual division of students, the transition from middle school to high school is a difficult time socially for many students. In Benner and Graham's longitudinal Los Angeles based study (2007), they found that Black students feel less school belonging than their White peers in grade nine. As a result, students may feel like they do not belong to the new high school community, especially during the transition period, and can become disengaged from school. As a related study by Schmakel (2008) demonstrates, almost half of students who end up dropping out of high school do so because they feel disengaged from their schools. Ravenswood students may feel a heightened level of disengagement and social uneasiness in high school since they are bussed out of their community, they attend school with peers who are socially different from them, and they know very few of their classmates. In addition to the social pressures that Ravenswood students may face, research, for example studies by Mizelle & Irvin (1999), Parrish, Poland, Arellanes, Ernandes, & Viloría (2011), and Cauley & Jovanovich (2006), indicate that making the transition to high school is easier when middle and high schools communicate on a regular basis.

Exceptions to the rule.

Research indicates high schools that provide a successful transition for students streamline a feeder school model (Parrish et al., 2011; Schiller, 1999). That is, students from a particular school (or district) are all assigned to one high school. This is the case for most students in SUHSD; only Ravenswood and parts of Redwood City are exceptions. In WestEd's (2011) study on transition to high school, the authors point to the following implications for policy and practice:

To simplify cross-school collaboration and transition activities and potentially reduce costs, district administrators should consider streamlining school feeder patterns. Streamlined feeder patterns not only facilitate coordination among staff, but also minimize disruption to cohorts of students as they move through the grades. Respondents in several study high schools reported advantages associated with many of their students having known each other since elementary school. (p. 21)

Continuing to comply with the desegregation mandate established decades ago does not serve the children of Ravenswood well. The demographics of the East Palo Alto area are vastly different from several decades ago, and the desegregation mandate for this population does not make sense. Even so, it is coming at the expense of Ravenswood youth not being able to successfully transition to high school.

At the same time that Ravenswood students face the adversity of being split up, some students from an affluent community with tremendous social capital are exempted from the boundary map policy. Specifically, students of Las Lomas are exempt from the district's high school placement policy, due to strong parent involvement the year the boundary map was released. Therefore, students who attend Las Lomas need only to fill out a transfer request form and they are automatically granted approval for a high school transfer (Hartwig, 2011). The parents in Las Lomas made the argument that they wanted all of their middle school children to be admitted together to the same high school, a plausible argument, but one that was only granted for this one wealthier, White, westside community. Although some of the students who attend middle school in Las Lomas have backyards that border the fence of Woodside, these students are afforded the opportunity for an automatic transfer approval to Menlo Atherton, due to the social and cultural capital exemplified to the board almost three decades ago. (This exception had not been widely publicized, until recently when a few Ravenswood advocates became aware of the exception.)

If parents from Las Lomas, and ultimately the school board members, understood the argument for keeping a cohort of middle school students together for their years in high school, why was the boundary map drawn such that it affects Ravenswood students in precisely the opposite manner? This exemption is perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the district's policies—providing more access and opportunity

to a group of students who come from affluent communities and hold strong social capital, while at the same time denying this exemption to students in need. I became even more frustrated learning about this exception, and knew there was something more I needed to do.

Using My Frustration to Spur Action

There was no doubt in my mind that there were clear inequities RCSD students faced while transitioning to high school. I was frustrated for a long time, but realized my approach would have to be different. If I stayed frustrated without speaking or doing anything, nothing was going to change. I had to take action for my students. For example, several years ago when I worked as the district's Math Coordinator, I showed specific cases of the misplacement of Ravenswood students in courses below their ability; yet I was ignored. In the fall of 2011, I brought up the issue again, as another class of students was misplaced. This time, the new assistant superintendent looked into the matter more deeply. She, too, understood that this was an internal issue at the high school level, though it wasn't isolated to only SUHSD⁵. The *Held Back* (Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, 2013a) report documents the case of SUHSD misplacing students of color from a particular school district (Ravenswood) in math classes more so than students from any other feeder district.

⁵ The report shares the wide practice of misplacement of Youth of Color in high schools across the Bay Area.

Since the release of the report, math placement trends have not been flawless, but there has been a marked difference in more appropriate math placement for Ravenswood youth because of the concentrated effort of SUHSD. It was the willingness of the two districts placing an importance on the matter that ultimately changed practice.

As a teacher, I knew that my former students were forced to repeat content because they would meet with me after school to show me their high school schedules. When I worked as a site and district office administrator I learned that *counseling down* and misplacement was characteristic of the entire district. Through my own transition from teacher to administrator, I have channeled my frustration with inequitable and racist practices at SUHSD to foster productive change; after all, the practices in Ravenswood are not flawless either. The success of Ravenswood youth will depend on the collaborative effort between both districts, and the first step is regular, productive, and honest communication between the two districts, which has started taking place. On January 15th, 2014, the SUHSD school board discussed a new boundary map that assigns all Ravenswood students to M-A, the closest school to the community (see Appendix C). If this policy passes, the map would go into effect for the 2015-2016 academic year. In the interim, Superintendent Lianides and his team are working hard to try to fulfill all Ravenswood requests for M-A as their home school for the year 2014-2015. The SUHSD board already approved a policy that allows Ravenswood's Open Enrollment requests to be considered before the general population. The passage of this

interim policy leads me to believe that the board sees the issue of the current boundary map as problematic and unjust for the youth of East Palo Alto. I hope this momentum keeps up, as the final vote on a new boundary map awaits the board in June 2014.

There have been several board meetings about the boundary map. Engaged trustees, educators and parents in these meetings have spread the discussion to high school students. Recently, a Woodside High School senior interviewed me for her senior exhibition project on the topic of Ravenswood youth transitioning to SUHSD. Several M-A magazine and newspaper articles have included pieces on the boundary map. Two student reflections from the issue on diversity are included below:

We have some thinking to do. Our school prides itself on its extremely diverse student body: M-A is a virtual color wheel so vivid that even its motto reflects student demographics. However, the blatant racial and socioeconomic stratification in higher-level classes, at lunch-time, within the staff and administration, and basically every aspect of student life would suggest that diversity makes us weaker rather than stronger. (Gilles, 2013, p. 27)

The contrast between Sequoia Union High School students who travel over 11 miles to get to school every day and those who pedal through Menlo Park's leafy avenues is impossible to ignore. The majority of the district boundaries are unsurprising; many M-A students are here because of their proximity to the

school. However, kids living in a small portion of East Palo Alto are sent to schools miles away from their homes, seemingly without explanation. (K. Weiner, 2013, p. 7)

Students are questioning their peers and staff on the basis of embracing diversity. One student points to many aspects of the campus that lack diversity, though M-A seemingly prides itself on diversity. At the same time, another student realizes that some of the inequities that exist today are given no explanation, showing that these policies and practices are outdated. As a participant in many board meetings, in addition to many, many individual conversations with adults engaged on the topic, the importance of bringing in the student voices are so important. The students at M-A are beginning to speak up about their opinions, yet at the same time, it may be most important to consult the students that have gone through the rough transition themselves.

Conclusion

As a teacher, district and site administrator, and now as a director in a foundation that supports the community of East Palo Alto, I have kept high school transition for Ravenswood youth as one of my top priorities. Even if the new boundary map passes, the hard work is still ahead. A greater concentration of Ravenswood youth at M-A is just the first step of many to better support the youth of East Palo Alto. I have confidence that teachers and administrators can collectively find ways to listen to

students, and welcome *all* students. Most importantly, if educators and leaders promise to reconsider any deficit mindsets in relation to youth or each other, the work ahead will become easier.

Changes in policy make little difference if there are no changes in practice or outcomes as a result. If more Ravenswood youth will be attending M-A as early as the 2014-2015 school year, both districts should begin to prepare for this transition. Changes can be made programmatically and perhaps even structurally. However, these may be some of the easier changes. Perhaps the most difficult changes the districts need to face are based on mindset. How do we view the community of East Palo Alto? How do we see Ravenswood youth? What are educators willing to do to best support and serve them?

There is an incredible opportunity to move forward with both districts in supporting the youth of Ravenswood; to put the tumultuous past behind, to be courageous and transformative in our practices. Specifically, district and school leaders should act in ways that demonstrate transformative leadership, in that leaders of schools and districts don't shy away from conversations of social justice (Shields, 2010). That in fact, these discussions are at the forefront of what the schools and districts prioritize. For the first time in a while, RCSD is equipped with strong school leaders, and many talented teachers. At the same time, SUHSD staff and school board members have understood the plight of Ravenswood students and are willing to have open

conversations about equity. There is movement in conversation, and I hope this leads to movement with *real* actions in the name of equity and social justice.

Finally, I hope that all stakeholders can learn from the experiences and voices of the students. My second paper is builds off my Student Voice (2012) study, and includes data from focus groups with former Ravenswood students who are now attending a school in SUHSD. The compilation of these voices will allow educators and students' peers to better understand their experience. Their stories can impact the way that the districts restructure support services to Ravenswood youth. Finally, Paper 3 gives recommendations based on Paper 1 and Paper 2, and charts a specific call to action involving educators, service-providers, and funders.

Paper Two: Listening to and Learning from Our Students

Miriam Magaña submitted a letter to the Sequoia Union High School District's Board of Trustees in the fall of 2013. She illuminates the distinct policy differences that directly impact students of East Palo Alto in comparison to their wealthier peers. Miriam's letter, if nothing else, brings to light the perspective of someone who navigated the process of attending a high school that fit her needs. Even after successfully completing college, she continues to wonder about her fate had she attended Carlmont and endured a rough transition to a school outside her community. She reminds us how important it is to reach out to and hear from East Palo Alto students going through the process of transitioning to and through high school.

September 25, 2013

Dear Board of Trustees:

My name is Miriam Magaña, and I am the special programs coordinator at the 49ers Academy, where I am part of the high school transition team and lead a private high school application class. I grew up in East Palo Alto, attended the 49ers Academy, and was assigned to attend Carlmont High School. I had several cousins and friends who lived in the same apartment complex as I did who dropped out of Carlmont, and although specific reasons why they did vary from one person to the next, I will talk a bit about a few that they had in common.

Having to wake-up at six in the morning to be bussed to Carlmont, which is 11 miles away, when M-A is only 3 miles away, makes absolutely no sense to me. Now add in the fact that my parents would have to drive that same distance for school meetings, appointments, or to pick me up when I wasn't feeling well. Don't you think that this affects parent engagement? Then I thought, well at least I can go to school with all my friends, yet I was wrong once again.

We are a community here in East Palo Alto, students go to school together from K-8th, and suddenly after 8th grade because of the inequalities of our current boundary map our community is, and has been for almost 30 years, completely broken-up. This cannot be legal and it needs to change, but after attending the second meeting on the topic at Menlo-Atherton High School, I realized that this would not be an easy battle.

We had a room full of Las Lomas parents fighting the rumors that their community was at risk of being sent to Woodside, which they mentioned was not a good enough school for their kids, would depreciate their home values, and would break-up their “perfectly functioning eco-system”. My immediate thoughts were, well what is the difference between your community and my community that entitles you to have the privilege to choose? Why are your home values more important than the education of my community?

Yet, I waited and waited for someone to say something about what is happening to Ravenswood on the map that was being projected on the large screen, but it wasn't until the very end that two people spoke up, and up to this date I feel like a coward for not being the third.

I did not attend Carlmont High School. I went to Eastside College Prep and I always wonder, would I have graduated from high school and attended my dream college if I had gone to Carlmont? I hope and pray that this does not remain a topic of conversation but an actionable item and that we finally give students in our community a fair shot to an education. We deserve it, just like everyone else.

*Thank you for listening,
Miriam Magaña*

Miriam remembers her journey so vividly and understands that she was extremely fortunate to be able to successfully complete her high school and college degree. She continues to stay engaged with youth from Ravenswood. She hopes her experience and guidance can help current students and families navigate the difficulty of transitioning to and through high school, regardless of where they attend. She works as a staff

member at the San Francisco 49ers Academy and also works at Menlo-Atherton High School in the MyLife program (see Appendix D for program details).

The Problem and the Purpose of the Study

This study captures student voices around their elementary schooling experience in Ravenswood City School District (RCSD), a public K-8 school district mainly serving Youth of Color living in poverty, and their transition to and through high school in Sequoia Union High School District (SUHSD), a public 9-12 school district serving youth from many different ethnicities. The focus was on their distinct experiences in and reflections about middle and high school, and more specifically around their transition.

It is crucial to understand the data that continue to worry educational leaders in both districts. For the last five years, approximately 250 students from Ravenswood have entered the four traditional public high schools in SUHSD each year. After completing the first year of high school, 30% of Ravenswood's 2011 freshmen class had not earned enough credits to be in sophomore standing. Fifty-three percent of all 2011 Ravenswood freshmen had a Grade Point Average (GPA) below 2.0. Ravenswood's freshmen class of 2012 also followed this trend in that 43% of them had earned a GPA below a 2.0 after just their first semester of high school⁶.

⁶ The data included in this paragraph are from a report compiled by the board for the San Francisco 49ers Academy ("49ers Academy high school transition: Initiative of 2013-2014," 2012).

While some students struggled academically in middle school and continued this pattern in high school, others had been top-performers in Ravenswood before departing for SUHSD. There is great reason to be concerned when even Ravenswood's top-performing students fail. Only 14 out of 38 students from the 2012-2013 freshmen class who were former Costaño School & the 49ers Academy (a K-8 school in RCSD) students had a GPA of 2.0 or higher after their first semester of freshmen year, whereas 75% from the same class had a GPA above a 2.0 in 8th grade. Although some top-performing students begin failing almost immediately after leaving Ravenswood, others continue on a successful pathway. This study seeks to explain why some students may continue to excel and others do not.

Almost all Ravenswood youth are Youth of Color. In 1996, district-wide there were 1,017 entering freshmen in SUHSD who were Youth of Color, and 925 who identified as White or Asian. Four years later in 2000, only 54% percent of the Youth of Color graduated high school, and a dismal 9% graduated college-ready. On the other hand, 75% of White and Asian students graduated high school in 2000, and 39% graduated college-ready (University of California, Los Angeles, n.d.). For the class of 2012, 69% of White and Asian students completed A-G⁷ requirements, versus 21% of African Americans, 24% of Latinos, and 18% of Pacific Islanders. In 2010, only 11% of

⁷ The Subject Requirement, more commonly known as A-G, are required courses students need to take in high school that makes them eligible to apply to the University of California or a California State University ("A-G Guide," n.d.).

Ravenswood youth graduated having met the A-G requirements, and in 2012 this percentage rose slightly to 16% (Sequoia Union High School District, 2013). Over the last decade, there has been a *widening* gap in achievement and college-readiness between White and Asian students and Youth of Color, most drastically seen in the rate of college readiness. Whereas White and Asian students' college-readiness rate has increased from 39% to 69%, a difference of 30%, Youth of Color's college-readiness rate only increased from 9% to 21%, with a difference of only 12%.

When Ravenswood youth transition to high school, of the 358 grade eighth students entering SUHSD District from Ravenswood District in 2005, only 130, or less than 40%, received a high school diploma 4 years later; during this same time frame, 82% of their White peers and 89% of their Asian peers received a high school diploma (Sequoia Union High School District, 2012). Much of the recent graduation rate data has measured former RCSD high school graduation rates after five years of high school (Castrechini, 2013) . There are some data points that show graduation rates of Ravenswood students as higher, yet these data equate five-year graduation the same as four-year, which is not typical when analyzing graduation rates of their affluent, White and Asian peers. Ravenswood youth deserve the same opportunities to graduate from high school as their wealthier, White peers. High school graduates are healthier, less likely to engage in criminal activities, and less likely to be on government assistance programs (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Benner & Graham, 2007). Ravenswood's Youth of

Color deserve these positive life outcomes linked to high school graduation as much as their peers in SUHSD.

In recent years, local school district leaders have gathered and analyzed data on the achievement gap of former RCSD students attending SUHSD schools, and the conclusions seem to be the same as they were a decade ago: RCSD students fail and drop out at a much higher rate than their upper- and middle-class White and Asian peers, and also at rates higher than any other feeder district. The quantitative data reviewed shows a critical aspect of the educational experience of East Palo Alto youth. Qualitative data has the potential to add value to the data points collected, to bring depth and breadth beyond the sheer numbers. Students' stories are important to consider when making policy changes and program improvements specific to their experience transitioning to and through high school (Kane & Chimwayange, 2013; Kelly & Perkins, 2012; Mitra, 2013).

