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Santa Barbara School District Gang Intervention Specialist Evaluation Report

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Santa Barbara School District

Gang Intervention Specialist



Evaluation Report

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1. Summary

In 2009 the Santa Barbara School District launched an intervention program for some of the students identified by school personnel as possibly involved in gangs. In this pilot year the program was evaluated by a research team led by Dr. Victor Rios, from the University of California, Santa Barbara, to document the program's implementation, analyze program efficacy, and determine student needs. This evaluation included qualitative pre test surveys completed by 59 students and qualitative post test surveys completed by 84 students. These surveys were designed to measure the students' attitudes towards school, community and family, and also allowed for the confidential reporting of violence, victimization, crime and gang-involvement. The evaluation also consisted of participant observations of group sessions, events and workshops in which four researchers shadowed the outreach worker to witness the immediate impact participation in the program had on students. The evaluators also conducted forty in-depth interviews with individual students and ten focus group interviews. These interviews included open-ended and structured questions regarding their perceptions of the outreach worker and how he has impacted their perceptions and aspirations. Finally, grade, attendance, suspension, and citizenship data were analyzed in an attempt to measure academic progress.

We found that the program's "Gang Intervention Specialist" (from here on "outreach worker" or "GIS") employs a motivational approach that is supported by the findings of previous evaluations of gang prevention and intervention programs. A motivational approach emphasizes building a one-on-one relationship based on trust and advocacy. Some of the leading researchers specializing in gang intervention programs have concluded that these motivational, "detached worker programs" are particularly suited for helping gang youth by connecting with them on their level. Outreach workers with similar backgrounds who can understand the experiences of the students they work with are adept at connecting these youth with school and community.

Overall, the outreach worker appears to be meeting the school district's primary goals of connecting the students with school and reducing the level of gang related conflict and violence. For example, students reported greater levels of attachment to school six months after the evaluation's pre test surveys. 71% of students reported that grades were always or usually very important to them in the post test survey and 54.2% indicated that they wanted to achieve a university degree, which represented a dramatic rise from the 26% who claimed to have similar aspirations in the pre test. Students also reported lower rates of delinquency, victimization, and pressure to join gangs after their participation in the outreach program. The program has been found as overall effective based on the improvement of student levels of self-esteem, educational attitudes, and self-reported decrease in negative gang behaviors.

Thirty of 110 students that Mr. Huerta worked with, or 27% raised, their G.P.A by at least .25 points within two marking periods. 51% of students experienced no change in their G.P.A. 22% of students saw a drop of .25 points or more in their G.P.A. No significant changes in citizenship, attendance, or suspensions were found.

Highlight of Findings

- **38 out of 40 students that we interviewed and 68 out of 84 post-test survey respondents reported that Ismael had inspired them to finish high school and attain a college education.**
- **71% of survey respondents for wave 2 (n=84) reported that “grades are very important to me,” up from 57.6% in the initial survey (n=59).**
- **In the second wave of surveys the rate of students interested in earning bachelor’s degrees had a drastic increase. In the first wave 35.7% reported a desire to achieve a bachelor’s degree. In the second wave, 54.2% now report desiring university degrees.**
- **Almost 90% of students claimed that the sessions with Ismael helped them feel better about school (up from 61% in May).**
- **The survey data suggests that some students are learning to handle threats of violence without resorting to joining gangs (see page 34).**
- **While we can recognize some very encouraging results in terms of students developing positive attitudes about school and their educational future, the data concerning their perceptions of their relationships with teachers have not shown much progress (see page 29).**
- **27 students out of 100 total experienced a .25 point increase or more in G.P.A. (This was not expected due to the short, six-month, nature of the evaluation.)**
- **No significant changes in attendance, citizenship, or suspensions were found. (This was expected due to the short, six-month, nature of the evaluation.)**

The data collected in this evaluation indicates that the outreach worker has developed a motivational program that has helped a number of students, recognized as gang associated, transform into “dreamers.” Dreamers are students who demonstrate aspirations to finish school, attend college, and become professionals. 38 out of the 40 students that we interviewed and 81% of post-test survey respondents reported that Ismael had inspired them to do so. This outcome has been accomplished through outreach programming that has emphasized the importance of college in several ways. This included exposing students to people with gang pasts who have been able to succeed at the college level, teaching students about the different career, vocational, and educational opportunities available, and taking them to college campuses to show them what these schools have to offer. By instilling these aspirations and connecting youth with school, the program has the potential to further transform these “dreamers” into “strivers.” Strivers are students that know how to work towards these goals and are committed to taking the everyday steps necessary to achieve such goals.

The central recommendations the evaluation team makes for future implementation include, increasing the outreach workers capacity by lowering his caseload or hiring a second outreach worker, implementing more workshops and activities focused on academic success, and encouraging greater school personnel collaboration with the program.

2. Purpose of Evaluation

Gangs in the Santa Barbara School District

Citing a recent increase in gang activity reported by schools, media, and community leaders, school officials have become increasingly vigilant in looking for the influence these groups hold on local campuses. This is particularly true because so many of those involved in local street gangs are juveniles that attend schools within the Santa Barbara district. Teachers and principals report noticing students identifying with neighborhood gangs primarily at the junior high and high school levels. Not coincidentally, this is the age group in which individuals are most likely to join a neighborhood gang. In these grade levels, students come into contact with students from diverse backgrounds for possibly the first time in their school careers and these street identities can become an attractive source of status for some youth. Because of this, school officials have become concerned about the role gangs and street identities have played in on-campus altercations and the behavior and academic performance of individual students.

Forming the Santa Barbara School District Violence Prevention Program

In 2008 the Santa Barbara School District decided to launch an outreach and prevention program to implement at its junior high and high school campuses. The program was to be centered around a youth outreach worker that would work as a “Gang Intervention Specialist” for students throughout the district. The position was to be modeled after gang intervention programs featured in a number of major cities in which the interventionist works as a case manager for assigned youths. Principals from the junior high and high school campuses in the district were to refer students they suspected of gang involvement to the GIS and this was to comprise his caseload, expected to include some 50-60 students. With only one outreach worker, the steering committee decided that it would be more advantageous to let him construct a caseload via referrals from school principals, as this would allow him to work with youth on several campuses and allow him to continue working with them as they advanced and attended different schools.

In hiring the outreach worker, the school district made it a point to hire somebody who shared a personal history of involvement with street gangs. This was important for the school district because they wanted an interventionist that not only understood the obstacles and lived experiences of the youth in the program, but also someone the students felt that they could relate to. In connecting youth with an outreach worker that has personal experience with their lived realities, not only may they be more likely to value the advice given but they will also be provided with a role model for someone who has participated in gang life and managed to successfully build a life away from the street. Using his personal history as an asset, the GIS can offer mentoring and practical advice on how to safely navigate communities with gangs and develop social capital and mobility to increase their familiarity with mainstream institutions. Of the candidates for the GIS position, the Steering Committee felt that Ismael Huerta was the best suited to meet these requirements.

Upon being hired, the GIS was expected to quickly get to know the students that would comprise his caseload. Within his role as the school district’s GIS, Ismael was to mentor student’s in groups within a classroom setting and individually. Through this one-on-one mentoring the GIS was to evaluate his students’ needs on a case-by-case basis and refer them to appropriate city and county resources

(social services, health services, financial assistance etc.), which he must be familiar with and need to be made accessible to him. In addition to these resources the GIS should also refer students to employment opportunities, job training, and educational assistance programs as these become available. These resources can be hard for marginalized young people to access, so it is important that students have access to these programs in order for the program to succeed. To ensure flexibility in responding to student needs, the GIS was permitted to mentor and refer students to resources as he saw fit without having to rely on a fixed curriculum for student progress. The GIS met with each student in his caseload at least twice a month and provided contact information so students could reach him in times of emergency. Visits with students took place in environments students found both accessible and safe. Regular home visits were conducted as well.