Background

In the summer of 2012, a SUHSD staff member and I conducted a Student Voice study about former RCSD students' perspectives on their elementary and high school years (Patel, 2012). The findings from this preliminary study found several pertinent themes. First, transportation is a prominent topic when students think about transitioning to high school. The time it takes to travel to and from school is different based on the proximity to a high school, yet almost all former Ravenswood students are

waking up at about 6:00 a.m. This is because the mode of transportation varies. Students traveling to the schools furthest away rely on school busses, while school busses are not provided for the closest school to the community so a majority of students walk to school. There are also logistics, such as busses being full or late, that have left a negative impression on students. Second, programs at high schools address needs differently. For example, the same program could be operating at a few schools, but participation by East Palo Alto students at each site varies greatly. There is a lack of clarity amongst school and community-based programs in terms of the target audience and the unique services provided. Finally, we found that academic counseling for Ravenswood students is inadequate. Students and their families needed better understanding of the systems in high school such as high school course offerings and its impact on college qualifications. In addition, homework habits differed greatly amongst the students and those students with the highest level of homework completion were often associated with a college prep program.

This evaluation study is a follow-up to the Student Voice study conducted in the summer of 2012. The pilot study from 2012 collected data from 31 student interviews. The questions were very specific and guided in part by district input. We were on a tight schedule, with little room for follow-up questions. After conducting this initial pilot study I knew there was an opportunity to build from these preliminary findings. I wanted to be able to meet with students in a familiar setting, during the school year

(instead of during summer break). Many of the 31 students with whom my colleague and I previously met didn't know either of us. Reaching out to small groups of my former students would allow them a higher level of comfort. They could then tell their story in a way that truly portrayed their feelings and experiences deeper. As a result of this pilot study, I wanted to make sure I understood the students' experiences more intimately to build on what we initially gathered.

The data reviewed through the years indicate that Ravenswood students face a plethora of challenges including social hardship, transportation, and academic support during their transitional year and through their high school experience. There is need to dig deeper into this preliminary study and define solutions and next steps. For this evaluation study then, the question that guides this study is, "*What are the experiences of former Ravenswood youth to and through their transition to a Sequoia Union High School District school, and what policies and programs can best support them?*"

The purpose is to be able to use the findings to align services, programs, curriculum, and policies between both districts to better support Ravenswood youth to and through their transition to high school. In addition, in the third paper, I will recommend programs and policies for the districts based on my evaluation.

Methodology

The Student Voice study conducted in 2012 provided data points in examining a breadth of student experiences, and there was a need to gather data that would provide

more depth on this issue of transition. Therefore, I made specific changes in the study procedures. The 2012 study only allowed for a preset number of questions, due to the structure of the interviews; I was not the interviewer, and instead took field notes as my colleague hosted the interviews with the students. For this study, I wanted to be the interviewer, and decided the ideal focus group size would be 2-5 students at a location in which they were familiar. Students were at ease and shared their perspective honestly. I took out the component of the video recorder and dressed informally to reduce the power dynamic as much as possible. In addition, I was also able to ask follow-up questions that were crucial to a better understanding of some of the experiences students talked about.

In order to engage youth in the focus groups, I used convenience sampling with effects from snowball sampling⁸ (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Given my connections to former 49ers Academy⁹ students, I posted information for the focus groups on the San Francisco 49ers Academy Alumni Facebook group. All focus group participants were 49ers Academy alumni and all are current SUHSD students, with the exception of one student who recently dropped out to join a GED¹⁰ program. Because I used to work with

⁸ Convenience sampling is taking a sample of subjects who are convenient to connect with, while snowball sampling using subjects to connect with potential other subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

⁹ The San Francisco Forty Niners Academy (also referred to as the 49ers Academy) is part of a public school in the Ravenswood City School District in East Palo Alto. I was a teacher at the 49ers Academy from 2007-2009, and served as its Academic Dean from 2011-2013.

¹⁰ The term GED, or General Educational Development test, is often referred to as the exam to earn a California high school equivalency certificate (*General Education Development Test (GED)*, n.d.).

the students in middle school either as a teacher or site administrator, they knew, respected, and trusted me. Our conversations in these focus groups were relaxed and allowed me to follow up on issues unique to each conversation. Though the collective group of students with whom I met across all three focus groups was comprised of 49ers Academy alumni, they share many similarities with other former RCSD students.

Data collection.

Focus group 1.

Several students responded to my Facebook post and I scheduled my first focus group with two students. Both were sophomores at Woodside High School, and the focus group was conducted at the 49ers Academy on a day school was not in session. Moala and Yolanda are the names I use in this paper to maintain their confidentiality.

Focus group 2.

The second focus group was conducted at Menlo-Atherton High School (M-A) and current 49ers Academy staff members helped recruit willing participants. Three freshmen students participated in this focus group, all of whom are students at M-A, have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and are enrolled in the Boys and Girls Club program MyLife at M-A. The MyLife program is an after school support program, serving the demographics of students that typically struggle in their transitional year of high school, and currently enrolls 40 students at M-A. This all freshman focus group, sharing certain key influential factors (IEPs and MyLife participation) was helpful in

that it provided insight on the students' transitional year as they are currently experiencing it. I will use the student names Juan, Pablo, and Martha to maintain these students' confidentiality.

Focus group 3.

The third focus group was also conducted at the 49ers Academy. There were five students who participated: four current Woodside students – one senior and three freshmen – and one student who was previously enrolled at Woodside and now enrolled in a GED program just before the start of her senior year. This mixed-age group was helpful in that it provided a comprehensive perspective on the high school experience. In addition, the older students were able to provide some brief guidance and tips after difficult topics surfaced for the freshmen. I will use the student names Ana, Raul, Gisselle, Yajaira, and Sahara to maintain these students' confidentiality. Below is a table summarizing the focus groups:

Table 4

Summary of Focus Groups' Composition

	# of students	HS attending	Girls: Boys
Group 1	2	Woodside	1 : 1
Group 2	3	Menlo-Atherton	1 : 2
Group 3	5	4 Woodside, 1 GED	4 : 1

In total, I was able to speak with 10 students: 6 girls and 4 boys. Nine students are still currently enrolled in a traditional comprehensive high school, while one is enrolled in a GED program. The students still enrolled in high school range from freshmen to seniors. For each focus group, I audio recorded the entire conversation. Each conversation lasted approximately 60 minutes. In addition to the audio recording, I also took field notes. I sent out each audio recording for full transcription by an outside agency. Before reviewing the transcripts, I also went back and listened to each focus group's audio recording. I let each of the audio recordings play for five-minute increments and then wrote a paragraph about what I heard. These reflective and summarizing notes on the full data corpus provided me a systematic method for writing analytic data memos. Analytic data memos are used in qualitative methods and use longer reflection pieces focusing on analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). I coded¹¹ my field notes, paragraphs, and transcriptions, and then began the process of categorizing and ultimately narrowing down the categories to themes. In reporting my findings, I selected quotes from the focus groups that verified anecdotal stories, added depth to the previous Student Voice study, and added value in offering new perspective on the high school experience.

Role of the evaluator.

¹¹ Coding refers to the process of reviewing data (in this case, field notes and transcriptions) to look for patterns and topics and jot words or phrases to capture these (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

I was an educator in RCSD from 2007 until October 2013. I began my career as a middle school teacher, then served at the district level, and finally served in the position of Academic Dean at Costaño School & the 49ers Academy. Recently, I've taken a position at a small family foundation, and my role is to manage and direct all business in East Palo Alto. This new position gives me better insight to the community from a macro perspective. I continue to stay engaged in conversations with educators and students as a way to inform my daily work, and most importantly to support moving the entire community forward.

I have seen firsthand the myriad assets the youth from the community of East Palo Alto possess. As a teacher and advocate, I have always tried to equip my students and their families with information needed to navigate the process of schooling. Parents are inundated with paperwork and strict timelines that are difficult to manage. However, many times the submission of paperwork is essential to unlocking opportunities, such as attending a school in closer proximity to a family's house. Even with the guidance and support I've provided to students and families, often it's not enough. The success rate of former Ravenswood youth in SUHSD has not wavered much, regardless of the level of "readiness" that they brought with them as they entered high school. That is to say that almost regardless of an East Palo Alto students' performance in the middle grades or scores they earned on the California Standards Test (CST), these students seem to have a lot of trouble navigating high school in a way that highlights their assets. Many of my

former students who flourished in my classroom and were extremely bright have dropped out or been referred to alternate programs such as GED, adult education, or Redwood High School¹², SUHSD's alternative high school.

As discussed in Paper 1, I've always known that there is considerable work to be done in both districts to better support our students. Ravenswood students entering high school need to be, without a doubt, better prepared academically and socially than they currently are. At the same time, high school educators in SUHSD need to be more welcoming to the students of Ravenswood and use strategies that allow them to build on students' strengths. There are a plethora of policies and practices in both districts that do not support Ravenswood students as they transition to and navigate through high school. Some of these include the current boundary map, the lack of meaningful collaboration between teachers, and a comprehensive transition program. The boundary map separates cohorts of students from East Palo Alto that have experienced their elementary years together, providing an additional social hurdle. A barrier in teachers talking to teachers prevents truly informed, intentional instruction to meet students' needs. The summer transitional programs are fragmented giving an early start to the tracking system that is inevitable in high school, and perhaps disengaging youth early on.

¹² Redwood High School is SUHSD's alternative high school campus. Students from Ravenswood are significantly overrepresented in this school, an indicator that they are not served well in the traditional comprehensive schools (Sequoia Union High School District, 2012a).

I believe strongly in, and am deeply committed to the long-term success of Ravenswood students once they enter SUHSD. Yet, for students from East Palo Alto to be well supported, the two districts will have to work together closely to align practices and policies that are complementary. Specifically, when Ravenswood students transition to and through high school, some current barriers must be dismantled if such reform is to be successful. I understand the tumultuous history evident in the relationship between the districts – it exists for a reason. However, because of the history and strong viewpoints still held by some adults in both districts and communities, our young people continue to bear the burden of a system that has not met their needs.

With recent progress the districts are making in communicating with each other regularly through joint principal meetings and an increased focus on K-12 vision initiatives, I am hopeful a stronger relationship will be established. In addition to strengthening communication between leaders of schools and districts, it is important to seek out the voices of the youth. They are the experts and educators have a lot to learn from them. I hope my time with students will reveal their truths so that both districts can be guided to better support them.

Findings

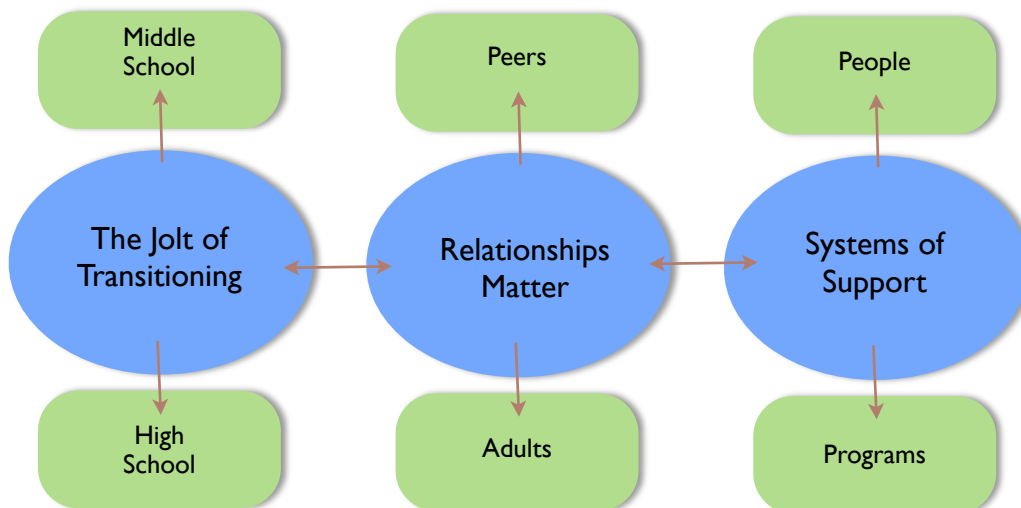
I was humbled by the conversations I had with all students who participated in this study. Their stories, insights, and feedback have reignited the flame of urgency in

me to seek out stronger levels of support for them. East Palo Alto youth are deserving of a high quality, supportive educational pathway. They want to do well for themselves, their families, and their community. Many of them place the blame and responsibility for their academic struggles on themselves. Yet at the same time, they are able to depict a clear picture of why, at times, they are not succeeding due to others or systemic issues. They describe a lack of caring adults around them, or the stressful social scene they have to face as a result of transitioning to a “*whole different world.*” Still, they remain hopeful, and I am thankful to them for having the courage to share their stories. In this section I describe the process of narrowing down my data to three main themes. I explain each theme in detail; I provide data excerpts from the focus groups and make connections to literature where relevant.

To discover the emerging patterns in these data, I coded the data across the three focus groups. Next, I grouped the codes into categories, and finally developed these categories into a set of themes. These themes reveal commonalities among the students, while also highlighting some clear distinctions, as student experiences varied. I balanced the assertions made in my analysis with the selection of particular data excerpts. Themes from the pilot study and this study differ in a couple of ways. In the pilot study, the themes were generally transportation, program effectiveness, and inadequate academic counseling. All three of these themes surfaced as topics in this study. However the themes for this study are different and include the jolt of

transitioning, the importance of relationships, and systems of support. Although this study was narrower in scope, I needed to understand each theme as it related to the topics in a deeper manner to have a strong basis for recommendations. Finally, I decided on three prominent themes, each with two subcategories.

Figure 1: Themes and Subcategories



In the following sections I go into depth about each of the three themes. The first theme is about students experiencing their transition and the obstacles they faced, while simultaneously realizing high school is extremely different than middle school. The second theme focuses on the important relationships students are very aware of and compare between middle school and high school. This section covers student and staff relationships as well as the difference in peer relationships in middle and high school.

Finally, the third theme addresses the people and programs that support students in addition to the areas that students still need continued support.

It is important to consider the difference in demographics between students who attend Ravenswood schools and those who attend schools closer to the SUHSD schools (see Table 2). I provide the demographics of Atherton, which is a town situated next to M-A. I include the demographics of Menlo Park, which combines the city's two distinct neighborhoods, the eastern region of Menlo Park, whose students primarily attend RCSD schools, and western Menlo Park, a majority of the city that is located west of 101. Finally, I include the demographics of East Palo Alto, whose students primarily attend RCSD schools.

Table 5

2010 Census Data of Atherton, Menlo Park and East Palo Alto

	Atherton	Menlo Park	East Palo Alto
Demographics	81% White 13% Asian 6% Other	70% White 18% Latino 10% Asian	65% Latino 17% Black 8% Pacific Islander
Median family income	\$250,000+	\$146,000	\$49,711
Educational attainment	High School: 5% College: 41% Grad: 42%	High School: 9% College: 32% Grad: 37%	High School: 27% College: 9% Grad: 7%

Adapted from Bay Area Census Data (*Bay Area Census*, 2010)

There is a stark difference in demographics, family income, and educational attainment amongst the communities. This table can also help place some of the student

perspectives in better context as they explain their experiences transitioning to high schools away from their homes.

Theme 1: The jolt of transitioning remains vivid in students' minds.

After students start high school, they begin comparing their new high school experience to their middle school experience that, even for the freshmen, seems so long ago. Everything is new: New faces. New teachers. New classes. New wake-up times. In describing the new space that students navigate, they fluctuated between feeling accomplished and independent to defeated and unsupported. I use the subcategories: 1) Braving the transition and 2) Realizing high school is different to describe student experiences of the difficulty of transitioning to high school.

During our initial conversation, almost all students described high school as going well. Some freshmen were really encouraged by high school and they stated that it is a new place to explore; one student even made the comparison to Disneyland. Most equated their high school experience thus far in relation to their academic grades; those students who expressed they liked high school were also the students who talked about having good grades, or having improved their grades from middle school. It is hard to discern if this connection was authentic because for some of the students, I was their former teacher, while for others, I served as the Academic Dean of their middle school before they left for high school. Some were clearly ashamed as they told me which classes they had failed, while a few others boasted their high school GPAs exceeding

their GPAs in middle school. About half of the students that were part of the focus groups are on-track to graduate high school, though six of the students are freshmen and had only received one semester of grades.

Before the start of the second focus group, one student, Sahara, abruptly asked to speak with me outside before we got started. She and I stepped out of the room, and Sahara revealed that she was no longer in high school. She wanted to know if she was still “*allowed to participate*,” as if she had violated some rule. I gave Sahara a hug, and reassured her that I absolutely wanted her to participate and encouraged her to be as truthful as possible. She smiled and said, “*Okay, I just wanted to make sure*,” breathing a sigh of relief that was two-fold. She knew I still respected her as a person, and that I cared about her, regardless of her academic status. Her tension faded, and she felt comfortable because of the green light I had given her. Throughout the entire focus group session she made certain body gestures and under-the-breath comments that clearly conveyed her desire to still be in high school; she wished things had turned out differently.

Braving the transition.

Most students seemed energized around a new beginning in high school, yet it was precisely this newness they also described as a major hurdle to feeling successful in high school. It was almost like students wanted to let go and grab the idea of high school, yet they held on to what they were comfortable with, memories from middle

school. A student, Juan, described his thought process in the mornings: *“I’m grumpy. Who wants to wake up so early? I wake up at 6 a.m. to get ready. It’s stressful and sometimes I oversleep. While I get ready I kind of like remember when I used to wake up around 7:50 and I just want to go back to Costaño.”* He shared with us his sheer frustration with his wake up time, an experience that was consistent with many students interviewed in the pilot study. Juan is a student at M-A, the high school situated most closely to Ravenswood. Even though it is the closest in proximity, there are no school busses that take students from Ravenswood to M-A. Students rely mainly on the city bus, their bikes, or they walk to school. Some students have parents or relatives drop them off in the morning, but rarely have a ride home, so they rely on the other modes of transportation to get home. Part of Juan’s frustration was also that he depended on his bike to get to and from school, but it was stolen. Later on in the conversation he returned to this frustration and blurted out, *“We need more sleep!”* Juan is cognizant that his learning and mood is affected by his lack of sleep, as research also indicates (Mitru, Millrood, & Mateika, 2002; Walsh & Poe, 2012). Although M-A and other high schools in SUHSD have moved to a later school start time due to recent studies on the impact of sleep on students, Ravenswood students have not been able to reap the benefits; many students are assigned zero periods, which start before 8:00 a.m., and others have long journeys to school.

In addition to getting sufficient sleep, students should feel a level of comfort, or that they belong to the school, that enables them to be successful in school (Neild, 2009; Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005). One student, Moala, described how he feels in a new environment, *“There’s like a thousand kids; you’ll be stranded trying to find your classes.”* Most students transitioning from middle school to high school will most likely feel the impact of a huge increase in the number of students, and also the massive landscape of traditional comprehensive schools (Mizelle, 2005; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010). Perhaps different than the physical environment, East Palo Alto students explain how they feel in a classroom setting. Moala continues his explanation saying, *“It’s really hard when you’ve got a question to ask, but you get that feeling, damn, aw, if I ask a question, everyone’s gonna look at you thinking is he kinda dumb or something. Or like you raise your hand, and you don’t really know anyone, and there’s all these mean faces.”* Another student added, *“You’re afraid to be judged.”* What has been most disappointing is that having worked with all the students I interviewed, I knew that these were students who in middle school were vibrant, confident class participants. On foreign turf, students described the shock of transitioning to high school, and it makes them withdraw. It is clear that they do not feel a part of the classroom community. At the same time, they continue to see positive aspects such as being forced to meet new people and requiring them to build their confidence. While they admit to feeling awkward and uncomfortable, they refuse to blame anyone, *“It’s hard to ask questions*

when you're in a room full of strangers... acquaintances, or unknown friends. Yea, I'll call them unknown friends." Moala's desire to connect with his "unknown friends" is admirable; he sees this as a possibility, bridging the unknown to the known.

Realizing high school is different.

After the initial shock of transition, most students were able to settle into what they called, "routine," yet it differed greatly from middle school. Gisselle reflects on the difference between a middle school Algebra class and a high school biology class, "*I mean I didn't really study. Algebra was easy, but when I got to biology, I had to but I didn't really study, so that dropped my grade a little.*" The comparison between a math class and science class struck me as odd. Perhaps she made this comparison because Algebra was supposed to be the hardest class in middle school. Or maybe it was the closest thing she had to compare biology to, since her 8th grade science class was given less than half the instructional time as math. She remembers that the academics at middle school did not challenge her, enabling her to not study and still get good grades. Based on her prior success, she continued a pattern of not studying into high school, but her grades have suffered. Overall, students that did relatively well in middle school based their academics were struggling in their college track classes; yet, students who had IEPs or socially struggled in middle school seemed to be improving academically. I wonder if the classes in middle school for students with IEPs were too challenging, or if the classes in high school were not challenging enough, since all three students with

IEPs stated that most of their high school classes were “*pretty much the same as in middle school.*” There is a deeper analysis needed based on students’ experience in special education in Ravenswood versus SUHSD.

In addition to the lack of study skills and overly basic middle school curriculum, other gaps became apparent. For example, Ana described the gap in access to technology in high school, “*You have homework on the computer and there’s some kids that don’t have Internet access. Some libraries close at 6 so people don’t finish and they have to turn their assignment in late and it’s like minus five points every day it’s late.*” She attributed this lack of access to computers and the Internet for some students as a major detrimental factor to succeeding and getting good grades in high school.

Two students went back and forth debating whether or not access to computers and the Internet was a main issue for students. Moala described expectations from some teachers as being *strict* and that everything needs to be *online and in the right format*. He continued about teachers’ use of individualized teacher websites in high school, and that for some teachers, nearly every assignment needed to be turned in through the website only. Most students agreed that the use of computers and access to the Internet are integral to their success in high school. Still they were conflicted on how they can be more successful in this area. Later, Moala added, “*That’s pretty hard. I mean we used computers in middle school, but we’ve never done it like this before. Why we gotta turn it in by computer...like why can’t we just GIVE it to you?*” It was easy to detect

frustration in his response. He explained that he's used to a certain way, a certain expectation that was set in middle school. He wanted his high school teachers to understand that access to a computer and the Internet is solely confined to his phone. After all, he knew his wealthier peers had access to the Internet and multiple computers in their homes, so completing and turning in assignments on time was never an issue for his peers. Completing assignments and getting them turned in on time became an additional hurdle for him. Yolanda was frustrated that middle school didn't prepare her better; she suggested that high schools should give more access to computer labs, while middle school staff should require more assignments and projects to be submitted via computer.

The jolt of transitioning from middle school to high school can be lessened if middle school teachers can better prepare students for high school standards and expectations; simultaneously, initial encounters high school teachers have with students can be focused on the learning environment and getting to know each students' background. This way the classroom dynamic is one in which *all* students feel comfortable. Through the transition, students strongly voiced the importance of relationships on their overall mindset and attitude towards high school. The next section describes students' relationships with staff and peers as it relates to their schooling experience.

Theme 2: Students are extremely cognizant of and compare their relationships.

It was obvious in each of the focus groups that students relied on the people around them through a stressful transition; yet the person that supported students most differed greatly amongst them. The memories of close relationships in middle school were difficult to talk about for many. Some lowered their heads, and hid their emotions about friendships, family, and staff members when they talked about the separation from their Ravenswood peers or the unfamiliarity they have with staff members in high school. A couple students were exhilarated to meet new people and talked about their supportive family. This section discusses the connections students made with staff, in addition to the difference of peer relationships in middle and high school.

Student-staff connections.

Students strongly believe their relationship with school staff is vital to their success in school, consistent with broader research (Bateman & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Hamre & Pianta, 2006). They described the difference between middle and high school staff. More than any other category, they chose to elaborate on this topic without me instigating follow-up questions, signaling to me that these relationships matter deeply to them. Every single student who participated in the focus group shared their thoughts on this topic, with many giving specific examples. While some were straightforward in their responses, others were careful with their words. Some students did not want to

undermine teachers or staff members, regardless if they felt specific staff members were ineffective.

Moala and Yolanda engaged in an intense dialogue about teachers early into our conversation. Moala stated, “*Teachers, they don’t care about you. They don’t really care about you. They just want you to do your job and be cool with you.*” His description of teachers in high school coincides with a prevailing theory about the structure of high schools: traditional comprehensive high schools operate like factories, pumping students through its chambers, without real interaction and care for students (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Yolanda chimed in, “*If you don’t do your homework, or like don’t do your class work, they will hate you. They would be like, okay, I don’t really care about this kid if he doesn’t do his homework.*” The word *hate* stung. Education scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Solorzano have captured the importance of connecting with students on a personal level and tying students’ life experiences to their classroom and school experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solorzano, 2001). Students perceived some interactions with teachers as hate; therefore, that was the students’ unfortunate reality. Moala did not seem to take this lack of care personally and responded, “*Exactly, because like I said there’s like a million kids there and they can’t like, they can’t focus all their attention on you. You’ve got to focus on them.*” Although he agreed with Yolanda, he situated their perception within the context of a high school teacher’s reality. The inattention to particular

students became a downfall of the structure, not necessarily the individual teachers. This is how the students justified the lack of attention and care towards them from their teachers. In high school, they had to find ways to stay engaged and connected to the curriculum and classroom, and the *students* had to focus on teachers. In middle school, the teachers spent time reaching out to students and making sure students were engaged in class, almost the opposite of what students experienced in high school.

Students stated several times that teachers in high school didn't care for them, but at the same time they did not want to blame the teachers. Other students gave praise to certain teachers in high school, casting them as heroes for motivating and encouraging them to do well instead of dismissing them when they fell off-track. Yet others gave clear examples of why they did not like certain teachers, going as far to say they should pursue other occupations.

In a conversation about influence, and how in high school one can be easily influenced by his or her peers compared to middle school, Moala gave his reasoning: *“Because here [middle school] you have teachers that are always on your back and they worry about you and in high school, you really don't know who to look up to or who's going to be telling you not to do something or what to do. Then you're just like, ‘Oh my friend does this; I'll go do this too.’”* This is his reality. He described the clear difference in environment and culture between middle and high school. Moala said high school is a *“whole different level”* multiple times when he tried to explain his

experience. All the while, he continued to want to respect his teachers stating that he would not give them much advice and he would just say he appreciates them. He understands the predicament high school teachers are in because they have so many students to look out for. But throughout our entire discussion it was very clear that he just does not believe he is as cared for as he was in middle school. That gives him leeway to get influenced by his peers as a direct result of not finding guidance from teachers.

In middle school, some students relied on their teachers as role models. Students made a clear comparison between their perception of teachers in middle and high school. Another student tried to make the comparison a bit more clear by giving an example, *“So like in middle school, the teachers they care about you so if you’re like doing bad in school, if you get suspended, all of your teachers are going to ask you, ‘Why are you suspended?’ In high school, it’s a whole different story like, ‘Ohh you’re suspended, let him go, I have a class to teach.’”* This points to the small school feeling a middle school structure in Ravenswood allows. Most Ravenswood students currently attend K-8 schools and only have about 60 other peers in their grade level. Traditional middle school models typically have bigger campus sizes and many more students in one grade level. Although there is never enough time during the school day, the staff in middle school found ways to connect to each other via text messages, meetings before or after school, or phone calls calling on the drive home. Returning to the school site after a

suspension is always a topic of debate amongst staff members. Even though staff opinions varied, they found a way to connect with students, especially when students fell off-track. This is a perception held close to students' minds. Yolanda makes the distinction: in middle school the teachers care about you even if you're not doing well in school, and in high school, her perception is that the teachers don't care about her if she doesn't do her homework. Besides their relationships with teachers, students also relied on their relationship with their peers, though this relationship was different in middle school than in high school.

Peer relationships: Then & now.

Students described their friends as key motivators in their high school lives, and at the same time, they reminisced about "*how it used to be*" referring to their close-knit circle of friends in middle school. Every student had a perspective to contribute on the topic of friends – with all students placing their middle school friendships on a pedestal. A couple freshmen admitted that they still had not made new friends (given they were starting on their second semester in high school). The focus group of M-A freshmen talked about their new friends and the memories of their old friends at the very beginning of our conversation. At first, I could see their excitement when they talked about the new people they met, and then a sudden melancholy hit each of them when they referred to middle school.

Martha: *It was a really cool experience for me because I had to meet new people...but also really kind of hard because we got used to 49ers Academy.*

Pablo: *I think it's awesome. We have a new start, new people to meet, new friends, and some old friends...Also it's hard leaving like a memory of people that we loved back then.*

Juan: *This is a new start for us and we can meet new people...It's kind of sad leaving the middle school we really loved.*

The students in this group, the only focus group exclusively of freshmen, kept circling back to the idea of high school being *different*. They were not able to fully articulate what made it so different. Several attempted; for example Juan said, *"It's not like Niners. We used to go on the field and hang out. It's not like that here at M-A. It's just different, really different."* Martha cut Juan off and was more direct, *"We don't really have time for each other. This is a really big school."* It was painfully obvious that all three freshmen at M-A were visibly upset about losing many of their long-term friendships as a result to the transition to high school. More so than the other focus groups, this focus group was much more emotional, as the transition was still fresh to them. This topic, however, was consistent in other focus groups as well, as students continued to talk about their peer relationships throughout the conversations.

The sophomores' relationship with peers was stronger, given they had already endured their freshmen year. Although they remember and cherish their former friendships, they seemed to understand the situation, and needed to find ways to move on. In talking about some important aspects of high school, Yolanda stated, "*Your friends...either they're fake, or you get to really know them for all four years in high school and you have to choose your friends wisely and that's very different. 'Cause here everybody knows each other.*" Moala's eyes lit up and he leaned forward and added "*Exactly!*" as if Yolanda had identified precisely why making friends was challenging. She continued, passionately, "*They love each other, they learn about each other here [her middle school campus]. In high school it's just like 'oh hey'.*" She juxtaposes the relationships in middle school and high school. In middle school, they were all part of the same community, where their paths intersected multiple times throughout the day. In high school, not only is the campus much bigger, but students are also introduced to a myriad of other communities. These include students from Menlo Park and Atherton, many who have completely different backgrounds and life experiences than students from Ravenswood. Intersections with these other communities are mainly confined to school, since they attend high schools in places that are physically and socioculturally distant than their home community. For the first time in our conversation, Yolanda dipped her head down, put a hand on her friend's arm and said, "*Everyone here used to be so close. I rarely see Moala and I love Moala. You have to find people that don't*

mind spending time with you during brunch and lunch.” This contrast between being *so close* to friends one has grown up with to finding people that *don’t mind* one’s company exemplified that Ravenswood students’ social experiences differed greatly from middle to high school – an element that made their transition more difficult than necessary.

Similar to the conversations we had about staff and student connections, the students still seemed hopeful to find friends, and saw the value in meeting new people. Understandably, these new and old relationships are in the front of students’ minds when reflecting on their schooling experiences. Relationships were a bulk of the conversation in each of the focus groups. This is where the starkest difference between middle and high school was apparent through the student voices. In addition to relationships with staff and their peers, some students depended on relationships as a strong system of support through the transition to high school. In the next section I explore the need for a consistency of support systems for Ravenswood youth.

Theme 3: Students need consistent systems of support.

The most encouraging part of my conversations with students was listening to them talk about the people and programs supporting them in high school. They described their supports as a friend, a program, or even a single teacher. Some also described that their motivation came from their determination to succeed so that they could live a better life than their parents’. This section explores how students view their current support systems, and also what supports they still need.

People & programs supporting students.

One of the clearest examples of feeling supported in high school came from Pablo. Pablo described having a rough middle school experience, battling diabetes and depression. When he explained the different types of programs he was involved in in high school, he seemed renewed and refreshed, and wanted to tell his story. Pablo talked about a social group he was part of at school, a diabetic club. He said that even though the social group did not meet that often, he felt relieved knowing that he was not the only person dealing with this health issue. He mentioned a friend he made in high school whom he had connected with through this group, and who was also in one of his classes. This consistency for Pablo enabled him to have a positive outlook in high school, and helped with his ability to overcome the rocky transition. In the first couple of months of high school, Pablo did not have any established support systems or connections with peers; the social aspect of transitioning added an additional burden to his diabetes and depression. The different programs and clubs he is a part of now have helped him gain confidence and strength. While Pablo relied on the support of programs and his peers, other students looked to family members and staff for motivation.

Several students said that members of their family provide support, while others used their parents' lives as a reason for motivation. Raúl shared, "*My parents motivate me because I don't want to be working like them, all the time, like 24/7. They want me to have a better future than what they had.*" Raúl is the first in his family to attend high

school, and he hopes he will also be the first in his family to attend college. In her dissertation about the transition of Students of Color to college, Scolari (2012) outlines literature about first-generation college students; yet some of the findings, such as parents not having the tools to support students in navigating the school system (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000), can be applied to first-generation high school students. Raúl uses the story of his family as an avenue of encouragement. His family's struggle propels him forward, as he strives to attain a high school and college diploma, a feat no one in his family has yet achieved. Yajaira talked about her inspiration, "*I think it's my mom and myself. My mom motivates me to do better because she doesn't want me to live the life she lived.*" The sentiment of wanting a better life is consistent with what several students shared during the 2012 Student Voice study.

Not only do students want a better life for themselves, their parents do, too. Parents living in poverty still have high academic expectations for their children, regardless of their own attainment (Torres, 2004). Even though there are barriers that prevent parents from offering specific guidance because they did not attend an American high school or any high school at all, they become sources of motivation (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Yosso, 2005). It is clear that many students from Ravenswood recognize the extra hardship they face growing up and living a life in poverty. Because students in East Palo Alto have limited access to adults around them who successfully attained a high school degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), they have

trouble accessing critical information they need to navigate the high school space (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). This access is further widened for them when they transition to college, which is also consistent with Youth of Color generally living in areas of concentrated poverty (Farmer-Hinton, 2008).

In addition to the support Raúl receives from his family, he also said his main source of support he receives is from his English teacher. He mentions his English teacher several times in the conversation as someone he respects. Stanton-Salazar (1997) explains the need of an engaged adult for students who may not have parents who can help them through the schooling process. Although parents can be sources of encouragement, students need an adult, preferably school-based, who understands the intricacies of the structures of school. For Youth of Color, he asserts, the access to this type of adult is needed most since the traditional high school was not established with their best interest in mind. For Raúl, his English teacher is the school-based adult who helps him to stay on-track his freshmen year, and he hopes through high school.