What's in a name? The implications of labeling students as gang members

Per the request of the GIS, the name of the program was changed from the Gang Intervention Program to the Violence Prevention Program to remove any stigma for youth participating, making it easier for the program to receive student and family cooperation. After being hired Ismael advised the Steering Committee that he believed telling students that they had to participate in a gang intervention program would send them the message that they had already been labeled as criminals by their schools. He felt this would be met by resistance from students and even more so by families who wanted to avoid this label. Additionally, he felt he could receive more community and student support by emphasizing the goal of the program was to reduce youth violence, not condemn students for their styles or subcultures. For these reasons Ismael felt uncomfortable referring to himself as GIS, or to the program as Gang Intervention, and the Steering Committee, agreeing with his points, moved to change the name to emphasize the focus of the program.

Program Goals

The primary goal of the violence prevention program is, quite clearly, to prevent school district students from engaging in violence on or off campus. The focus of this program is to prevent this through the erosion of negative oppositional street identities believed to be prone to aggression and violence. This is believed to be best achieved by teaching students to identify with something other than a negative street culture. Through having an outreach worker at school that the youth can relate to and who can serve as a mentor for them, the program aims to provide marginalized youth with a friendly face to welcome them in what they may perceive as an uninviting institution. In this way the program hopes to develop a rapport between the student and the GIS that can help the youth develop stronger attachments to their school, family and community.

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Coinciding with this goal for the program is the expectation that, along with developing an identity apart from street culture, youth will be less likely to find neighborhood gangs attractive if they have the resources necessary to meet their basic needs. In assigning youth to the GIS, it is anticipated that the GIS will become familiar with the individual circumstances of the students in his caseload and connect them with any city or county resources that they may need access to. By stabilizing the personal lives of enrolled students, the program hopes to remove many of the factors that may push young people towards local neighborhood gangs.

Students Targeted for Inclusion in the Violence Prevention Program

The students enrolled in this program have been identified by their respective teachers and principals as disruptive, at risk, and/or underachieving students suspected of gang involvement. Most of the students referred to the program are male and almost all of them are Latino/a.

Purpose of Evaluation

With the launching of the new violence prevention program, the school district made the decision to include an evaluation of the program for a number of reasons. The most obvious was simply to see if the program was working. Previous intervention programs that focused on cognitive and behavioral training have done well (Anderson 1998), and those teaching youth about their cultural history have accomplished considerable transformations in the students' behavior (Dance 2001). However, although we have some idea about what kind of prevention and intervention programming can be effective in reaching youth, we cannot know if a particular program is functioning as intended without some sort of evaluation process (Klein & Maxson 2006). In developing the program for the Santa Barbara School District, it will be important to monitor its implementation to best ensure that it creates the intended results.

Another important reason for the evaluation was to see how the program can be adapted to increase its effectiveness among the targeted student population. How can it reach as many students as are needed and how can the program be as influential in their lives as possible? This involves a process of evaluating the experiences and needs of the students targeted and determining the appropriate strategies and resources necessary to address their particular concerns. As the implementation of the program is in its first year, much of the approach has been based on previous research in gang intervention programs and by shadowing students and the GIS. However, both of these sources have been shaped by knowledge of gangs and outreach programs as they exist in other cities, primarily Los

Angeles. This is the first such program to be attempted in Santa Barbara, it will be important to determine if the unique dynamics of this town influence the strategies necessary to reach local youth.

Also important in motivating the decision to evaluate this program was the recognition of the need to document as much of the program's implementation as possible. This ensures that the program can be replicated for future use, complete with all lessons learned from this year's experience. Should the GIS step down from his position, it is important to have a structure in place for someone else to step in and resume the position. This saves considerable time and labor renewing the program and allows for a new GIS to get to work as soon as possible without losing the progress made by the former worker. Future expansion into other campuses will also be much more guided, and less risky financially. In documenting how the position is to be integrated into the structure of the school district, what the effective practices and guidelines are for the position, and how previous caseloads have been managed, the program can develop a structure strong enough to be repeated as need be without being dependent on any one specialist.

Also important in motivating the decision to evaluate this program was the recognition of the need to document as much of the program's implementation as possible. This ensures that the program can be replicated for future use, complete with all lessons learned from this year's experience. Should the GIS at any point step down from his position, it is important to have a structure in place for someone else to step in and resume the position

3. Focus of Evaluation

For the purposes of adapting the outreach program to best fit the needs of the students targeted for participation, we measured student attachment to school, family, and community. The evaluation concentrated on these focuses for a number of reasons. The school district believed that these areas of concern were most important to them because they reasoned that they would be characteristic of youth alienated from participating in school and drawn to street subcultures. Students disillusioned with school itself will clearly be less invested in doing well academically, and if this is the case the district has expressed its dedication to making its campuses more welcoming and engaging environments for all students. Additionally, youth that are alienated from their family or community may lack the social support that instills the importance of education and motivates them to work hard in school. If either of these factors are influencing students in ways that negatively affect their school behavior and performance, the school district wants to identify the underlying problems so that they can adjust the focus of the outreach program and allocate district and city resources appropriately.

Gang Intervention Theory

There is also considerable research indicating that these variables are significant in identifying youth most likely to join neighborhood gangs. The evaluation team found it important to examine the students' attachment to school, family and community because these connections function as controls

that limit an individual's propensity for participating in deviant or criminal behavior. Travis Hirschi's social control theory argues that bonds tying one to the community, such as commitments to family, employment or education, act as informal controls over the individual that prevent delinquency (1969). Simply speaking, when these bonds are strong, one has too much to lose to risk involvement in violence or illicit economies. Research also indicates that desisting from crime can be facilitated through strengthening such bonds; "men who desisted from crime exhibited remarkable stability and organization across several adult life domains – work, marriage, and living arrangements" (Laub & Sampson 2003, 129). When these connections are in place, much of the need to participate in street life (to find a surrogate family, status, a source of income, etc.) is eliminated.¹ Gang intervention largely relies on this theory, working with the assumption that the most effective method of dissuading a young person from gang violence is to ensure that their basic social needs are met. In terms of outreach, youth will be much more willing to listen to someone interested in helping them access social resources than to somebody simply condemning their lifestyle. When this is accomplished, the teen will theoretically lose interest in gang life and its associated violence.

In addition to the quantitative measurements of the students' attachment to school, family and community, it was also important for the evaluation to analyze how well the program facilitated Ismael's ability to individually mentor students. In order to increase youth access to the kinds of opportunities that could strengthen their social ties to the community, it is necessary for them to have mentors and teachers who can relate to the challenges and experiences they face in the street. Individualized youth mentoring has been shown to improve young people's attendance and performance in school (McPartland & Nettles 1991), lower juvenile recidivism rates (Davidson & Redner 1988), reduce substance abuse (LoSciuto et al 1996), and improve familial relationships (Rhodes et al 2000). Mentoring also fosters the intergenerational relationships within a community that develop the social capital young people need to prosper (Coleman 1988; Gonzalez 1999). But street youth specifically need mentors who will be able to recognize, see past, and work around the tough fronts marginalized teens commonly adopt as a defensive mechanism or cultural presentation (Dance 2002). If teachers act as gatekeepers to social mobility, those teachers unfamiliar with the lived realities of youth from working class communities will often perceive teens adopting the postures of gangsters as mere troublemakers. As a result, many find it difficult to reach these students and ultimately focus more of their attention on disciplining rather than teaching these youth. In turn these youth come to see school as a belittling rather than nurturing environment and their identification with the resistant subculture is reinforced, their posturing justified (Dance 2002; Flores-Gonzalez 2002).

Individualized youth mentoring has been shown to improve young people's attendance and performance in school (McPartland & Nettles 1991), lower juvenile recidivism rates (Davidson & Redner 1988), reduce substance abuse (LoSciuto et al 1996), and improve familial relationships (Rhodes et al 2000).

¹ Additionally, "traits like self-control can change over time as a consequence of changes in the quality or strength of social ties" (Laub & Sampson 2003, 23)

As former gang members themselves, intervention workers are in a good position to recognize the need for youth to adopt such postures and work around them to still connect with the individual. This understanding provides the youth with an advocate who can help them resist labeling processes that identify marginalized students as criminals. Additionally, a role model from a similar background may be more effective in combating the common assumption among youth that gangbanging (participating in gang activity) or slanging (selling illicit substances) are their only viable options. Similar messages of the possibility of social mobility from outsiders may only ignore the youth's own realistic observations of the inequality present in their own neighborhoods.

4. Methods

The Santa Barbara School District Violence Prevention Program Evaluation consisted of survey, focus group, interview, and participant observation research that aimed to determine what the needs were for youth targeted for inclusion in the program and how effective the outreach efforts of the district had been in meeting these needs. To determine how to best assist the students enrolled in the program, the surveys were designed to address a number of areas of concern that, according to previous research, showed some impact on school performance. Half of the survey respondents were chosen at random and interviewed to discuss their responses to the survey questions in more detail. Focus groups were conducted to gain an understanding of the group dynamic and group influence on student responses and to provide a more comfortable setting for students to respond to questions. Multiple workshop, fieldtrip, school, community center, and home visit observations were conducted over a six-month period to gain a sense of the outreach worker's interactions and day-to-day activities. The research team conducted workshops and interacted with students in order to gain respect, trust and a sense of the youth participants' responses to specific interventions.

Pre and Post Test Survey

Two rounds of surveys were conducted with the students enrolled in the violence prevention program at several school district campuses. The first was carried out in May of 2009 and the second in late October and early November of 2009. The second round of surveys was administered some 6 months after the first round to give the researchers an opportunity to observe the influence of the program on the participants' responses. The survey is divided into four areas in which we ask the respondents to describe different aspects of their lives. These questions are designed to measure students' attachment to school, family and community, as well as how they feel about working with Ismael. 59 students participated in the first wave of surveys and 84 (with 80 valid cases)² participated in the second round of surveys. We collected longitudinal data on 26 students who participated in both the first and second wave of surveys.

The first collection of survey questions is designed to measure the students' perceptions of school and how much they value education. Respondents are asked about how comfortable they feel at school, how they are treated by teachers and other students, and what they expect to get out of their education. Street activity may appeal to students who are marginalized within their schools, so it is

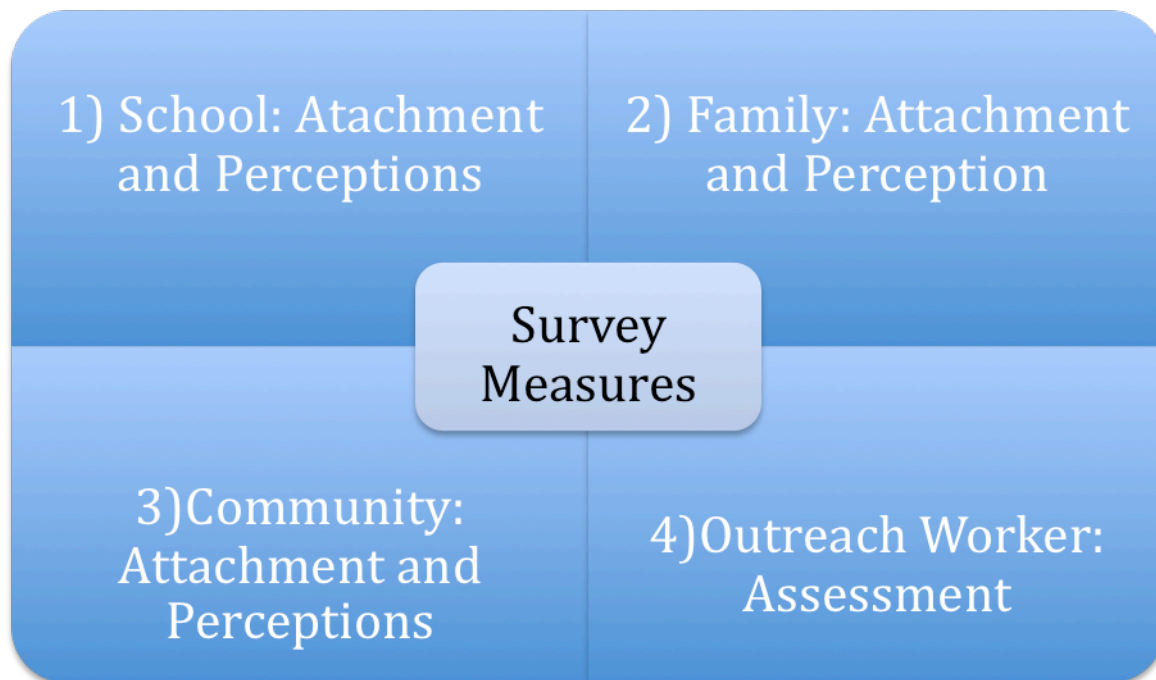
² Invalid cases consisted of duplicate survey responses. Students were administered the surveys in large groups, which made it possible for some students to receive a survey more than once.

important to determine if this is a significant need for this student population. If school attachment is indeed a significant problem for these youth, outreach mentoring focused on the benefits of education and its necessity in the workplace may be recommended, as well as closer working relationships between outreach workers and teachers and campus personnel.

The second major focus area of the survey is designed to measure the students' attachment to their families, most specifically to their parents. Students are asked questions about how closely they keep in contact with their parents about everyday activities, how comfortable they feel talking about personal problems with them, and what kind of influences they perceive them to be in their lives. If problematic living situations are affecting students at school, it is important for outreach workers to be familiar with any county or city resources the student may be eligible for that may benefit the youth. The outreach worker is likely to be more aware of such circumstances than the evaluation researchers will be, but this systematic approach may help determine how significant a need this may be for this population.

The third set of questions we have in the survey asks students about their perception attachment to their communities. These questions focus on student perceptions of how they feel their community is seen by others in the city and at their school, what social inequalities they witness or experience, and how safe or threatening they find their neighborhood and others in the city. Although this may seem beyond the scope of the school district's responsibilities, student understandings of how they are perceived and categorized by the community they live in, often times influences how they behave and perform in school, where they must interact with others they see as different from them. This is likely related to student attachment to school, and is an important aspect of their lives to consider in developing an effective and beneficial outreach program. If this is found to be a significant concern for the student population, outreach sessions and mentoring focused more on offering advice on how to safely navigate neighborhoods and community empowerment may be recommended.

The final set of questions we have in the survey is designed to measure the students' initial response to meeting with an outreach worker. These questions ask students about their opinions of their class sessions with the outreach worker, what these meetings have been focused on, and how satisfied they have been with them. This section is also intended to supplement the other three areas by asking the students if they feel these areas have been addressed in sessions, if they have found such talks useful, and if they would like to be offered more or fewer sessions on said topics.