Besides support students receive from individuals, most students spoke highly of the programs in which they were heavily involved. Each student currently enrolled in a comprehensive high school was part of some other programming. These include Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), BUILD, College Track, a small in-school academy, or MyLife. Each of these programs intends to provide academic and social support primarily to students who are first-generation Youth of Color hoping to

attain a high school diploma and college degree. AVID is the only program offered at all the school sites, since it is the only federally funded program. BUILD and the smaller academies are at three school sites, while MyLife is only at M-A. College Track is a program that runs completely outside of high schools, and is an after school program located in East Palo Alto.

A senior who participated in the final focus group spoke extremely highly of the Woodside Green Academy that she has been a part of since her sophomore year. She strongly recommended the program to the other freshmen in the group, noting the family-like feel and the consistent support from teachers (since most of the teachers stay with the students and program from sophomore through senior year). Yolanda attributed much of her success in high school to the support of College Track. She explained that she truly appreciates the space and time College Track gives her to complete her homework. The program provides tutoring and academic advising so that students can appropriately apply to colleges. She was not sure whether she would have been able to complete her assignments without being part of the program. Another student said that being part of BUILD keeps his mind on college. BUILD uses experiential learning to reach disengaged youth in high school who are interested in exploring an entrepreneurship pathway. When he started BUILD as a freshman, he really did not like the program because it was not what they said it would be; he said the people that recruited him to join the program said it would be about building his own product and

business. Instead, he spent the first year taking math and business classes instead of actually building anything. In his sophomore year, however, he had come to understand all the “paperwork” he had to do was part of building a business; he felt this was a connection that needed to be made stronger in his first year.

The freshmen students at M-A were all part of MyLife, and highlighted the program throughout our conversation. Even though they were freshmen, this group of students also seemed to understand what was available to them in high school, and already seemed connected to many resources on campus. Though Martha felt the absence of not being really connected to her high school counselor (which was echoed by every single participant throughout all three focus groups), she used MyLife as her vehicle to make sure she was on track academically. Although broader research has demonstrated the need for Youth of Color to have adequate access to high school counselors (McDonough, 2005), this remains an issue in SUHSD as students voiced in this study. Not having access to any 8th grade counselors in Ravenswood, in addition to the structural constraints high school counselors are met with, make it difficult to provide meaningful advising (Reyes, Gillock, & Kobus, 1994; J. S. Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008). However, MyLife provides consistent access to a pivotal adult that can help Martha navigate the school system, and despite her IEP, she boasts that she has better grades in high school than middle school. Pablo, Juan, and Martha all felt as

though more students should be part of MyLife, and the three hope to continue in the program next year.

Areas of support students identify as needing improvement.

As the prior section shows, students were articulate in naming their sources of support. On the other hand, they also voiced areas where support is lacking. Consistent with findings from the 2012 pilot study, access to academic counselors is an issue for Youth of Color. Yolanda stated that one of the hardest parts of high school was getting to know her counselor. Again, giving her counselor the benefit of the doubt and understanding her counselor's struggle in trying to manage the caseload of hundreds of students, she felt it unhelpful how much counselors are absent from their high school lives. Halfway into her sophomore year, she has only met with her counselor once. She had a lot to say about this:

Like they don't reach out to you or like try to talk to you about your grades; you have to do that yourself, and I think counselors should have to help you in high school... You're talking to this person about your high school experience and your grades and sometimes that's very hard for other people to talk about and I think you have to get to know your counselor for that and many people don't at all.

Like the examples from Martha and Pablo, she brings comfort to the forefront, and emphasizes that while she feels comfortable, it may take some students longer to warm

up to their counselors. Martha noted that because she barely ever meets with the academic counselor, it is difficult to trust and open up to them. She said meeting with the counselor felt like a random occurrence, one that did not provide her much guidance. All students understood the importance of guidance counselors in high school, and clearly wanted more time with them.

Two freshmen talked about their struggles with AVID. They knew it was important, providing them eventual access to college opportunities. But both also talked about wanting to drop out of the program because they just did not see the importance of the program or its connection to college in their freshmen year. As the two described their freshmen AVID experience, they stated more than once that their teacher was not helpful. When students asked questions, they were often ignored, and furthermore, the teacher spent a lot of time at the desk instead of working with students. It is clear that the initial recruitment of programs like AVID and BUILD have been able to convey the message of “help with college access” to students and families, so many students who are first generation to go to college are involved, including Ravenswood youth. However, providing a thorough explanation of how to do what is needed in the beginning years of high school seems unclear to students. They seem to have missed the message of why freshmen and sophomore year in the program are important, since college related action items seem distant. Moala suggested that students should have more access to after school programs. He then added that in his sophomore year in

BUILD, it may be helpful to have two sessions a week required versus the single meeting that is the current model. Finally, some students mentioned Compass as an awkward summer program, mainly because they were placed in groups where they didn't know anyone. Compass is a summer program offered by SUHSD, and most recently switched from a high school readiness program to an intervention summer program, inviting students scoring Far Below Basic and Below Basic on the CST. Students did mention that the plus side to attending and completing the program is the units earned towards graduation.

Although all nine students still enrolled in a comprehensive program were involved with a particular program, it remains unclear how many RCSD youth are taking advantages of these programs. In addition, although almost all programs tout a higher graduation rate of Youth of Color living in poverty than the district average, it remains unclear how many students persist through the program. In other words, high school and community programs typically state their success rate of those students that persisted through their senior year in high school, not accounting for students who left the program or were kicked out. It is important for programs to understand the reasons why students choose to leave the program, or perhaps offer extended services instead of removing students from their program. By the time students reach their fourth year or final year of high school most of them are on-track to graduate anyhow. It's during the transitional years, through their sophomore year of high school, that they continue

needing support; this is precisely when programs should deepen their services instead of cut students off.

Discussion & Conclusion

Six of the ten students who participated in the focus groups are currently freshmen in SUHSD. For their fate to be different than students before them, schools and programs serving students need to adjust to offer them better support. In addition, given the future pipeline of Ravenswood students to SUHSD, there are a plethora of ways leaders, educators and service providers in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park can better prepare youth for their eventual transition to high school. The needs of Ravenswood students have been consistent for several years. Although all nine students who participated in focus groups were linked to a support program, it is unclear how many Ravenswood students participate in programs that can offer academic guidance and support with strengthening social skills. Understanding how to increase persistence in these programs, along with finding ways to connect students to meaningful programs seem like important next steps. Some students, like Sahara, do not find their way to a program, and have difficulty staying enrolled in a comprehensive high school.

The story of Sahara is important to consider. Although she has joined a GED program after attending Woodside for the first three years of high school, her story was vibrant and she wanted to share her experience. When students described any bit of ease in their experience, she chimed in subtly by whispering under her breath. When Raúl

told the group that the bus stop was only half a block from his house she muttered “*lucky*” right after, signaling that getting to and from the bus stop was an irritating burden for her. In addition, as students described their family support, she jumped in and said, “*I wish I had that.*” Sahara’s high school career has not been supported by her family, primarily not by her father and brothers. Though not typical of the family experiences I have had with students, Sahara’s family would rather have her help out at home with cooking and cleaning, instead of going to school each day and pursuing a career. Additionally, she was the only student in the study who was not part of a supportive program. Without a supportive person or program coupled with the stress from her family, Sahara ultimately joined a GED program instead of finishing her high school degree at Woodside. Although she enjoys the program because it is much easier for her to access, it was clear she wished high school could have worked out for her.

When describing their experience from middle school to high school, students often used the phrases of being “*on my own*” and “*just do your job*”, describing a new way of operating: alone. Sahara’s story is powerful because she shares her loneliness coupled with her unsupportive environment at home as reasons for eventually leaving high school. She is one of the few students that has circled back to her middle school to stay connected; most students who dropped out of high school or were moved to Redwood High School, SUHSD’s alternative high school placement, are more ashamed

of the path they took. Yet, their stories are vital to listen to so that schools and programs can make necessary adjustments to keep more students from leaving schools.

As the 2013-2014 academic year comes to an end, there are many things that still need to be decided in order to make lasting, systemic changes in the support services for RCSD youth. For example, the SUHSD school board still needs to vote on the proposed boundary map that may have all RCSD attending M-A. In addition, the Superintendent of RCSD and the school board are in the middle of discussions surrounding a restructuring of schools, to allow for one or two comprehensive middle schools, and getting rid of the K-8 models in the district. Given the history of constantly changing school structures, it will be important to consider why school structures have changed so often, and what is to be learned as a result. If the K-8 model will stay, the district needs to be more deliberate in allocating resources to develop the middle school teaching staff, and to allow opportunities for teachers to collaborate across the district, and even out of the district to strengthen their teaching practice. If the district decides to switch to comprehensive middle schools, RCSD ought to develop clear guidelines for staff, parent, and student expectations, and what to do if the expectations are breached. These two decisions, the boundary map and the structures of the school need careful thought, and a detailed plan of actions as it relates to supporting students.

The experiences students shared about their transition to and through high school are informative. In addition, the comparison students provided between their

middle and high school experiences are important to consider when making programmatic changes. I use the historical background presented in Paper 1, and the experiences I listened to and learned from students to give policy and program recommendations in my final paper. Hearing student voices should remain a top priority of leaders in both districts as they consider changes to better support Ravenswood youth to higher academic outcomes.

Paper 3: Recommendations for an Articulated K-12 Vision Between Sequoia Union and Ravenswood Districts

Introduction

The purpose of the final paper of this project is to suggest policy and program recommendations for leaders and educators in Ravenswood City School District (RCSD) and Sequoia Union High School District (SUHSD). I include ways for philanthropists, foundations, and service-providers in the immediate area to engage in productive work supporting Ravenswood youth to and through high school. My experience as an educator, the historical context of the community, and most importantly the voices of students who courageously shared their thoughts with me, have guided the action steps for both districts. In order to better align practices and resources across the districts, the intended audience for this final paper is district leaders, philanthropists, and service providers.

First, I will summarize Paper 1, my transformational experience as a Ravenswood educator, summarize Paper 2, a student voice study, and circle back to my research question. Then, I will recommend policies and practices for the districts. Finally, I hope to encourage all stakeholders to think about how to use resources more equitably in the districts. By equity, I mean putting resources where the need is greatest, not to be confused by equality, that is, using resources in the same way across the board, regardless of need.

Overview of Findings

As an 8th grade teacher in East Palo Alto, I became aware of practices and policies in RCSD and SUHSD that served as barriers to students for a successful transition to and through high school. In Paper 1, I expose my transformational experience as an educator in Ravenswood through the different positions I held. I also include historical context about the community, specifically about process and policy involved with Ravenswood students transitioning to high school. The intended audience is mainly teachers in RCSD and SUHSD to validate their own experiences and offer a way to navigate through various emotional stages, though the paper could also serve as a guide to educators more broadly working in a similar context. Historical context is shared as a way to understand the community's past as it affects the present and future. In the 1980's and 1990's, East Palo Alto was a city riddled with crime, gangs, and drugs. Even though recently the community has made positive strides forward, it still struggles with negative connotations that unfortunately also impact the youth. The stark difference in demographics and life experiences for Ravenswood youth are vastly different from many of their much wealthier peers in high school, affecting RCSD youth as they transition to the SUHSD schools.

The impetus for Paper 2 came from conducting an initial study in the summer of 2012 for the districts. I learned that students were very willing, and some were almost desperate, to tell their stories. Though I had worked on the initiative of high school

transition for several years, I had not considered the voices of students in a systematic way. The conversations I had had were mostly with my former students who shared anecdotes when they came to visit. After gaining their valuable perspective during the pilot study, I realized there was a need for a more robust study design that would allow students to explain their stories more fully. I wanted to capture their experiences and learn from them. I wanted their stories to guide how adults, programs, and services could better support them in their transition to and through high school. The intended audience for Paper 2 is those who support youth from Ravenswood academically, socially, and emotionally. This group may include but is not limited to teachers, after school program providers, and counselors. Therefore, the research question that frames this study has been: *What are the experiences of former Ravenswood youth to and through their transition to a Sequoia Union High School District school, and what policies and programs can best support them?*

In Paper 2, I described the outcomes that arose from conducting three focus groups with former Ravenswood students now attending high schools in SUHSD. I discovered there were aspects of their transition that were validated across all the students, such as the sheer jolt of transitioning from the small district of Ravenswood to the large high school district, and the burden of carrying that experience throughout their entire high school experience. My findings demonstrated that navigating the social scene in high school was a hurdle for students that caused high levels of stress. Related

to these struggles to fit in, a prominent theme was the relationships students had with peers and adults. The vast nature of high school in a new district drew some students closer to their middle school friends, developing a sibling type of love. Others continued to struggle to make new friends in high school, and consequently needed to rely heavily on family for support. Students who were first in their families to attend high school in America, which is common for Ravenswood families, shared that their entire family was also adjusting to the transition. Finally, all participating students who are still enrolled in high school noted either a particular consistent and reliable person in their lives, or a supportive program as imperative to a successful high school transition and ultimate success *through* high school. Some students pointed to their families' hardships as motivation, because growing up experiencing the stressors of poverty have shown them that they should work in school to try to attain a different lifestyle as adults. Other students highlighted programs such as College Track and MyLife¹³ as sources of encouragement. Still others noted that their strongest support came from individual teachers, some from high school and others from middle school. Students seemed very grateful for their middle school teachers who continued to stay engaged in their lives, even after they had moved on to high school.

¹³ MyLife is a program through the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula that offers support mainly to students residing in East Palo Alto, eastern Menlo Park, and the North Fair Oaks area of Redwood City. I include this program's overview and budget because it is the only comprehensive program that currently exists at Menlo-Atherton High School as a direct response to help students transition to and through their first couple of years of high school. For funders interested in supporting East Palo Alto youth into high school, this is an ideal program to fund. See Appendix D for more information.

Through their experiences, students openly discussed what was working for them and what wasn't. Students honestly admitted their faults, too, saying, for example, that they were just "*not getting the job done.*" Listening to them share their experiences humbled me. In each focus group, I remember becoming overwhelmed by a feeling of great pride for my former students. Despite describing hardships at home coupled with struggling to fit in at high school, their discussions remained positive. They described themselves as hopeful and willing to work so that they could gain substantially from their high school experience. Educators and service providers have a lot to learn from what these students demonstrate. Students spoke honestly, took responsibility, and talked about their frustrations in a productive manner. They steered me in a direction to look internally to see what *I* can do to improve in my duty to serve youth. Even though they had a lot to say about their physical surroundings and relationships, they were extremely self-reflective in their stories. It was truly inspiring.

Broadly, educators in RCSD may only be privy to high school graduation rates in the Sequoia Union schools. However, most teachers are not aware of the detailed data provided in Paper 1, especially during students' transitional years. Some students have academic and social challenges that begin before their transition to high school, while others face challenges that are sparked by the transition itself. While I served as an educator in Ravenswood, I had many conversations with leaders from both districts. The tumultuous history discussed in Paper 1 was due in part because of Ravenswood

educators feeling as though the high school district was not supporting Ravenswood students in high school. At the same time, high school educators felt as though Ravenswood was not adequately preparing students before entering high school. As seen in exit and entry data¹⁴, there is truth to both sides of the debate. However, this finger pointing within both districts has resulted in few actionable steps, and a continued story of struggle on the part of the students. To move forward and truly serve the youth, we must move decisively to promote improvement in the academic outcomes of East Palo Alto youth.

Policy and Programmatic Implications

There is broad research literature addressing the middle to high school transition (Bateman & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Ding, 2008; Heck & Mahoe, 2006; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Kowal, 2002; J. B. Smith, 1997); however, my experience as an educator and researcher in the immediate context can provide specific recommendations for practice in our communities. I provide appendices to which leaders and philanthropists may refer for consideration. Throughout this section, I include footnotes to provide more information for the appendices to which I refer.

Specifically, this paper is designed to describe and outline seven recommendations. The first recommendation needs to be addressed by the SUHSD Board of Trustees, and in fact, is the only recommendation I give that is strictly policy

¹⁴ Refer to Appendix E.

based. The other six recommendations are programmatic in nature. They address issues of staff collaboration and development and of direct student support services and programs. The intended audience is primarily both district leadership teams, and specifically the superintendents, whereby these recommendations may serve as a practical guide to changes in the districts' current systems and programs. Furthermore, philanthropists and other funders can use these recommendations to identify how monies can best be spent to support students in Ravenswood as they transition to and through the Sequoia Union high schools.

Recommendation #1: Pass the new boundary map proposed on January 15th, 2014.

As discussed in Paper 1, the antiquated boundary map established in 1986 should be replaced. Under the leadership of Superintendent James Lianides, a new proposed boundary map was shared with the public and school board at the January 15, 2014 meeting (Appendix C). At this board meeting, four of five SUHSD school board members noted they are in favor of the proposed reform, in large part because of the new boundaries drawn for students attending Ravenswood schools in East Palo Alto. According to the proposed map, all Ravenswood students will be assigned to Menlo-Atherton High School (M-A) as their home school, a marked shift from previous board policy. M-A is the high school in closest proximity to the community of East Palo Alto

and eastern Menlo Park¹⁵. M-A also has the highest success rates for Ravenswood students, as compared to Carlmont, Sequoia, or Woodside (A. Weiner, 2014). During the focus groups in my student voice study, and consistent with the 2012 pilot study, students described the inconvenience and additional roadblocks to success of attending a high school far from home. Due to its proximity, attending M-A versus other SUHSD high schools partially addresses the challenges facing students from East Palo Alto.

As mentioned in Paper 1, students in the Las Lomas district who attend La Entrada middle school are divided between Woodside and M-A high schools under the current boundary map. However, when the boundary map was adopted over thirty years ago, the SUHSD School Board granted those La Entrada students assigned to Woodside the automatic right to transfer to M-A. This boundary map exception exists to this day, and the majority of affected La Entrada students continue to take advantage of this exception. Notably, La Entrada serves students in one of the wealthiest communities in the nation¹⁶. Exceptions to the current boundary map continue to give preferential treatment to students at La Entrada, as noted in the board policy below:

¹⁵ Ravenswood City School District serves the communities of East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park. A majority of students that attend schools in eastern Menlo Park are already assigned to Menlo-Atherton High School. The proposed map would allow access to *all* students attending the eastern Menlo Park and East Palo Alto schools.

¹⁶ La Entrada is the sole middle school in the Las Lomas School District. The Las Lomas School District spans Menlo Park and Atherton ("Map of district," 2011). Some of the wealthiest parts of west Atherton are in the Las Lomas School District (Gopal, 2009).

2. Students at La Entrada living in the Woodside attendance area will be allowed to transfer to Menlo-Atherton upon request as established with 1986 boundary change. (“Sequoia Union HSD Administrative Regulation: Intradistrict open enrollment and adjustment transfers,” 2013, p. 3)

As an interim policy, the board passed several other stipulations for the 2014-2015 school year that finally gives Ravenswood students preference – although not the automatic right enjoyed by La Entrada students – in Open Enrollment. On October 9, 2013, the following was added into the original 1986 policy:

4. For the 2014-2015 academic year or until such time that new school attendance areas go into effect, students residing within the geographical boundaries of Ravenswood City School District are within a special attendance area. As such, students in that area will be assigned to high school campuses pursuant to the District’s current school boundary map. However, such students who are not within the Menlo-Atherton High School attendance area who desire to attend that school may request a transfer to Menlo-Atherton High School, and the Superintendent may grant such requests to the extent that there is capacity at

the school to accommodate them.¹⁷ (“Sequoia Union HSD Administrative Regulation: Intradistrict open enrollment and adjustment transfers,” 2013, p. 4)

Many Ravenswood advocates, including myself, questioned specific language around the exceptions, such as “may grant to the extent there is capacity at the school” in reference to the Ravenswood transfer requests actually granted. La Entrada students are “allowed to transfer” no matter what. As explained by the Las Lomitas superintendent in a 2011 letter to his parents, “Even if M-A is declared ‘full,’ at a future date, LE students ... will be admitted to Menlo-Atherton High school for 2012-13 under existing SUHSD Board Policies.”¹⁸ In sharp contrast, Ravenswood transfers *may* be granted at the discretion of the Superintendent only if there is room at M-A – a school that has already been deemed over capacity. These contrasting policies, even in 2013, serve to highlight the systemic issues of inequity imbedded in our system. However, in recent community meetings, Superintendent Lianides has stated that he is working hard to get every single Ravenswood students’ transfer request granted for the 2014-2015 academic year (see Appendix F for the full report made to the board on March 26th, 2014 on transfer requests).

¹⁷ The materials for the October 9, 2013 SUHSD school board meeting that include the Administrative Regulation can be referenced online (“Sequoia Union HSD Administrative Regulation: Intradistrict open enrollment and adjustment transfers,” 2013).

¹⁸ The entirety of this letter from the Las Lomitas Superintendent can still be found online (Hartwig, 2011).

I urge that the SUHSD Board of Trustees adopt the proposed boundary map that was presented on January 15, 2014, as soon as possible. Paper 2 demonstrates that Ravenswood students continued to voice their concerns over long bus rides to high schools far away from their homes, their unfamiliarity with the high school campuses and their staff, and the hardships of establishing new friendships. Students shared how the MyLife program, currently only at M-A, has helped them transition into high school. Generally, students cited the lack of access to an academic counselor as a contributing factor in their difficulties, but compared to the other high schools in SUHSD, M-A currently has the lowest student-counselor ratio. If the exact map presented in January 2014 is not on the docket for review again, I strongly encourage the board to approve a map only if the entire Ravenswood attendance area is assigned to Menlo-Atherton as the home school for the reasons outlined above. In addition, as of the date of this document, although the map has yet to be voted on, the policy as written has no exceptions¹⁹. The proposed boundary map does not only address issues of equity, but also the projected population explosion expected for SUHSD. Along with the passage of the map, SUHSD is spearheading the efforts to pass a multi-million dollar bond for necessary capital improvements and expansions to accommodate the booming student growth over the next decade.

¹⁹ Students attending La Entrada in the Las Lomas district are all assigned to Menlo-Atherton as their home school in the proposed boundary map.

Although the passage of this new boundary map will be historic and heroic, it is only a first foundational step to a long-ongoing process to better support Ravenswood students in the SUHSD schools. Based on open discussions at board meetings and community feedback from meetings held throughout SUHSD by Superintendent Lianides, combined with online conversations via media posts, the M-A community (school, students, parents, community members) must figure out how to embrace this shift and welcome a slightly different student demographic. Given that a majority of Ravenswood students already attend M-A, and data shows that Ravenswood students are faring better at M-A than any of the other comprehensive high schools, this policy recommendation should not be a surprise to M-A or the district as a whole (Although Ravenswood students may be faring better at M-A than any other SUHSD school, the students are still not doing well enough due to ongoing barriers that still persist at all the schools). Yet many adult community members from Menlo Park, Atherton, and East Palo Alto remain doubtful of this shift, citing racial-tension from the 1960's at M-A²⁰. Yet students have not remained silent on the issue. I explain students' reaction and involvement later in this paper.

Whether the proposed boundary map passes or not, it is imperative that the districts work together to showcase the great potential that rests if they are able to

²⁰ Racial tensions were exacerbated so much so that the school was forced to shut down for four days in 1967 (Boyce, 2002).

coordinate their efforts to serve Ravenswood youth. There are many stakeholders in the schools and community who doubt positive changes can occur. If the adults who lead and work in the districts doubt a better M-A with more Ravenswood students, carry low expectations of improving the middle-to-high-school transition, and lose hope that the school experience will be enhanced for *all* students, they send a message to youth to expect the same. Instead, leaders ought to act with certainty, high expectations, and a renewed sense of hope. Adults, educators and community members alike, can be more productive if they are willing to let go of frustrations held onto from decades ago that still act as barriers to working together. If the districts cannot move to a productive service-oriented approach for *all* students, the schools will have failed yet another generation. This is not an option.

If the Sequoia Union school board adopts the new boundary map, many of the hurdles educators, parents, and students have been facing for years can be eradicated *only if* we take the necessary next steps. As discussed in Paper 2, students have clearly voiced their struggles in feeling comfortable at their high schools, depending largely on their relationships with peers and staff. In addition, staff members find it frustrating and difficult to connect meaningfully when students are spread out across the schools as discussed in my narrative in Paper 1. Without the successful passage of a new boundary map, the recommendations will be more difficult to implement universally for all stakeholders. Nonetheless, these next steps are critical in considering, planning, and

allocating appropriate resources to better support students and see better student outcomes.

Recommendation #2: Increase educators' cultural awareness, history, and background of the community of Ravenswood and its children.

Throughout the focus groups, students talked about their relationships with teachers. For example, one student describes his struggle with teachers in high school saying that teachers, "*just don't care about you.*" Another student described the challenge she faced when high school teachers required assignments to be turned on via the Internet stating, "*some libraries close at six so people don't finish and they have to turn their assignment in late.*" In addition, students felt as though the expectations for the use of technology were too low in middle school, and did not prepare them adequately for the transition to high school in the SUHSD. To better understand students' situation, middle school Ravenswood educators ought to have a joint professional development with M-A staff before the start of each school year.

The content of such sessions should focus on providing an historical context of the Ravenswood community. The film *Dreams of a City: Creating East Palo Alto*²¹ can be used as a catalyst to engage educators in meaningful discussion about current affairs in the community. Paper 1, or selected parts from it, can be used to help give

²¹ The film was created in 1996 and gives an historical account of the community of Ravenswood, and then also spotlights the duration of Ravenswood High School (Levin, 1996).

perspective and validate the emotions teachers may feel as they support youth. Students and parents can talk directly about their experience, successes, and struggles in navigating the K-12 education space to inform educators on how to support students during the upcoming year. For example, in one of the focus groups, a student suggested that middle and high school staff ask students directly how they can be supported, and then added, “*like you’re doing right now,*” in regards to the nature of the open-ended questions of the focus group for Paper 2’s data collection.

Learning about the history of the community and hearing directly from parents and students is not enough. The most difficult work rests in the hands of educators and direct service-providers in terms of mindset. Is there a fundamental belief that all children, regardless of their ethnicity, or background, can succeed at high levels? The easy way to answer this question is to say yes and move on. However, when we look at the suspension, expulsion, *and* achievement rates in RCSD and at M-A, our practices show otherwise. Perhaps inviting a third party to facilitate this session would be best, so that assumptions some educators make about each district can be addressed. It is also important to have conversations relating to race and social justice. For example, topics that have been raised in the past behind closed doors, such as low achievement rates of many RCSD students, and the heavily tracked classes at M-A need to be addressed openly with each other face-to-face instead of only with close colleagues on the way out of meetings. The use of data that has been released by SUHSD of incoming RCSD

freshmen achievement rates, and their subsequent achievement rates throughout the Sequoia schools can help surface these conversations. Collectively, all stakeholders must be willing to address these suppressed issues head-on, if the ultimate goal is to see an increase in achievement for all students across both districts. The undertones of racist gestures, notions, or practices cannot be tolerated, and the leaders of the schools and districts need to take a more dominant role in striking these views down, even if it means dismissing a staff member. At the same time, teachers can use the power of their collective to demand the leaders of schools and districts to lead in a transformative way, one that places social justice and equity at the top of the priority list.

Once these conversations are had openly, and all stakeholders can reach a shared goal (i.e. increasing the achievement rates of RCSD youth in Ravenswood and Sequoia), educators from both districts ought to work together to devise a plan to support youth throughout the year. For example, they can create a timeline of parent/student visits to the high school and a calendar of dates and times to collaborate regularly, teacher-to-teacher. District or education foundation funds can be used to support teacher pay for this extra time dedicated to coordinating efforts on behalf of Ravenswood students and their families. To build this in as part of the regular structure and programming of professional development in the districts, it will be necessary to engage all educators in the process for several of years. Once educators from both districts have gained a deeper understanding of the community, then this kind of development work can be

moved to part of the New Teacher Orientation in each district (and perhaps this would be a joint endeavor, too, so that new teachers in each district can connect). The table below provides an example of how this professional development could be structured so that educators from both districts gather together in thinking about how to serve Youth of Color from Ravenswood better.

Table 6

Example of a Joint Two-Day Professional Development

Date	Location	Outcome	Activity
Aug 2014 (Day 1)	RCSD school	Understanding Ravenswood's History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch <i>Dreams of a City</i> • Read & Discuss sections of Paper 1 • Panel discussion and questions (panel members: city/district/community leaders with institutional memory)
Aug 2014 (Day 2)	M-A	Understanding Students' Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student & parent panel • Discussion on mindset • Small group conversations • Share data • Make connections & align support services • Calendar for the year

Recommendation #3: Increase expectations and standards in Ravenswood and Menlo-Atherton High School for all students.

People in and outside the community often describe the Ravenswood community and its people in terms of deficits – underachieving, underprepared, disadvantaged. This perspective leads people to hold low expectations and standards of

students from the Ravenswood community, and has an internal affect on students, too. Educators and community members alike should instead approach supporting students from Ravenswood with an asset-based approach. Educators should look to students' strengths, such as their curiosity, ability to think outside the box, and resilience, and then build from these capacities. Together, teachers can try to strike a better balance of high expectations, based on an understanding of the youths' situation. That is to say that even though circumstances may be difficult for youth living in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park, educators should not lower expectations of them. Instead, educators can continue to set the bar high, demanding of students what is demanded by schools on the west side so that academic rigor isn't compromised. At the same time, however, Ravenswood youth mostly live in vastly different situations than many of their wealthier peers at M-A. Lack of access or opportunity to particular supports should not serve as a barrier in their schooling experience. Schools and its educators, and to the extent appropriate, community organizations, should help fill this gap by offering time, resources, and services equitably. In other words, students who lack access at home or outside the school environment to technology or private tutors should be provided this access at school or programs based in the community. In this way, expectations can still be high, while simultaneously supporting students' needs.

Educators should take the students' advice, as described in Paper 2. For example, Yolanda and Moala (currently sophomores at Woodside High School) suggested that

middle schools should teach and expect students to turn in assignments online. They added that high schools should provide more access to computer labs and should host workshops on how to better use the Internet to research and submit assignments. This recommendation heightens the expectation of Ravenswood students in middle school, while also calling for high schools to provide expanded support. Indeed, there are a myriad of ways to raise the bar in Ravenswood schools to better prepare students for their eventual transition to high school, and this suggestion in terms of better use of technology is simply one example. Using the knowledge gained from the ongoing faculty development outlined in recommendation #2, educators in both districts should come to have a deeper understanding of the context of Ravenswood youth and be willing to hold them to high expectations, while at the same time, understanding their situation and providing more individualized support where needed.

There are pockets of improvements that are popping up in both districts. For example, under the leadership of RCSD's STEM Coordinator, Robert Provonost, he has helped create access to a learning lab in which students starting in their transitional kindergarten year can be exposed to making, tinkering, and problem-solving through his pilot program MakerSpace. The goal is to have MakerSpaces launched at every school site in the district as soon as possible, so RCSD students can begin to explore and think about the STEM field early on, instead of waiting until middle school. Of course, in order for this to happen, there needs to be buy-in and flexibility on the part of funders to

help financially support this type of program, even if it may not *directly* tie to academic outcomes in the first few years. The mere exposure to and joy from these MakerSpaces have completely changed recess time for some of the most vulnerable students on campus. Another example to help fill the gap in access to technology is the work of Sue Kayton who has made it a personal mission to get computers in the homes of all M-A students. Instead of operating as an individual, she could use the support of a structure that is tied to the school system more intimately to get more families involved in the free service she provides. Even with the proximity of the Ravenswood community to corporations such as Facebook and Google, it's deplorable that the youth in the community are years behind their wealthier westside peers in the technology space. Though corporations are beginning to partner with the community at an increased level, the pace is much too slow. There ought to be a more deliberate service delivery on part of the corporations that are situated so close to an alarming opportunity and achievement gap.

Recommendation #4: Increase Ravenswood student and family familiarity with Menlo-Atherton campus and staff.

Ravenswood students and their families can benefit from getting to know the high school campus and its staff before becoming high school students. With a clear majority of Ravenswood youth currently attending M-A, and the likelihood of almost all Ravenswood students attending M-A in the near future, creating more opportunities

for students to connect with the campus will allow greater comfort at the start of the transition to high school. In Paper 2, most students expressed that they didn't feel connected to the staff in high school. Students reported that they felt lost on a much larger campus. During the middle school years, M-A staff should come to the schools in Ravenswood to meet families and answer questions at high school information sessions, and this should take place multiple times throughout middle school. In May of 2014, RCSD has arranged for a "Dream Big" workshop for all 7th and 8th grade students to expose them to professionals from different walks of life and in different fields. While this is a great first step, there can be a more concerted effort in helping them deliberately plan out their middle and high school years to better prepare them for college. For example, high school guidance counselors should come visit Ravenswood students during their 7th and 8th grade years to help them make plans towards high school completion. A high school guidance counselor and a Ravenswood staff member can work to create an articulated seven-year plan that includes a roadmap of grades 6-12 that will place all Ravenswood students on a trajectory towards college or career.²²

²² Ravenswood City School District (RCSD) does not currently have a staff person designated to help coordinate all the efforts in regards to preparing middle school students to and through their high school transition. That is, there are no current guidance counselors in RCSD. The Ravenswood Education Foundation, in partnership with RCSD, has started a fund to be able to support two positions solely focused on this work. I envision these staff to work with M-A staff intimately in coordinating many of the activities laid out in the recommendations. A list of duties and programs attached with hiring a high school transition coordinator and counselor are listed in Appendix G. For funders looking to close the opportunity and achievement gap for Ravenswood students as they transition to high school, this would be a great way to support both districts to create processes and structures related to transition.