In-depth interviews

Forty of the students selected to participate in the evaluation survey were also interviewed by the evaluation team in order to provide more depth to the data. Utilizing recorded interviews to supplement the data gathered in the surveys allowed the research team to hear the students' personal accounts of issues encountered at school and in their homes and communities and provided a much more detailed insight into students' experiences. Through this we are able to construct a more specific understanding of what the students need from the violence prevention program.

40 students were randomly selected and contacted for one-hour interviews following the administration of the first wave of surveys. Students were notified of the interviews in class sessions with Ismael, in which they met the researchers handling the actual interviews. The students were made aware that the interviews were voluntary and confidential. Finally, students were told they had the right to refuse to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. The purpose of the interviews and the evaluation was also explained to them to convey the importance of their participation and to give them a voice in developing school district programs. The interviews themselves were fairly unstructured and referred to the survey questions as a loose guideline. The aim of these interviews was to discuss the student's individual experiences and focus on those that stood out to them as important for consideration in developing an outreach program.

The interviews were conducted on school campuses after class times or in locations the students selected in their home communities. Most of these interviews took place during the summer months. The students chosen for these interviews were again approached for follow-up interviews after the second round of surveys were handed out in early November. Through these follow-up interviews we are able to track changes in how students discuss experiences relevant to the evaluation study and ask

them how their time in the program has caused them to think differently about the issues they encounter in their lives.

By shadowing Ismael the researchers could see how he has been able to structure his time and interactions with students to best manage his caseload... We take all of this into account in determining how to best ensure that all targeted students get the individual attention they need.

Observations of scheduled classes

To complement these methods for gathering data, evaluation researchers also shadowed Ismael while he held classroom sessions, workshops, one-on-one meetings, and fieldtrips with the students. This allowed the evaluation team to collect field notes of observations detailing the context in which Ismael met and interacted with his cases. These observations were mainly conducted during routine classroom sessions that Ismael facilitated at different school sites, but also extended into more informal meetings he held with individual cases, as well as other group activities such and field trips. By shadowing Ismael the researchers could see how he has been able to structure his time and interactions with students to best manage his caseload. This way the evaluation team was able to establish a good understanding of the extent to which he can address the needs of the students through formal class sessions and what other ways he manages to spend time with the students. We take all of this into account in determining how to best ensure that all targeted students get the individual attention they need.

Through these observations we were also able to better understand how the program is being implemented into the structure of individual schools. Following Ismael on the job allowed the researchers to observe how formal class times were structured and how the individual school campuses have accommodated these sessions. It has also helped us recognize how Ismael has been able to take advantage of other opportunities to interact with his cases outside of these designated times, and if he has had access to the resources necessary to accommodate his students. Documenting how this program has been carried out thus far has been useful in analyzing how the opportunities to connect with students is made available by the district, which will help us evaluate how to best structure the program to effectively serve these youth.

Class time usually called for sign-in at the beginning of class; discussion of class agenda for the day, and any upcoming meetings with the groups. Then, the youth were usually allowed time to bring up a topic of their choice for discussion. On some days, Ismael would come in with an objective for discussion, such as suicides during the string of youth suicides on the Eastside earlier in the school year. Other times, Ismael would ask community and educational contacts to provide workshops for the youth detailing specifics areas of interests and necessity for students. Usually towards the latter part of those presentations, the youth would be allowed to ask questions and try to relate some of the information given to them by the presenter. Right before ending class session Ismael always reminds students to give him a call if they need anything, need to talk, or just want to hang out. Lending them an open invitation that many take him on.

Difficulties in performing research

One of the obstacles to conducting the necessary research for this evaluation was student accessibility. Because of the timing of the evaluation approval, the research team was not able to begin the first wave of survey research until May, several months after the program had started. This meant that by the time we had a chance to check the results of the first surveys and were ready to begin the recorded interviews, the students had already been dismissed for summer break. While many of the students participating in our evaluation study were enrolled in summer school, they were unable to miss any class time, so it was not possible to interview them during school hours. Most students left the campuses as soon as they were dismissed and were difficult to contact outside of the school, so conducting research during the summer months was considerably challenging.

Another problem in conducting the program evaluation was tracking down some of the students during the course of the research. When conducting the second wave of research surveys, the evaluators had some difficulty finding all of the youth who had participated in the first round of surveys. Some students had graduated or moved out of the district after the first round of surveys, and others were transferred or expelled from their original schools. Consequently the evaluators were only able to find 26 of the original 59 students who participated in the first surveys. This made it difficult for the researchers to attain much in the way of longitudinal data that could be used to determine program efficacy. However, a new round of 44 students were surveyed in the post test to compare them with the original respondents.

5. Observation Findings

On-Site Implementation of the Violence Prevention Program

When initiating the Violence Prevention Program the first tasks for Ismael were to compile his caseload and secure spaces in which to meet with his students. Most of the schools he went to were helpful in accommodating him with a classroom to use for his time with the students. Administrators at the respective campuses referred a number of students to Ismael to create his initial caseload of approximately sixty students. Over time staff and faculty members became more aware of Ismael's presence on campus and began referring students to him as well. At present Mr. Huerta reports to have a caseload includes over 110 students.

Ismael's interactions with the students enrolled in the program are structured with a combination of weekly group sessions arranged during the school day and one-on-one meetings conducted with students and their parents as the need arises. Several presentations and field trips are also organized for the youth throughout the year. The following sections include sample descriptions of program implementation based on evaluators' observations.

Group Sessions

Ismael meets with his students in weekly group sessions at each campus that typically last 50 minutes to one hour. These classroom sessions are scheduled for different periods each week to prevent the students from always missing the same class to participate in the program. These weekly sessions not only represent most of the time he gets to spend with the youth on a regular basis, but they are also the only consistent contact Ismael is able to arrange with most of his students. These sessions served as important opportunities for Ismael to touch base with the students, but also allowed for group discussions and workshops that gave the youth a chance to listen and learn from each other.

Various activities were often used to encourage and facilitate group discussions. For example, in one classroom session at San Marcos High School, Ismael initiated a group conversation by having all the students write questions on small slips of paper and putting them all in a bucket. One student would then pull slips out of the bucket and introduce the discussion topics to the group, using their thoughts and responses to open up a group dialogue. This allowed the students to address concerns anonymously and get feedback from the group without being singled out. This proved important for talking about sensitive topics that are embarrassing or hard to discuss. In this instance, the students used the activity to bring up the issue of suicide, which was particularly relevant at this time because of a number of recent cases involving youths the students knew. The activity opened up a powerful conversation, in which the youth were able to vent some of their feelings regarding these tragedies and discuss how important it was to support each other and recognize when they or someone else needs help. One student wrote a note to Ismael where he discussed wanting to kill himself. Ismael contacted school administrators and appropriate services were administered.

Focusing the majority of the group discussions on gangs would turn the program into another way the youth were labeled as gang members in their everyday lives, and Ismael's recognition of this is an example of the situated knowledge he brings to the position.

Through activities and discussions such as these the youth came to recognize the group sessions as a space in which they could feel free to express themselves knowing that they would be understood and would not be criticized for the way they felt. An important thing to note about these sessions is that, while focused on reducing gang recruitment, they were rarely actually framed this way and only occasionally directly addressed gangs as a topic at all. Focusing the majority of the group discussions on gangs would turn the program into another way the youth were labeled as gang members in their everyday lives, and Ismael's recognition of this is an example of the situated knowledge he brings to the position. In the several sessions that were observed by evaluators, conversation topics included issues of Chicano identity, gender, culture, creating self-agency, college, street and prison politics, youth rights, family values, self-esteem, transformation, art, political movements, community issues, personal histories, finding jobs and the justice system. By addressing this broad range of concerns, the group sessions recognize the variety of life experiences they encountered, validated their perspectives and concerns as legitimate, and empowered them as individuals in ways that mitigated the factors that pushed youths towards gang involvement.

Contact Outside of School

Most of the time Ismael has with the youth in the program is spent during the weekly group sessions. He also regularly meets with students on an individual basis as the need arises. The youth in the program were given Ismael's cell phone number when he started working with them so they could always contact him if they needed to. These one-on-one meetings were usually arranged when Ismael was contacted by either one of his students or one of their teachers or counselors requesting he talk with them. These individual meetings were also sometimes initiated by Ismael when he had a student in a group session who he thought might need some more attention or an opportunity to talk privately. He also often met with students' parents to discuss their concerns with either the program or their child's behavior. These conversations with students or their parents were often confidential and therefore not documented by evaluators.

Ismael also operated as an advocate for program youth who faced charges from the justice system. He helped one of these students by escorting him to juvenile court and speaking on his behalf as a character witness. He also wrote letters of recommendation for some of his cases to their judges and probation officers describing the progress they were making in the program, in some cases even getting their sentences reduced. This aspect of mentorship is particularly important for criminalized youth because many of these youth need someone to attest to the positive things they accomplish when facing law enforcement or judicial figures. This in turn builds trust in students, leading them to believe in Ismael's message: 'As a representative of the school district, I am here to support you.' This in turn may have led some students to change their attitudes towards school. His efforts to help youth with their criminal cases were not always successful in mitigating their consequences, but they did accomplish a lot in terms of developing a trusting bond between Ismael and the student that helped facilitate other program goals.

By addressing this broad range of concerns, the group sessions recognized the variety of life experiences they encountered, validated their perspectives and concerns as legitimate, and empowered them as individuals in ways that mitigated the factors that pushed youths towards gang involvement.

Contact Outside of School

Youth were also contacted individually for referrals to social services or community organizations. Collaborating with other community agencies, such as the Westside Community Center, occasionally put Ismael in contact with people who had job opportunities for some of the youth. These opportunities included short-term county jobs clearing mountain trails, painting murals and working at the Food Bank. Ismael would then in turn call students who were looking for work and met the eligibility requirements of the particular opportunity, but as these jobs were often looking for workers over 18 years old, he was only able to connect a handful of students with employment. Referrals were also made for students who needed help addressing substance abuse problems. Students who asked for help, or whose parents asked Ismael for help, were referred to CADA to provide them with the resources necessary to fight drug addiction.

Field Trips

To promote the students' interest in furthering their education, Ismael organized a number of fieldtrips. Students from each of the high school campuses Ismael works for were taken to university campuses, community organizations and city parks in Los Angeles. These field trips were designed to take the youth out of town, somewhere new but more importantly to show them examples of criminalized youth who went on to become successful adults and introduced them to some of the resources that can help them do the same. Ismael organized most of these field trips himself; he was able to use many of his connections in LA to arrange tours and presentations for the students at USC, UCLA and Homeboy Industries.

At USC they were escorted into a classroom where one of Ismael's contacts had prepared a presentation for them. The presenter was an old friend of Ismael who grew up in the neighborhood with him and was now an English Ph.D. currently lecturing at USC. He gave a powerful and informative talk to the guys that emphasized using their background as an asset and utilizing the resources available to them to succeed.

One such field trip with students from San Marcos High School took the youth to campuses at the University of Southern California and the University of California in Los Angeles. Students were picked up at San Marcos by Ismael, a member of the SMHS staff and a collaborator from UCSB and driven in vans to the USC campus. At USC they were escorted into a classroom where one of Ismael's contacts had prepared a presentation for them. The presenter was an old friend of Ismael who grew up in the neighborhood with him and was now an English Ph.D. currently lecturing at USC. He gave a powerful and informative talk to students that emphasized using their background as an asset and utilizing the resources available to them to succeed. The presentation initiated a conversation among the youth that carried on outside, where they met with current USC students who gave them their perspectives on college life and how they were able to make it to the university.

After the morning visit to USC the youth were then taken to the UCLA campus in the afternoon, where they again met up with some friends Ismael had recruited to host the visit. The youth were given another presentation about resources for college and community issues and were provided with a tour of the campus. At both universities and on the drive back to Santa Barbara the youth were observed asking the supervisors about their college experiences and talking excitedly about adjusting their course loads to make them more competitive for university admissions. They also expressed a lot of gratitude for the opportunity to attend the field trip and talked about how they appreciate working with Ismael because he gives them an opportunity to express themselves without fear of judgment or ridicule. They said he listens to them and offers advice about the daily experiences that they encounter, and that he has helped them develop a mature decision-making process. The college-themed field trips seemed to be a very motivating experience for the students and extended the classroom session goals of strengthening the youths' confidence and ambition to invest their energy into furthering their education. One telling sign was when a few days after the field trip the evaluation team visited students at San Marcos High School. We counted nine of Ismael's students wearing UCLA sweaters. When we asked them "Why did you wear this sweater today?" One of

them responded, “Because we are going to be students there one day.”

Workshops

The students were also offered various workshops designed to further encourage them to look into college and support this interest. For one workshop Ismael brought in a representative from the office of financial aid at UCSB to talk to the youth about resources that are available to help them cover the expenses of a college education. The representative walked the students through the financial aid application process and discussed different options that are available to incoming students. Ismael provided the students with pizza and bottled water during the presentation. The youth were very attentive to the talk and asked a lot of questions about scholarships and applications, and some of the older boys even served the pizza to the group and kept the younger ones focused on the presentation. Afterward they were appreciative and thanked the speaker for coming in and sharing the information with them. In line with the themes of the field trips and many of the group sessions, workshops such as this one accomplished a lot in terms of making the youth more familiar with college and the application process and making the decision to explore and apply to colleges much less intimidating.

We counted nine of Ismael’s students wearing UCLA sweaters. When we asked them, “Why did you wear this sweater today?” One of them responded, “Because we are going to be students there one day.”

6. Survey Findings

Summary of Changes Evident in Pre & Post Test Survey Responses

School

The surveyed students demonstrated remarkable progress on survey items that asked them about their attitudes regarding the importance of education and their educational goals. A significant number of students replied that they try hard in school and that grades are important to them, and the positive responses for both of these questions increased between the first and second wave. The students also responded with higher educational aspirations than were reported in the initial surveys. Far more students claimed that they wanted to achieve a university degree, and far fewer replied that they did not expect to continue after finishing high school.

Family

There were not many changes in the students’ responses to the survey items that focused on parental attachment. The most dramatic changes between the pre and post test surveys were the levels of respect the youth indicated holding for their mothers and fathers. More of the youth also reported feeling trusted by their parents. There were also some responses that hinted at improved abilities to communicate with parents, although most of the survey items regarding the students’ families saw responses largely similar to those received in the pre test surveys.

Community

The most encouraging sign of progress that we can see in the questions measuring the students' perceptions of their community was that there was a noticeable reduction in the percentage of youth claiming they felt pressured to join gangs. The youth also indicated higher levels of participation in community organizations, which can be useful in allowing them to develop stronger bonds with their communities. Unfortunately there were also notable increases in the number of youth who saw their neighborhoods as dangerous places to be.