As another way to connect, Ravenswood students should visit M-A for non-academic school activities, such as a home football game or a rally. Preview Days were established several years ago for 8th grade students to provide them with exposure to the high school before they attend. Students mentioned activities like Preview Days as helpful in understanding what high school would be like. Preview Days should continue, yet this recommendation suggests that they go deeper by having students sign up for certain interests (e.g., sports, school clubs, AVID) and M-A staff can then follow-up with youth during the summer to help them to connect with these organizations. Further, to increase visibility and acknowledge the importance of this introduction to high school, Preview Days should be formally calendared into each school's schedule before the start of the next academic year. In one of the focus groups, a student suggested that the district ask the students directly where they need support in their transition. Preview Day would be a good opportunity to begin to address these concerns with eventual follow-up in the fall.

Additionally, students need access to adults on campus who can help guide them through their academic and social pathways. Students talked about not feeling connected to their counselor because of the low number of contact points. Whereas many students attending M-A have a myriad of resources outside of school to help them navigate high school and prepare for college, students from Ravenswood do not have the same access to these resources outside of school. It would behoove M-A and these

students if the district were to allocate certain staff to help fill this gap. Currently, although the ratio of student-to-counselor is the lowest in the district, it still does not allow for sufficient guidance for students, a pattern that most strongly impacts students who most need this support. Students in the focus group recognized that getting to know their guidance counselor is important, while at the same time they talked about not having enough interaction with them. Counselor time should be allocated to students who may need to rely on their services, since many M-A students have access to other services outside of school such as private tutoring, private college counseling services, and other external activities and supports. Access to psychological counseling, community sports leagues, and family members who can provide guidance based on their own experiences in higher education are some examples of additional external supports wealthier students have who attend M-A. Structuring counseling services so that students who need a range of supports have access should result in an increase of students from RCSD feeling they have the appropriate support from the school, and ultimately impact student outcomes.

Recommendation #5: Joint and ongoing collaborative opportunities for Ravenswood middle school staff and Menlo-Atherton's staff.

This recommendation builds from recommendations #2 and #3, yet is distinct because it provides middle and high school teachers the time they need to apply their learning from the joint professional development. Typically schools use a one-time

professional development experience, in which momentum is lost. Instead, teachers and staff need a structure for continuous and meaningful conversations so that they can learn from each other. Teachers from across the two districts should connect with each other before each school year starts, and then regularly thereafter. Every year that I worked in a Ravenswood K-8 school, we devoted time at the beginning of the school year for teachers to connect about certain students who may need to be challenged more, or who may need intense support in a particular area. Unfortunately, this kind of consultation doesn't happen between the 8th and 9th grade teachers, yet the middle to high school transition is arguably one of the most important for our youth. Sharing such information can go a long way in providing individualized support for students.

As a district and site administrator, I served on the high school transition team's homework expectations committee. In this role, I researched the difference in homework assignments from middle school classes as compared to high school classes. Teachers in both districts made assumptions about students: having or not having access to a family's ancestry to complete a school project, or having or not having access to the Internet were some examples of implied assumptions. If middle and high school teachers have established a regular schedule of meeting with each other, they would gain a better understanding of what was expected of students in the lower grades and what will be expected in the upper grades. In addition, assumptions could be corrected based on each other's experiences with students. Principals should also connect with

one another on a regular basis, a structure that has already been implemented this year between the districts. Most of the time during scheduled meetings should be allotted for principals and school leaders to discuss practical matters and immediate action steps, with regular time set aside for long term planning. The most important aspect of this recommendation is that these kinds of interactions between principals and teachers from each district should be on-going throughout the school year, and should restart at the start of each school year so that new staff members will be integrated into these discussions. As I noted in Paper 1, these discussions need to move beyond when and what to teach, and move to a conversation on how to teach and engage *all* students in a way that is culturally responsive.

Recommendation #6: Community organizations and programs must provide deeper and better access and services for students.

There are several organizations in the community and schools that provide support to students from Ravenswood. Many of them, however, are competing for the same students. At the same time, a majority of students are not benefitting from any programs, or at least not at a level that keeps them on-track for the duration of high school. First, there seems to be a general gap in academically rigorous programs and organizations that serve children in the Ravenswood community. In grades 4-8, most students attend after school programs on their school campuses, either run by the district or by the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula. In high school, however, while the

demand is high, budgets for after school programming largely rely on grant money or private donations.

Through my experience as an educator and as a staff member at a foundation, I have come to realize that there are particular reasons, such as poverty and ostracization of East Palo Alto in a area surrounded by wealth, why a plethora of organizations support the community; yet little progress has been made in terms of long-term educational outcomes for youth. First, there needs to be a general understanding of what types of data should be collected by each organization to track youth across their educational years. Then, a common data system that can be used by each organization in the community would track and manage important data points across the organizations, including measurement of educational outcomes. The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities is an organization helps districts and communities answer researchable questions related to improving the lives of youth. The Gardner Center has partnered with One East Palo Alto, a non-profit community organization that works to improve the lives of the residents of East Palo Alto. Together, with a number of other organizations, progress has been slow in collecting data for all agencies working with youth in the communities of East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park²³. In a recent One East Palo Alto meeting, the Gardner center presented on the data

²³ As the report notes, about 35 organizations have signed on to be a member of the Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success (YESS) collaborative. Yet, with nearly 100 organizations in the community, not an

points all agencies should be collecting so the next time the Gardner Center tries to pull data across organizations, the data set is clean and can offer more sound conclusions. Organizations in the community need to build capacity in this area, and need to have access to a data tracking and management system, that would need the support of funders to help implement. However, not all community organizations are part of One East Palo Alto for one reason or another. Perhaps the district and city can jointly host a meeting, invite the Gardner Center as presenters, and invite all community-based organizations to participate in a short informational and development exercise on how to collect and analyze data to that it can be useful to implement programmatic changes. Once there is a broader set of community organizations (at least 75% participation rate of all organizations supporting youth in the community), then collectively, this group can create a simple proposal to a funder collective for funding a data management system.

In addition to data tracking and management, there needs to be sufficient communication. In my pilot study and as mentioned in Paper 2, students voiced their praise for programs that have supported them to and through the transition to high school. Certain programs such as AVID (and BUILD starting in the fall of 2014) have established a great presence on the M-A campus as each is a particular class in which

accurate picture has been cast of the service providers and the youth in which they serve (Castrechini, 2010).

students enroll and have listed on their transcripts. Other programs such as MyLife may not be as well connected to the school's student and data management system; however, several students spoke highly of the program, and so it makes sense for programs like MyLife to be more integrated into the student schedule, as AVID and BUILD already are. This reform will allow all teachers to be aware of these programs, which will make them more likely to refer students as necessary. In addition, each of these programs should be well connected to the RCSD schools. Currently, individual programs reach out to individual schools and ask for time in the school day to present to students. This approach can engage the interest of some students, but many are missed, for example, because not all programs are presented at every school, or because the programs are presented in a piecemeal way so students don't fully process their options. The schools in Ravenswood and the organizations in the community should instead hold a high school program fair and invite all students and parents. Families would then fill out all needed paperwork right at the fair. Such an organized event would provide students and parents across the district access to the information, as well as lessening the barriers to admission by allowing them the space and time to ask questions and a structure to apply in-person.

Finally, organizations should find more intentional ways to work together. Too often there is a desire to claim one's unique niche in the educational space. Many of the programs operating in East Palo Alto or supporting students from the community are

more similar than they are different. These similarities ought to be embraced, and instead of spending double the resources, for example, on recruitment, organizations should work together to create coordinated pipelines. For example, if middle school students attend the Boys and Girls Club programs, as they transition to high school, the organization should work directly with College Track or BUILD to help place students into the program based on what they learned about the students. This way, fewer resources are spent on recruitment and materials, and more can be spent on direct service delivery to students. During my role acting as a school administrator, I was not aware of all the programs and services available to students and their families. Even if I heard of a specific agency, I was not sure how to assist families to receive services. What were the requirements? Whom do they serve? What information would the family need to provide? Some students in the focus groups are taking part in particular programs. I wonder why some are involved while others are not. Is there a difference in interest? Or is there a difference in access? A coordinated effort to link students and families to programs and services is needed. M-A's foundation has already poured resources into a professional who does just this, yet this kind of coordination is still lacking in Ravenswood. The school district and the organizations hold joint responsibility on this gap in access. A solution would be to include this responsibility (the coordination of services from middle school to high school) in the high school transition fund for the Ravenswood Education Foundation (see Appendix D).

Recommendation #7: Focus on the transition.

In Paper 2, students were able to remember vividly their transition to high school. Students chimed in about their transition's continued impact throughout their high school experiences. In the student data shared in Paper 1, it was noted that even many of Ravenswood's top-performing youth in 8th grade begin failing within the first semester of their freshmen year. Indeed, the broad educational research literature cites the importance of focusing on students' transition from middle to high school. Thus, RCSD and SUHSD, including organizations that partner with the districts, should keep a keen eye on this transition. During the focus group, one student said that there wasn't anything she could think of that would truly prepare her for this first day of high school. Yet later in the interview, she said that her family and the support from College Track helped ease her transition. Given that transitioning to high school is stressful, even shocking according to the Ravenswood students interviewed, there are contributions that all organizations should make to ease this experience. Recommendations 1-6 will help to strengthen the structure of the transition, align the curriculum between middle and high school, and understand student needs before entering high school. However, without a concerted effort to focus on the transitional experience for students, the student outcome data may remain dismal. To address this challenge, the districts should collaborate to implement a comprehensive transition program that better serves *all* incoming Ravenswood students to M-A.

To begin, I recommend a comprehensive transition summer program, open to *all* students from Ravenswood entering M-A the following fall semester. Currently, summer programs exist in both districts for middle school students and rising 9th grade students. However, space is limited to mainly Honors students, or students who need intervention and are served in the Compass program. Students in the focus groups noted that the Compass program felt a little awkward because they didn't know too many of the other enrolled students. A transition program open to all incoming freshmen at M-A from Ravenswood could allow for students to meet other Ravenswood students, and also feel comfortable by having their peers from middle school attending the program with them. In addition, it would allow access for all new students from Ravenswood to interface with their teachers at M-A before school starts. A high school in San Jose has drastically shifted its summer transition programming in the last few years to better reach students (the school is nearly all Youth of Color living in poverty). They *enroll*, much more deliberate than invite, all incoming freshmen into one of the four strands of their summer transition program. The program runs for five weeks, with about seven hours of programming each day. The morning consists of academic programming based on skill level in math and/or literacy, and the afternoon is heterogeneously grouped for the college readiness component. The high school hires 12 former students from that particular high school who have gone on to college to teach the afternoon college

readiness, and team-building portion of the program – an ideal way to engage youth. This is a model that M-A ought to consider for its summer programming.

Recently, there have been talks in RCSD to assign each RCSD student to one summer program, to ensure that between the district and community organizations, every student is involved in some sort of programming over the summer to keep their mind engaged and prevent summer learning loss. I strongly recommend RCSD leadership to take this idea seriously, as all youth could benefit from the access to a high-quality summer program.

Along with a summer program, districts can focus on the transition by planning for the challenges students experienced as discussed in Paper 2. Broadly, students face academic, social, and procedural challenges during their transition. If transitional components are delivered piecemeal, disconnected from a larger vision of transition, then the districts will face the real risk of seeing little improvement in the academic achievement of Ravenswood youth. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) demonstrate the importance of addressing all aspects of student challenges, including the involvement of parents and school staff, if student outcomes are to be significantly affected.

A comprehensive transition plan will help funders understand that, for example, a summer experience or a single after school program that a particular organization is able to fund is not sufficient by itself, but is part of an integrated picture. Both RCSD and SUHSD should craft this comprehensive plan, but the full delivery will need to be

supported by community partnerships, including community based service providers and foundations that can provide monetary support.

A robust transition program paired with transition activities is only part of the larger picture in supporting Ravenswood youth. For example, if the structures are in place for more comprehensive programming, but the mindset and cultural awareness of educators (as discussed in recommendation #2) are not addressed, then students will not be able to benefit fully from these structural and programmatic changes due to the delivery or pedagogy in these programs. I ask district leaders, philanthropists, and community-based service providers to strongly consider all seven recommendations so that the problem of dismal success rates of Ravenswood students as they transition to and through the Sequoia schools does not continue to be an ongoing issue. The academic outcomes of Ravenswood youth can be drastically increased, if the problem is addressed comprehensively and collectively.

Reflections on the Evaluation Process

I began this journey years ago, as my personal narrative in Paper 1 reveals. Since my first year teaching to gradually discovering the inequities students residing in East Palo Alto face simply because of their geographic location, I grew more passionate about seeking justice. In this dissertation, my primary focus has been to uncover and share policies and practices that harm students, whether intentional or not, coupled with

showcasing the voices of the youth. Even more importantly, I give recommendations based on these inequities and the brilliant ideas shared by youth.

Hosting focus groups with my former students was humbling because of their sheer strength, perseverance, and willingness to share their experiences, regardless of their successes or failures. At the same time, there were multiple times throughout each focus group that I had to chant mantras in my head to remain calm, and do my best not to show my true emotions. I didn't want my emotions to affect the dynamics of the conversation. I wanted the spotlight to remain on students and their experiences rather than my emotions. The hardships some students continued to experience and their raw accounts of how some staff members made them feel pierced my ears and heart in a way that I'll remember for my lifetime. There were many days where listening to and dissecting the audio recordings became too overwhelming. I had to pause, wipe my tears, and continue the following day. However, the conversations with these students gave me reason to stay hopeful as they offered countless suggestions to educators and community members at-large for what they can do to better support students.

Throughout this process I was reminded at how courageous Ravenswood students are as they are undergoing a schooling experience that isn't currently meeting their needs. I also collected multiple examples of how they look to, and in most cases, rely upon adults on middle and high school campuses for guidance and support. It made me think about why I loved teaching in East Palo Alto. The connections I made with students

from Ravenswood are for life. Even though I no longer work directly in the schools, former students still rely on guidance and support from me. I attribute this to a willingness on both of our parts – to connect to one another as humans, and care for each other’s well being. Educators that are able to create this bond with their students remain important figures in students’ lives.

Conclusion

Students in East Palo Alto are full of ideas and intellect. It is the duty of community leaders, parents, and educators to cultivate their strengths. The community of East Palo Alto is less than 3 square miles and Ravenswood City School District sends about 250 8th grade students to Sequoia Union High School District each year. That is the total yearly number of Ravenswood students to Sequoia Union schools: only 250 young people. Menlo Park and Atherton, situated in some of the wealthiest areas in the nation, are saturated with resources; these towns neighbor the city of East Palo Alto, a community that lacks access and opportunities, yet remains strong in culture and intelligence. Together, the communities of Ravenswood and Menlo-Atherton can work together to tackle a very solvable problem that has plagued youth for decades. In order to jump-start this process, I provide a call to action.

CALL TO ACTION

1. Given the high number of transfer requests of Ravenswood students to attend M-A in the 2014-2015 academic year, the SUHSD Board of Trustees should pass

the proposed boundary map, or a map that shows all Ravenswood students matriculating to M-A as their home high school, as soon as possible, and no later than June 2014.

2. District leaders in the area of curriculum, instruction, and teacher support should collaborate in June and throughout the summer of 2014 to determine a schedule of collaboration between both districts. Specifically, Principal Matthew Zito and Instructional Vice Principal Steve Lippi of M-A can meet directly with Assistant Superintendent of RCSD, Lorena Morales-Ellis, and RCSD principals. The outcome of the meeting should focus on a schedule of regular meetings between these two groups for the entire 2014-2015 school year. In addition, there should be a clear schedule of events including Preview Days for students, high school information nights at M-A and at RCSD schools for students and their parents, and teacher collaboration and observations days.
3. RCSD Superintendent Dr. Gloria Hernandez-Goff and Ravenswood Education Foundation Executive Director Renu Nanda should host a meeting with a group of funders. Specifically, they should demonstrate a focused need on high school transition to more effectively target donors. In addition, they should demonstrate the 2014-2015 academic road map of priorities as it relates to a K-12 vision, as well as a longer five and ten-year plan. Along with the plan, both Dr. Hernandez-Goff and Ms. Nanda can focus on the top two or three funding

priorities as it directly relates to higher student academic outcomes. Similarly, Principal Matthew Zito of M-A and Cindy Folker, Executive Director of Foundation for the Future (M-A's education foundation) should host a meeting delineating the funding needs to better support RCSD youth at M-A. The outcomes of each meeting should focus on a commitment on the part of funders to see an initiative through, as it links to what students have voiced are needs, and what the data indicates as needs.