Response to program

The responses to this part of the survey were by far the most impressive. The students provided exceptional responses to the questions asking them to evaluate their sessions with Ismael. Not only did the vast majority of student responses indicate that the youth enrolled in the program found the sessions with Ismael to be relevant to their experiences and helpful in providing them with advice and guidance, but these questions also saw considerable improvement since the pre-test surveys. Students also claimed that these sessions made them feel better about themselves and about school, and that they helped them develop strong senses of ethnic identity. Again, these items not only achieved very high marks but they also showed a lot of progress in the post test survey.

Survey Wave 1: May 2009

School

The students responded fairly positively to the school attachment questions on the survey. The majority of students responded that they either usually or always tried hard in school, with only 17% claiming that they rarely or never put forth such effort. They responded similarly when asked about grades, with 58% answering that grades are always or usually very important to them. Most of the students seem to recognize school as important and demonstrate some level of attachment to trying to do well. The fact that both questions had relatively small percentages of students indicating that they did not see school as important bodes well for the overall level of school attachment for the group.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
I try hard in school	5.1%	11.9%	30.5%	30.5%	22%
Grades are very important to me	13.6%	8.5%	20.3%	35.6%	22%

The fact that the majority of the students surveyed responded that they care about putting effort into school is a good indication of some level of attachment to school, and that this bond can potentially function as a control preventing delinquency. However, many students also reported feeling

marginalized in their schools as well, which can jeopardize the efficacy of this control. 45% of respondents claim that the history of their culture is rarely or never portrayed fairly in class. Another 32% agreed that this statement was true some of the time. In the question, focusing on how the students feel their racial backgrounds are treated by teachers, 45% agreed that the statement “Teachers discriminate against me on the basis of my race” was completely, almost always or sometimes true, and 63% claimed that “Teachers disrespect or stereotype my culture” was completely, almost always or sometimes true.

Recognizing that all of the students selected for this program are students of color, this represents a problematic situation for schools attempting to foster a racially inclusive educational environment. Even if students are invested in school and recognize its importance, daily encounters with curriculums or authority figures that marginalize them are going to gradually erode this attachment to education. It is important to ensure that the school does not become an unwelcoming or demeaning environment for students of color, as this will alienate them from formal education and likely strengthen any identification with defiant street cultures (Dance 2001).

This process is likely connected to the large number of students (77.9%) who feel that they are at least occasionally singled out as troublemakers. Teachers, like the rest of us, are subject to socializing processes that condition us to identify ‘criminals’ as a group largely comprised of youth of color. When these teachers then, consciously or not, rely on popular assumptions regarding the criminality of youth of color to interpret student misbehavior, they may be quick to identify such youth as delinquent and punish them accordingly. This contributes to the criminalization of these youth, who in turn recognize this discipline as being clearly linked to their race.

	Not at all True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Almost Always True	Completely True
The history of my culture is represented fairly in my classes	25%	20%	31.7%	11.7%	11.7%
Teachers discriminate against me on the basis of my race	21.7%	33.3%	30%	8.3%	6.7%
Teachers at school disrespect or stereotype my culture	16.9%	20.3%	37.3%	15.3%	10.2%
I get singled out as a troublemaker by teachers	8.5%	13.6%	32.2%	22%	23.7%

The fact that more students agreed with the statement that teachers disrespect or stereotype their culture than agreed with the statement that teachers actively discriminate against them suggests that some of these students may feel marginalized in the classroom but recognize this treatment as, at best, unintentional. It is absolutely possible for teachers unfamiliar with the lived realities of students of color to develop uninformed or stereotyped assumptions of their character without necessarily having any malicious or prejudiced intent. This can be reinforced by course curriculums that require students of color to memorize and affirm the historical and literary accomplishments of Europeans and White

Americans while minimizing the contributions of their own peoples. Students reported this fact overwhelmingly in their interviews. The fact that there are considerably more students who feel their culture is not fairly represented in their classes than there are students who feel their teachers discriminate against them (or stereotype them) seems to hint at this more structural source of racial marginalization.

Most students express knowing at least one understanding teacher or authority figure at their school, which is good because this means that many of them have faculty members that they believe they can relate with.

The finding that the majority of students find their teachers to be generally respectful (as presented in Table 3) also supports this structural analysis. Fortunately, the survey responses indicate that for the most part the students seem to acknowledge that their teachers generally respect them and care about educating them. Few students agreed that the claim that teachers were ‘not interested in students like them’ was completely or almost always true (17%), but a large number did see this statement as sometimes true (40%). Similarly, more students reported feeling completely or almost always respected by teachers (38%) than rarely or never respected (25%), but again a large number of students see this respect as inconsistent (37% saying ‘sometimes’).

Most students express knowing at least one understanding teacher or authority figure at their school. This is a good sign as it means that many students have faculty members they can relate with. Collaboration between the violence prevention program and some of these faculty members may accomplish a lot in terms of fostering the sense of respect between teachers and students and reinforcing student confidence that these teachers are invested in their education.

Table 3: Students & Perceptions of Teachers, Wave 1

	Not at all True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Almost Always True	Completely True
Teachers are not interested in people like me	23.3%	20%	40%	10%	6.7%
Teachers at my school respect me	5%	20%	36.7%	26.7%	11.7%
There’s at least 1 adult at school I can talk to if I have a problem	15%	11.7%	31.7%	16.7%	25%

Family
The majority of surveyed students demonstrate strong attachment

nts to their parents. Over 76% of students express always or usually respecting the kind of person their mother is, and 55% gave the same answers regarding their fathers. Relatively few students (less than 14%) report feeling that their parents pick on them. These responses would seem to indicate that the majority of students feel they have relatively good relationships with their parents, which can provide a strong foundation for feeling a connection to school.

Table 4: Student Relationships with Parents, Wave 1

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Your parents always pick on you	37.3%	27.1%	22%	10.2%	3.4%
You respect the kind of person your mother is	0%	10%	13.3%	16.7%	60%
You respect the kind of person your father is	11.7%	13.3%	20%	20%	35%
Your parents make you feel trusted	11.9%	11.9%	39%	15.3%	22%

The students seem to generally recognize their parents as a significant source of guidance and encouragement in their daily lives. Approximately 62% of students feel they are usually or always praised when they do well, over 48% report that they usually or always depend on their parents for guidance, and 50% believe that their parents usually or always try to understand their problems. This is a strong indication of the students' familial attachment, as well as a good sign that the majority of students have people in their lives aside from their peers that they listen to and respect.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
You talk about your future plans with your parents	5%	21.7%	36.7%	25%	11.7%
You can talk to your parents about anything	13.3%	20%	28.3%	21.7%	16.7%
Your parents try to understand your problems	8.6%	20.7%	20.7%	31%	19%
You depend on your parents for guidance	0%	15%	36.7%	26.7%	21.7%
Your parents praise you when you do well	3.3%	15%	20%	31.7%	30%

However, what is also important to note is that, in comparison to the rates discussed above, there is a drop-off in students who report usually or always talking about their future plans with parents or being able to talk to parents about anything (as shown in Table 5). In fact a full third of students report that they can rarely or never talk to their parents about anything. Even if youth trust that their parents have their best interests at heart, they may still feel that parents are unable to relate to their experiences. This is particularly true for youth who are second-generation immigrants (Martinez 2000), as their parents are likely unfamiliar with the experiences of coming of age in the US, and therefore may be limited in some of the advice they can offer. This is why it is important for the youth in this program to have access to an outreach worker who can relate to their experiences as youth of color and to the experiences of those involved in street gangs.

Community

In our student survey we included a number of questions regarding how these youth perceived their home communities. The researchers wanted to include these items to measure the degree to which youth identify and participate in the formal institutions of their neighborhood. These kinds of bonds can function as the same kind of informal controls as attachments to school and family, but the evaluation team also wanted to collect some data on the perceived dangers present in the community and students’ assessments of law enforcement. These insights can allow us to get a better understanding of the students’ experiences away from school and how they may influence the appeal of neighborhood gangs or the likelihood to participate in school violence.

The students responded that while they do recognize opportunities to get involved in their community, most do not often participate in community programs. While these numbers do not in themselves appear to be problematic, they are a good indication of the students’ level of involvement in community institutions outside of school. Similar to commitments to school or family, this kind of attachment can function to regulate delinquency. It will be interesting to see if the students’ sessions with Ismael raise these rates. It may not be necessary for the success of the program, but it would likely benefit program goals for the students to become more involved in the local issues in their community and the programs their neighborhoods have to offer.

	Not Frequently At All	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently
...with community programs in your neighborhood	63.3%	26.7%	10%
...in organizing your community to address social issues or economic justice	59.3%	30.5%	10.2%

The survey responses are split regarding the perceived safety of the students’ home communities, with a little more than half feeling usually or always safe and about 47% reporting that they at least occasionally feel their safety is threatened in their own neighborhood. We also have reason to believe that this is where the students are more likely to encounter violent situations. Students report considerably higher rates of fighting and encountering gangs outside of school than on district campuses. While approximately one of four students indicates fighting or being pressured into gangs at school, these rates rise to over 40% in the neighborhood. We also see a significant jump in reports of students being threatened by gang members once they leave the school campus. Additionally, these rates only reflect encounters from the month prior to the survey, meaning that it is fair to assume that the students reporting these incidents likely experience them regularly, and that these rates may be even higher if we included students who encounter such threats and attacks more sporadically.

	At School	Off Campus

Threatened by another student	23.3%	N/A
Threatened by gang member	13.3%	38.3%
Pressured to join a gang	25%	44.1%
Been in a fight	27.6%	41.4%
Attacked by another student (at school or off campus)	16.7%	
Attacked by a gang member (at school or off campus)	23.3%	

If students are feeling threatened in their home communities, they may feel that they need to join in with a group for their own protection, the consequences of which will likely extend into their time at school. Seeing as this appears to be a serious need for this student population, preventive programming will need to offer legitimate advice and mentoring from someone who understands these experiences that will enable them to safely navigate these communities without being drawn into violent encounters.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Do you feel that your neighborhood is a safe place for you	3.3%	13.3%	30%	28.3%	25%
Do people in your community judge you when you walk down the street	20%	15%	28.3%	16.7%	20%

Another important issue for the youth in the program is the criminalization they experience in their home communities. Criminalization occurs as a process in which youth are identified and treated as criminal outcasts by authority figures they interact with on a regular basis. This process of identifying ‘criminals’ is often based on social hierarchies of race, class, and age, and how these social orders inform us about what kind of person the ‘typical criminal’ is. This external identification and treatment subsequently condition youth so identified to see themselves as criminal and embody these expectations through delinquent behavior. Police surveillance and suppression is perhaps the most blatant example of this external criminal identification.

Youth report feeling targeted by police in their communities. 59% report feeling that police treated people in their neighborhood unfairly and over 77% claim that they have been stopped by the police in their community. Student responses seem fairly evenly distributed when asked about if they feel judged in their neighborhood. While the school district and the prevention program cannot change the way youth are treated in their communities, efforts can be made to ensure that school campuses are an environment in which youth of color are free from the kind criminalization they experience elsewhere. The outreach worker has successfully started this endeavor. Additionally, the prevention

program can help youth learn to safely navigate their neighborhoods without drawing the attention of law enforcement or relying on groups that may get them into trouble.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Do you think the police tend to treat people in your neighborhood fairly	13.6%	59.3%	27.1%
Have you ever been stopped by the police in your neighborhood	77.6%	22.4%	N/A

While the school district and the prevention program cannot change the way youth are treated in their communities, efforts can be made to ensure that school campuses are an environment in which youth of color are free from the kind criminalization they experience elsewhere. The outreach worker has successfully started this endeavor.

Response to program

In the survey, we included nine questions that asked students about the relevance of Ismael’s work with them, and their perspectives on Ismael’s impact on issues such as their connection with their peers, feelings about school, feelings about themselves, and other variables. The students responded positively to meeting with Ismael in the first round of surveys. Students reported higher levels of confidence in themselves as well as improved connections with school, their peers and their communities. 58% agreed with the statement that meeting with Ismael strengthened their connection with their community. 61% of the students reported feeling better about school as a result of these meetings; 73% claimed to feel more empowered by these outreach sessions, and a remarkable 76% agreed that they felt better about themselves because of their work with Ismael.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Felt more empowered	3.4%	1.7%	22%	45.8%	27.1%
Gained a strong sense of ethnic identity	3.4%	1.7%	27.1%	30.5%	37.3%
Felt a stronger connection with my peers	5.1%	3.4%	23.7%	39%	28.8%
Felt a stronger connection with my community	1.7%	6.8%	33.9%	30.5%	27.1%
Felt better about myself	1.7%	3.4%	18.6%	40.7%	35.6%
Felt better about school	3.4%	5.1%	30.5%	30.5%	30.5%

Improved my ability to handle challenges with peers	1.7%	5.1%	20.3%	42.4%	30.5%
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Meeting with Ismael seems to have given the students another adult at school that they could identify with and that makes them feel more at place in the campus environment, which will likely help reduce feelings of alienation at school. The high numbers of students agreeing with the statement that working with Ismael has made them feel better about themselves is a strong indication that these sessions play a role in counteracting experiences at school that leave students feeling marginalized. Many students feel that this program has given them a strong sense of ethnic identity (67.8%), which may teach them to value a background that they previously felt was undervalued at school or elsewhere, and likely contributes to an improved sense of confidence and self-worth. The high percentages of students claiming Ismael has improved their feelings about school (61%) also support this and show promising signs that their enrollment in the prevention program has already improved their attachment to school.

Much of the students' exposure to Ismael and to the prevention program has been through group sessions, which may help explain the strong connection they report feeling with their peers in this initial evaluation survey. Through these group sessions they may be able to share experiences and learn from each other in ways that other environments do not facilitate. Many students agree that the program has strengthened their connections with peers (68%) and improved their abilities to handle challenges with peers (73%). These connections can function as informal controls much the same way as attachments to school and other institutions can, in that these students have learned to value and look out for each other, and are learning to address challenges without violence.

The high percentages of students claiming Ismael has improved their feelings about school (61%) also support this and show promising signs that their enrollment in the prevention program has already improved their attachment to school.

Wave 2: November 2009

School

The students responded very positively to some of the school attachment items, in some cases showing significant improvement over previous responses. The survey results demonstrated even stronger recognitions of the importance of education than the encouraging responses they posted in the first surveys administered back in May. For example, 60.3% of students reported that they usually or always try hard in school (up from 52.5% in wave 1). But what is even more remarkable is that only 6.4% answer that they rarely try hard, and none of them claimed that they never tried hard. This represents a substantial drop from May when a combined 17% responded "never" or "rarely" to this question.