4. The city of East Palo Alto, under the leadership of Mayor Laura Martinez, who is an educator in the community, and the RCSD Board of Trustees should host a gathering of service-providers in the community in June 2014. A third party can facilitate it, perhaps experts in the collective impact field such as FSG. Using the information gained from the work of the Gardner Center (Castrechini, 2013), the mayor and board members can directly ask some organizations to consolidate (to reduce costs and conflicting messages to families), and to willingly work together to fill grade level and geographic gaps that exist within the community, as they also relate to students in eastern Menlo Park²⁴. Instead of competing for student attendance for out-of-school time programs, organizations can work together more closely under the direction of the city. With close to 100

²⁴ East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park are two distinct communities that Ravenswood City School District serves. East Palo Alto is its own city, whereas eastern Menlo Park is part of the city limits of Menlo Park. Two Ravenswood schools, Willow Oaks and Belle Haven, are geographically in eastern Menlo Park.

community organizations working to serve youth, gaps of service can be lessened only if there is a deliberate plan to do just that. The outcomes of this gathering can focus on a direct ask of all organizations working with youth in the city and/or Ravenswood schools to agree to a data collection memo so that future data collection and analysis can be streamlined²⁵. The mayor and school board should identify a data system before the meeting so that organizations can immediately sign-up and participate in a brief training. In addition, the mayor and board can ask all service providers to identify one or two core strengths of the organization or program as it results to serving youth (e.g. high school transition, early literacy skills, access to music and art, college readiness). From this identification process, programs can be grouped together under these categories. Once a group is established, on the part of the group, they can find ways to reach more students in a deeper, more impactful way. This may include consolidating programs or giving up some other areas of focus to narrow down on the program or organization's strengths. This full process may reveal some areas where there are gaps (e.g. the area of one-on-one mentoring may be one in which no organization feels strong). When gaps are identified, community leaders can decide which organization has the capacity and structure to take on

²⁵ Although One East Palo Alto and the Gardner Center started this important work, there are many organizations that are not part of this collaborative; the city and the school board can be seen as an objective body looking to close the loop for service-providers in the community in an effort to improve efficacy in supporting East Palo Alto and Ravenswood youth.

this need, perhaps even with added resources per the city or district. The goal of a gathering of this type is to establish a unified goal (e.g. to develop and support engaged youth on a life pathway that affords them maximum choice). Once all stakeholders can agree upon the unified goal, then they can begin to work and plan together in a deliberate way to provide deeper services to a broader youth community. Finally, follow-up to this process is important; similar to the action item for schools, everyone should leave this gathering with a calendar of scheduled meetings for the 2014-2015 school year. This work could result in a bi-annual Support Services Fair held in the community for students and families. At the fair, students and families can learn about the different offerings and sign up for programs on the spot that fit their needs.

The problem at-hand is finite and tangible. RCSD is only a district of 3,600 K-8th grade students, a size smaller than many high schools in California. If district and community leaders work together, they can increase educational outcomes of *all* students through these enhanced support structures. The leaders of both districts ought to make the issue a top priority, devise a comprehensive transition plan, and act on the seven recommendations listed in this work. Once the plan is crafted, district leaders can collectively engage community organizations to help fill service gaps, and ask funders to help fill monetary gaps. Again, the most difficult work rests in the mindset of those serving students in classrooms, schools, and programs.

One may glance over the recommendations and think these things are already being done. However, I question to what extent, and how whatever is being “done” actually results in greater access and opportunity for Youth of Color that can ultimately impact life outcomes. The work shouldn’t be considered “done” until Youth of Color from Ravenswood are afforded the opportunity that leads to a life of choices that most of their White and Asian peers in the same high school have. As noted in Paper 1, students are beginning to voice their opinion around the matter, too. An outspoken M-A student published this article in M-A’s school newspaper, giving a strong message to parents who oppose the proposed boundary map. He states,

The truth is that the ‘rationale’ (I use that term loosely, as it implies logical decision making) behind the fear of M-A going downhill is a fear of racial integration at the school. Before you take offense from my bluntness, understand that this is a racially charged issue, and to sweep race under the carpet would only add to the problem. And we have had a tendency to do exactly that for far too long.... While not overt, these prejudices still dominate parts of the area. Ungrounded concern over crime or drugs and irrational fears over ‘urban’ or ‘ethnic’ cultures are poisoning M-A as an academic environment. (J. Weiner, 2014).

He gives one final comment to the parents that have labeled Ravenswood students as “those kids”: “If you are one of these people who feels the need to send your child to a

private school to avoid the racial diversity M-A has to offer, please, as a favor to all of us, do exactly so,” (J. Weiner, 2014). If young people are willing to hold adults accountable, adults need to hold each other accountable. Just like this student alludes to sending kids to a different school, educators who are not serving in the best interest of all students, should also be asked to leave.

A shift is desperately needed for all stakeholders to put the past behind us and envision a brighter future for the Youth of Color in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park. Collectively, then, we can tell our young people and their families who have not been served appropriately for decades that we are going to work harder and smarter, because they are worth it.

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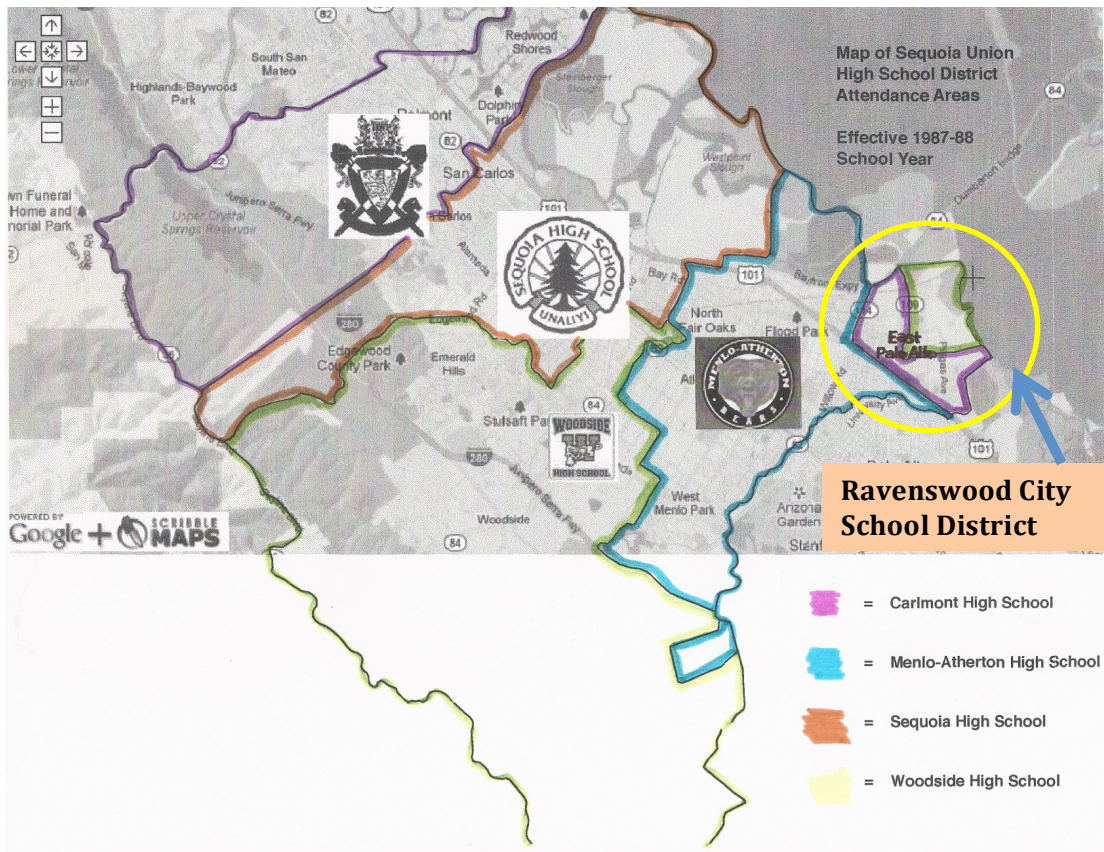
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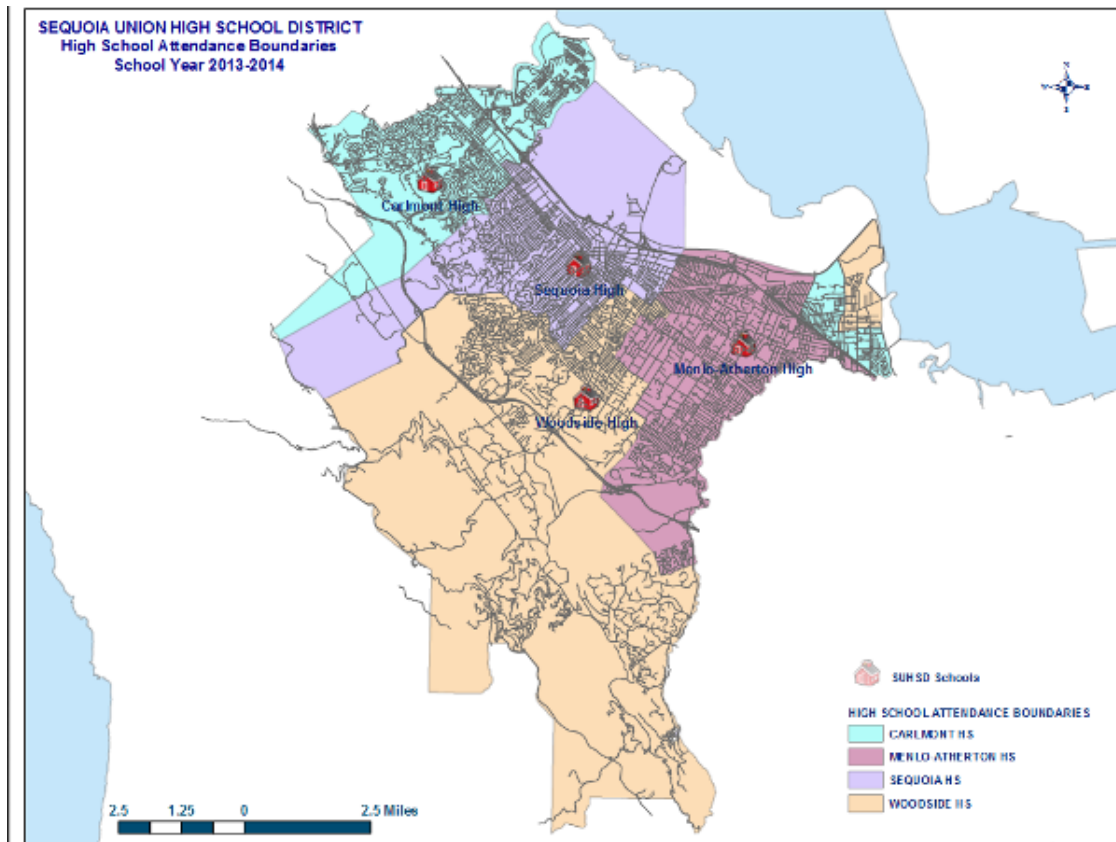
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Appendix A: Google Map of the SUHSD Boundaries

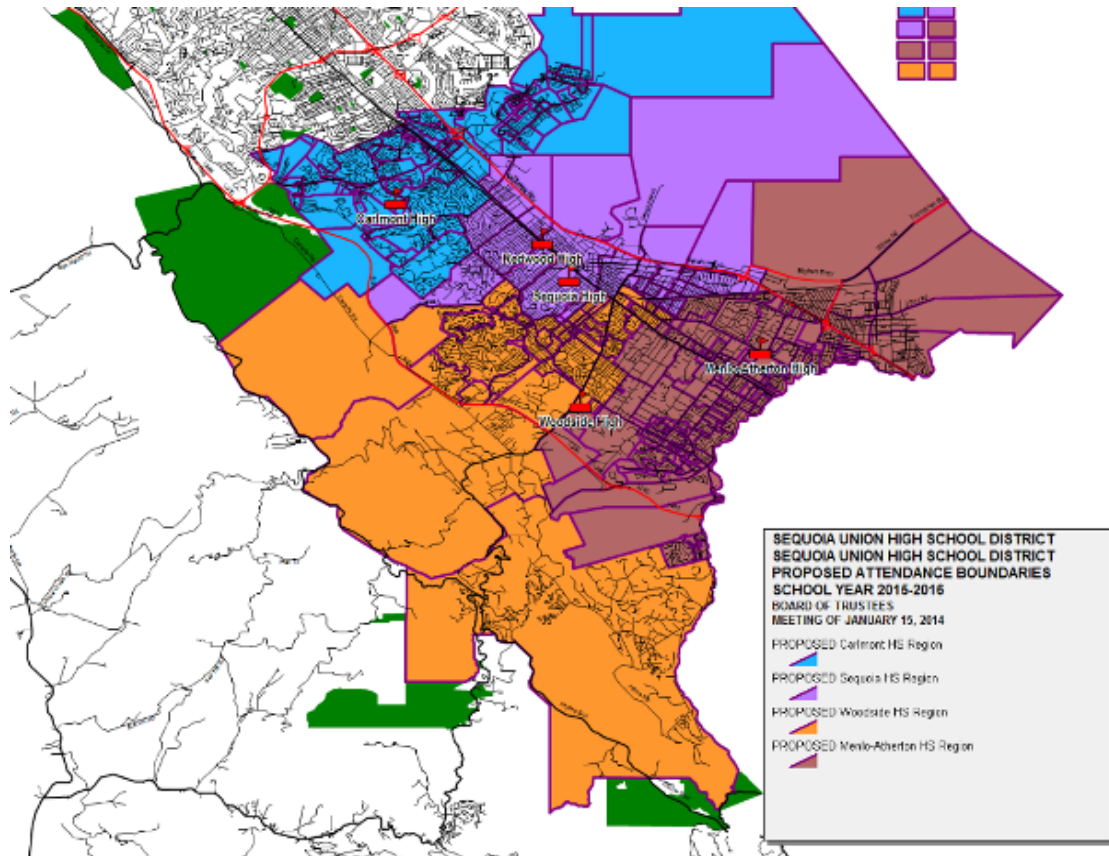


Appendix B: SUHSD Boundary Map Used in Public Board Meetings



Appendix C: SUHSD's New Proposed Boundary Map

Discussed on January 15, 2014



Appendix D: MyLife Program Overview and Budget

MyLife @ Menlo-Atherton High School

Overview

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula (BGCP) and Menlo-Atherton High School (M-A) co-created the MyLife program to increase the graduation rate of M-A's most at-risk students. It is a *high school success* program designed to help these students build the skills, study habits and support network that will enable them to *access and manipulate* the course content, and ultimately, to succeed academically.

Failure to graduate high school is strongly associated with ninth grade course failure. Research shows that 70-80% of students who fail in the first year will not graduate from high school. The MyLife program targets freshmen with a “whole student” approach to service delivery to ensure that participants can both identify and resolve any barriers to classroom success.

BGCP staff have offices on-campus and meet regularly with campus teachers and leadership. This partnership facilitates strong communication and resource-sharing, and allows staff to respond quickly to student needs.

Population Served

While most programs focus on motivated youth and are selective about whom they serve, MyLife welcomes all students. Many participants are recommended by teachers, counselors, or their parents based on various risk factors that may jeopardize their graduation. 100% of the youth engaged live in Ravenswood or the Fair Oaks neighborhood of Redwood City.

Program Elements

- **MyLife Afterschool Program**- on-site program where students are getting homework help, building strong relationships with their peers and adults, learning study and organizational skills, exploring electives, and attending field trips
- **Case Management**- one-on-one meetings with students to discuss academic and personal growth, set short-term and long-term goals, and monitor progress

- **Student Advocate**- connecting students and their families to teachers, service providers, and other available support services
- **Teacher Support**- creating individual student plans and providing check-ins with students
- **Classroom Support**- providing academic support to teachers/long-term subs
- **Classroom Pull-Out**- providing small group instruction and academic support
- **Enrichment Activities**- offering an array of curricula and programs including filmmaking, athletics, ceramic, art and college awareness
- **Parent Outreach**- offering opportunities for parent engagement and education
- **Student Support Services** -MyLife lead staff is stationed full time at Menlo-Atherton, fully integrated into the student support services provided by the school.

Opportunity for Growth

Based on the success of MyLife so far, we would like to expand the program. Specifically, in 2014/15 we would like to double the number of students served and develop a more differentiated approach for our 10th grade participants. We envision adding services to new grade levels in subsequent years of the partnership so that by 2016/17 the program serves students in all grades (9-12.)

While BGCP also serves high school students at its three clubhouses in East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Redwood City, serving students on-site at M-A has proven to be an effective strategy. Being on-site provides greater access to teachers, grades, and even student volunteers--this year it recruited over ten student volunteers.

While growing enrollment at M-A is a top organizational priority for BGCP, it is also actively strategizing on how it can leverage the unique resources of our Menlo Park clubhouse to provide an even deeper experience for M-A students. For example, if it could secure transportation, MyLife students could leave the school by 5:15pm and be at the clubhouse from 6-8pm where they could delve even deeper into enrichment activities or work with college counseling specialists. Similarly, perhaps the clubhouse focuses exclusively on 11th - 12th grades while MyLife at M-A serves 9th - 10th grades. This is very much a “live” conversation between BGCP and Menlo-Atherton.

	Actual 2013/14			Target 2014/15		
	9th	10th	Total	9th	10th	Total
Active members	30	10	40	50	30	80
Avg. Daily Attendance	22	8	30	35-40	20-25	55-65

Staffing model and responsibility areas for 2014-2015:

Staffing	2013/14	2014/15	Area of Responsibility
MyLife Director (Desiree)	1	1	Staff management, case management, volunteer recruitment, school partnership, parent liaison, program design
Coordinator (Samantha)	0.5	1.5	Manage tutors/mentors and daily volunteers, homework help, teach enrichment, lesson planning
Tutor/Mentor		1	Homework help, teach enrichment, lesson planning
49ers Academy Mentor (Miriam)	0.5	0.5	Homework help, enrichment, select case management, 49ers Academy parent and student relations (incoming 9 th graders)
BGCP Cost	\$120,000	\$250,000	
Cost/active member	\$3,000	\$3,100	

Note: BGCP cost doesn't include 49ers Academy cost

Current Outcomes (2013-2014)

% students on track for 10th grade (22 credits) (credits requirement to be sophomore: 44 credits)	100%
% students with 27.5+ credits (total credits needed to graduate: 220 (approx. 55 credits/year)	85%
% students 30+ credits	73%

Percentage of students passing core classes

Class	Semester 1
Algebra	97%
Biology	100%
English I	98%
Advanced Integrated Science*	97%
Geometry	86%
Algebra II	100%
World Studies	63%
Modern European History	50%

*replaced former 9th grade "Environmental Science" course in order to fulfill A-G requirements

Appendix E: SUHSD Retention/Attrition for Entering Freshmen in 2007-2008

Sequoia Union High School District
Retention/Attrition for Entering Freshmen in 2007-08

Class of 2011
All Elementary/Middle School Districts

Group, Subgroups, Programs	Total Number of Freshmen	% Advanced or Proficient on 8th Grade ELA CST	% Advanced or Proficient on 8th Grade Math CST	Received High School Diploma or Certificate	Received Comprehensive High School Diploma or Certificate	Received Alternative/Ed High School Diploma or Certificate	% 9th Grade Cohort Meeting A-G Requirements	8th Year Seniors/ Special Ed Adult Program	Withdraw to Enroll at Outside Public or Private Sch	Enrolled in Adult Sch	Moved Out of Country	Dropped Out									
All SUHSD Students																					
Districtwide	1959	53.2%	47.4%	1558	79.5%	1438	73.4%	120	6.1%	775	39.6%	19	1.0%	161	8.2%	98	5.0%	27	1.4%	96	4.9%
CA	599	64.5%	60.7%	483	80.6%	483	80.6%	50	8.3%	289	48.2%	3	0.5%	35	5.8%	12	2.0%	4	0.7%	12	2.0%
Mr-A	472	55.0%	52.1%	372	78.8%	354	75.0%	18	3.8%	225	47.7%	2	0.4%	43	9.1%	24	5.1%	2	0.4%	29	6.1%
SQ	388	40.7%	37.0%	282	72.7%	257	66.2%	25	6.4%	104	26.8%	5	1.3%	26	6.7%	28	7.2%	13	3.4%	34	8.8%
WS	500	48.1%	36.0%	371	74.2%	344	68.8%	27	5.4%	157	31.4%	9	1.8%	57	11.4%	34	6.8%	8	1.6%	21	4.2%
Belmont-Redwood Shores																					
Districtwide	238	74.0%	67.2%	223	93.7%	214	89.9%	9	3.8%	142	59.7%	0	0.0%	10	4.2%	2	0.8%	2	0.8%	1	0.4%
CA	236	74.3%	67.3%	222	94.1%	213	90.3%	9	3.8%	141	59.7%	0	0.0%	10	4.2%	2	0.8%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%
Mr-A	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SQ	2	50.0%	50.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%
WS	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Las Lomitas																					
Districtwide	73	86.1%	87.1%	70	95.9%	67	91.8%	3	4.1%	60	82.2%	0	0.0%	3	4.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
CA	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mr-A	71	87.1%	88.2%	69	97.2%	66	93.0%	3	4.2%	60	84.5%	0	0.0%	2	2.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
SQ	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WS	2	0.0%	50.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Menlo Park																					
Districtwide	436	85.6%	81.8%	426	97.6%	426	97.6%	0	0.0%	403	92.4%	2	0.5%	4	0.9%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	2	0.5%
CA	1	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Mr-A	132	86.8%	83.7%	125	94.7%	125	94.7%	0	0.0%	102	77.3%	0	0.0%	3	2.3%	1	0.8%	1	0.8%	2	1.5%
SQ	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WS	3	50.0%	0.0%	1	33.3%	1	33.3%	0	0.0%	1	33.3%	2	66.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Portola Valley																					
Districtwide	23	76.2%	71.4%	22	95.7%	21	91.3%	1	4.3%	19	82.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
CA	2	0.0%	0.0%	2	100.0%	2	100.0%	0	0.0%	2	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Mr-A	7	60.0%	60.0%	5	71.4%	5	71.4%	1	14.3%	5	71.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
SQ	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WS	14	92.9%	85.7%	14	100.0%	14	100.0%	0	0.0%	12	85.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Ravenswood City School District																					
Districtwide	279	17.4%	24.2%	172	61.6%	131	47.0%	41	14.7%	30	10.8%	3	1.1%	36	12.9%	30	10.8%	4	1.4%	34	12.2%
CA	84	19.2%	23.3%	60	71.4%	34	40.5%	26	31.0%	5	6.0%	0	0.0%	9	10.7%	6	7.1%	1	1.2%	8	9.5%
Mr-A	122	18.6%	22.1%	76	62.3%	69	56.6%	7	5.7%	21	17.2%	0	0.0%	15	12.3%	15	12.3%	1	0.8%	15	12.3%
SQ	18	16.7%	33.3%	8	44.4%	4	22.2%	4	22.2%	1	5.6%	0	0.0%	1	5.6%	3	16.7%	0	0.0%	6	33.3%
WS	55	11.4%	27.0%	28	50.9%	24	43.6%	4	7.3%	3	5.5%	3	5.5%	11	20.0%	6	10.9%	2	3.6%	5	9.1%

October 24, 2012
1 of 2

Educational Services Division
Research and Evaluation

Sequoia Union High School District
Retention/Attrition for Entering Freshmen in 2007-08

Class of 2011
All Elementary/Middle School Districts

Group, Subgroups, Programs	Total Number of Freshmen	% Advanced or Proficient on 8th Grade ELA CST	% Advanced or Proficient on 8th Grade Math CST	Received High School Diploma or Certificate	Received Comprehensive High School Diploma or Certificate	Received Alternative High School Diploma or Certificate	% 8th Grade Cohort Meeting A-G Requirements	6th Year Senior School Ed Adult Program	Withdraw to Enroll at Outside Public or Private Sch	Enrolled in Adult Sch	Moved Out of Country	Dropped Out					
Redwood City School District Only																	
Districtwide	756	44.5%	35.0%	595	78.7%	522	69.0%	73	9.7%	60	7.9%	46	6.1%	8	1.1%	39	5.2%
CA	36	75.0%	50.0%	32	88.9%	26	72.2%	6	16.7%	4	11.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
M-A	76	26.0%	19.2%	54	71.1%	46	60.5%	8	10.5%	7	9.2%	4	5.3%	0	0.0%	9	11.8%
SO	293	40.7%	37.4%	236	80.5%	208	71.0%	28	9.6%	16	5.5%	18	6.1%	4	1.4%	16	5.5%
WS	351	48.5%	34.5%	273	77.8%	242	68.9%	31	8.8%	33	9.4%	24	6.8%	4	1.1%	14	4.0%
San Carlos																	
Districtwide	192	71.7%	71.1%	183	95.3%	179	93.2%	4	2.1%	4	2.1%	2	1.0%	0	0.0%	3	1.6%
CA	168	73.2%	74.6%	161	95.8%	157	93.5%	4	2.4%	102	60.7%	2	1.2%	0	0.0%	2	1.2%
M-A	7	33.3%	66.7%	7	100.0%	7	100.0%	0	0.0%	3	42.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
SO	16	61.5%	30.8%	14	87.5%	14	87.5%	0	0.0%	6	37.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	6.3%
WS	1	100.0%	100.0%	1	100.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Woodside Elementary																	
Districtwide	78	88.9%	38.9%	16	88.9%	16	88.9%	0	0.0%	11	61.1%	1	5.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
CA	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
M-A	1	100.0%	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
SO	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WS	17	88.2%	41.2%	15	88.2%	15	88.2%	0	0.0%	10	58.8%	1	5.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Private Local																	
Districtwide	51	-	-	48	94.1%	46	90.2%	2	3.9%	30	58.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.0%
CA	12	-	-	12	100.0%	12	100.0%	0	0.0%	7	58.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
M-A	11	-	-	10	90.9%	1	9.1%	9	81.8%	6	54.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	9.1%
SO	6	-	-	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	3	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
WS	22	-	-	20	90.9%	18	81.8%	2	9.1%	14	63.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Non-Local Feeder (Public, Private, Foreign)																	
Districtwide	193	-	-	103	53.4%	96	49.7%	7	3.6%	42	21.8%	16	8.3%	12	6.2%	15	7.8%
CA	60	-	-	44	73.3%	38	63.3%	6	10.0%	14	23.3%	2	3.3%	2	3.3%	1	1.7%
M-A	45	-	-	24	53.3%	24	53.3%	0	0.0%	14	31.1%	4	8.9%	0	0.0%	1	2.2%
SO	53	-	-	17	32.1%	17	32.1%	0	0.0%	6	11.3%	7	13.2%	8	15.1%	11	20.8%
WS	35	-	-	18	51.4%	17	48.6%	1	2.9%	8	22.9%	3	8.6%	2	5.7%	2	5.7%

Appendix F: 2014-15 Open Enrollment/Special Transfer Summary

Take from Board Meeting Minutes: http://seq.org/+uploaded/file_1361.pdf

2014-15 OPEN ENROLLMENT/SPECIAL TRANSFER SUMMARY

The District received transfer requests from October, 2013 through January, 2014. A special lottery was held after the closing of Open Enrollment. Students were assigned a priority number based on the school they wished to attend. Seventy percent of transfer requests were approved. Approximately one-fourth of the 2014-15 class will be attending a school other than their assigned high school of residence.

OPEN ENROLLMENT TOTALS		
TOTAL REQUESTED	TOTAL APPROVED	Percent Approved
780	559	71.6%

Includes Ravenswood, Tinsley, Las Lomitas & Tierra Linda Adjustment Transfers

	TRANSFERS IN	TRANSFERS OUT
Carlmont	110	113
Menlo-Atherton	33 + 91 Ravenswood = 124	139
Sequoia	160	173
Woodside	165	134

CARLMONT HIGH SCHOOL	CA	M-A	SQ	WD	TOTAL
Carlmont (out)	-	59	36	18	113
Carlmont (in)	-	8	83	10	101
Sibling Requests to CA	-	-	7	2	9
Total Approved	-	8	90	12	110

CARLMONT HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL TRANSFERS PER AR 5116.1	CA	M-A	SQ	WD	TOTAL
Tierra Linda – Special Boundaries	-	-	32	-	32

The Board of Trustees approved a “boundary exceptions” policy for the 2014-15 school year, or “until such a time that new school attendance areas go into effect” for those students residing within the attendance area of the San Carlos School District’s Tierra Linda Middle School. These students were assigned to their home school but were allowed to request a transfer, and have it approved, to the extent that Carlmont was able to accommodate the requests after considering outgoing requests. Thirty-four students filed to transfer using this approved exception.

MENLO-ATHERTON HIGH SCHOOL	CA	M-A	SQ	WD	TOTAL
Menlo-Atherton (out)	14	-	64	61	139
Menlo-Atherton (in) – Special Transfers	7	-	2	14	23
Sibling Requests to M-A	4	-	1	5	10
Total Approved w/o Ravenswood	11	-	3	19	33
Total Approved including Ravenswood		91			124

MENLO-ATHERTON SPECIAL TRANSFERS PER AR 5116.1	CA	M-A	SQ	WD	TOTAL
Tinsley	7	-	2	4	13
Las Lomitas				10	10
Total Tinsley + Las Lomitas	7	-	2	14	23
Ravenswood to M-A	-	91	-	-	91

There were 119 requests submitted by Ravenswood for Menlo-Atherton. The district has granted 91 of these transfers to date. There is a waitlist of 28 students. As 9th grade enrollments at M-A become finalized and space becomes available, students will be placed at M-A from this waitlist.

SEQUOIA HIGH SCHOOL	CA	M-A	SQ	WD	TOTAL
Sequoia (out)	83	4	-	86	173
Sequoia (in)	31	61	-	50	142
Sibling Requests to Sequoia	5	3	-	10	18
Total Approved	36	64	-	60	160

WOODSIDE HIGH SCHOOL	CA	M-A	SQ	WD	TOTAL
Woodside (out)	10	64	60	-	134
Woodside (in)	18	59	77	-	154
Sibling Requests to Woodside	-	2	9	-	11
Total Approved	18	61	86		165

This year there were higher numbers of transfer requests submitted than typical over the past years. This is due to the outreach to the Ravenswood community to have all 8th graders participate in the Open Enrollment process. It is hoped with the new enrollment boundaries, next year the number of Open Enrollment requests will decrease as more students will be assigned to home schools that are in closer proximity to their residence and will be following their co-hort of classmates to the same high school.

Appendix G: Ravenswood Education Foundation High School Transition Fund



Ravenswood High School Transition Fund

Objective

The Ravenswood City School District (RCSD) through the Ravenswood Education Foundation (REF) seeks to support middle school students entering the Sequoia Union High School District (SUHSD) to best position them for success in high school and beyond. Given talks around redistricting and the increased likelihood that Ravenswood students will enter Menlo-Atherton High School (M-A), the timing is critical that RCSD provide intentional academic counseling and planning for middle school students, strengthen institutional relationships, and remove barriers for students from East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park.

Goal

REF will track data in order to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increased on-time graduation of Ravenswood students from M-A
- Increased number of Ravenswood students in Advanced Standing classes
- Increased number of Ravenswood students satisfying A – G requirements

Timeline

Starting in the '14-'15 school year, this fund will support a 4-year high school transition program.

Program

High School Transition Coordinator & High School Counselor (2 guidance counselors)

Activities:

Logistics

- Develop timeline and manage logistics during open enrollment transfer process
- Assist with high school selection process (public, charter, and private)
- Assist families in SUHSD address verification process
- Track students through high school, including AVID students

Parent Education

- Provide parent education on high school transition for middle school families
- Facilitate communication and collaboration between RCSD and SUHSD Parent Outreach Coordinators, and M-A Parent Outreach Coordinator.

Student Support

- Plan and hold roadmap visioning retreat for middle school students

- Work with middle schools to provide support in selection of high school classes
- Liaison with High Schools***
- Coordinate with myLife team to maximize appropriate selection of students and understand trends and gaps to follow up with in middle school
 - Coordinate with truancy social worker
 - Develop and foster relationships with local private and charter high schools
 - Work with M-A guidance counseling staff to create a plan of support for students not meeting academic standing
 - Collaborate with M-A Student Services Coordinator to ensure a seamless transition with needed wrap-around support
- Academic Alignment***
- Oversee and track articulation and alignment meetings with academic staff

Outcomes:

- Students earn enough credits for sophomore standing (tracked throughout freshman year)
- Increase in number of students with 2.0 GPA at end of freshman year
- Increase in number of freshman students who successfully complete Advanced Standing classes

AVID Across Middle Schools

Activities:

- “Avidize” RCSD middle schools, potentially down to 4th grade
- One – two AVID classes per middle school where an appropriate fit
- Collaborate with SUHSD to ensure RCSD AVID students continue in high school AVID

Outcomes:

- Examine outcomes for middle schools with AVID
- Increase number of students successfully completing freshman AVID classes

Articulation & Alignment Meetings

Activities:

- Science, technology, and literacy coordinators meet with M-A leadership/department heads/teachers to examine gaps and strengths
- 6th – 8th grade ELA/Social Studies and math/science teachers meet with their high school counterparts quarterly; to be led by coordinators
- Culturally relevant joint professional development on cultural sensitivity training for all middle school and high school teaching staff (August)

Outcomes:

- Increase communication and collaboration between teachers to help ensure preparation of RCSD middle school students for high school

Budget

Item Type	Cost Year 1	Cost Year 2	Cost Year 3	Cost Year 4
Personnel (Transition Coordinator \$80K in yr 1 plus 17.36% benefits)	\$93,888	\$96,235	\$98,582	\$98, 582
Personnel (Transition Counselor \$60K in yr 1 plus 17.36% benefits)	\$70,416	\$72,763	\$75,110	\$75,110
Materials	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000	-
Technology	\$5,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	-
Middle School Academic Roadmap Retreat	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
AVID (7 schools; M-A to contribute as well)	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000
Staff time for articulation and alignment meetings (assumes \$37.50/hr; 20 teachers @ 2hrs/month)	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
Total Cost Per Year	\$269,304	\$271,998	\$276,692	\$265,692