Even more impressive is the progress evident in the responses to "grades are very important to me". An extraordinary 71% said that grades are always or usually very important to them, up from 57.6% in the initial surveys. Again noteworthy is the drop in negative responses: only 10.5% reported that

grades are never or rarely very important to them, compared to 22.1% who gave the same answers six months prior. These responses show a significant improvement in student attitudes towards school and the importance of their education. These results indicate that the students' involvement in group sessions and presentations that focus on college, as well as field trips to university campuses, may have influenced the youth to consider going to college and led them to see doing well in school as very important.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
I try hard in school	0%	6.4%	33.3%	32.1%	28.2%
Grades are very important to me	1.3%	9.2%	18.4%	35.5%	35.5%

The positive influence of these college-themed workshops and field trips becomes even clearer when we look at the changes in the educational aspirations of the students in the program. When first asked about the highest level of education they would like to achieve, only 35.7% of the students indicated they wanted to attain a bachelor's degree or higher. 44.6% were not even planning on finishing community college. However, in the second wave of surveys the rate of students interested in earning bachelor's degrees nearly doubled, and a full 54.2% now report desiring university degrees. The numbers of students looking to just finish high school or only attend some community college both saw significant drops and combine to represent only 18% of respondents. Even the students marking "other" offered encouraging responses regarding their goals, indicating interests in graphic design, medicine, real estate, and one who simply replied he wanted to achieve "as high as I can go".

	Wave 1	Wave 2
High School Diploma	21.4%	8.3%
Some Community College	23.2%	9.7%
Community College Degree	17.9%	20.8%
Bachelor's Degree	16.1%	30.6%
Professional or Graduate Degree	19.6%	23.6%
Other	1.8%	6.9%

Participation in the program with Ismael exposed the youth to a lot of information about college that was new for many of them. This included resources that they could use to support their efforts applying to schools, but also the testimonies and encouragement of individuals with backgrounds similar to those of the students who were able to succeed at the university level. Not only did many of the sessions and field trips get the students excited about the idea of college, but they also gave many

of the youth confidence that they could do well there. As discussed in our observations, participation in the program has given the students a space in which they feel acknowledged, understood and welcome, and this has made many of them feel better about coming to school. Program mentoring has prioritized strengthening the students’ senses of self-esteem and identity, and this has been instrumental in assuring them that college is not just something intended for more privileged students, but that it is meant for them as well. This emphasis has resulted in the students developing better attitudes about school and more ambitious educational goals.

As discussed in our observations, participation in the program has given the students a space in which they feel acknowledged, understood and welcome, and this has made many of them feel better about coming to school.

Teachers

While we can recognize some very encouraging results in terms of students developing positive attitudes about school and their educational future, the data concerning their perceptions of their relationships with teachers have not shown much progress. The response distributions for these questions remained largely the same between the two waves of surveys, although there are a few small variations worth pointing out. Most of the percentages shown below in Table 13 were very similar to the corresponding responses in the first wave, but for the statement “teachers at my school respect me” there is a drop in students claiming this is rarely true (from 20% to 12.7%) and a small rise in those reporting that this is completely true (from 11.7% to 16.5%). These changes are fairly minor but they indicate that some students are developing better rapport with their teachers. However, responses to the statement “teachers are not interested in people like me” were somewhat worse than they were in the previous surveys. The percentage of respondents seeing this statement as “not at all true” declined from 23.3% to 12.7%, and those seeing this as “almost always true” rose 10% to 21.5%.

	Not at all True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Almost Always True	Completely True
Teachers are not interested in people like me	12.7%	25.3%	34.2%	21.5%	6.3%
Teachers at my school respect me	5.1%	12.7%	39.2%	26.6%	16.5%
There’s at least 1 adult at school I can talk to if I have a problem	15%	12.5%	28.8%	17.5%	26.3%

While we can recognize some very encouraging results in terms of students developing positive attitudes about school and their educational future, the data concerning their perceptions of their relationships with teachers have not shown much progress.

Problematic relationships with teachers become more apparent as we turn our attention to the survey items shown in Table 14. Again we can see that most of the responses are fairly similar to what they were in the first wave of surveys, but there are some troublesome developments. There was a sizeable increase in the number of students reporting that the statement “the history of my culture is fairly represented in the classes I take” was “rarely true” (from 20% to 29.5%). There is also a noticeable increase in the percentage of students claiming the statement “teachers discriminate against me on the basis of my race” was “almost always true” (14.5%, up from 6.7%).

	Not at all True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Almost Always True	Completely True
The history of my culture is represented fairly in my classes	24.4%	29.5%	28.2%	12.8%	5.1%
Teachers discriminate against me on the basis of my race	23.7%	31.6%	26.3%	14.5%	3.9%
Teachers at school disrespect or stereotype my culture	20.8%	22.1%	37.7%	13%	6.5%
I get singled out as a troublemaker by teachers	2.6%	20.8%	32.5%	27.3%	16.9%

There was also an interesting development in the responses to “teachers at my school disrespect or stereotype my culture” that ran counter to these other changes: fewer students felt this was true and more felt it was untrue than in the last survey. It is unclear why we would see some progress on this item and signs of regression on the other questions regarding race and teachers, but what is good to see is that, as was the case in the first survey, far more students report that the items about discrimination and cultural stereotyping are never or rarely true than report that they are almost always or completely true. While it is good that it is only a fraction of the youth feel this way, this is still an issue that must be addressed, especially when we consider the large percentages answering “sometimes” to these items, indicating they recognize it as a reality they must occasionally encounter.

Response to program

In the second wave of surveys we again found that students responded positively to working with Ismael. In fact, the students’ assessments of Ismael in the second wave of surveys were rather exceptional, and showed considerable improvement over their initial evaluations of him, which were already fairly strong. 83% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they have developed stronger

connections to their peers, and over 88% agreed or strongly agreed that their ability to handle challenges with peers has improved. These numbers represent improvements over the Wave 1 responses and are signs that the group sessions are becoming more effective in teaching the students to maturely handle personal conflict. But the largest jump is among students who report that these sessions have improved their outlook on school: almost 90% claimed that the sessions with Ismael helped them feel better about school (up from 61% in May). This is a great indication that the prevention program is making the students feel more comfortable in the classroom and strengthening their attachment to school.

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87% of students surveyed also agreed or strongly agreed that working with Ismael has made them feel better about themselves, and an incredible 92% of the students agreed that the sessions with Ismael gave them a strong sense of ethnic identity. As discussing Latino/a culture and history has been a significant part of Ismael’s curriculum with the youth, the program sessions have emphasized teaching them to take pride in their background and develop a confident identity around it. By helping youth develop positive ethnic identities, the goal is to counteract experiences that belittle or criminalize this background and transform what they think it means to be Latino/a. These sessions have become more effective in producing strong ethnic identities since the first surveys, which can help students feel more empowered (90%) and confident in their ability to succeed in school (Dance 2001).

By helping youth develop positive ethnic identities, the goal is to counteract experiences that belittle or criminalize this background and transform what they think it means to be Latino.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Felt more empowered	0%	0%	10.1%	51.9%	38%
Gained a strong sense of ethnic identity	0%	0%	7.7%	50%	42.3%

Felt a stronger connection with my peers	0%	1.3%	15.4%	47.4%	35.9%
Felt a stronger connection with my community	1.3%	1.3%	29.1%	41.8%	26.6%
Felt better about myself	0%	0%	12.7%	39.2%	48.1%
Felt better about school	0%	1.3%	8.9%	48.1%	41.8%
Improved my ability to handle challenges with peers	0%	0%	11.4%	53.2%	35.4%

These impressive boosts in the students’ responses are likely related to the increased time Ismael has been on the job since the first surveys and the job experience he has been able to accumulate since then. In the time since the first surveys were administered in May, Ismael has been able to learn how to best manage his caseload and most effectively cater his group sessions to his students. Consider that in May, 67.2% of the students surveyed found their sessions with Ismael to be very helpful, and 62.1% of them found the topics discussed with Ismael to be very relevant to their experience. In the second round of surveys, these rates improve to 83.5% and 80.8% respectively.

	Wave 1: May 2009	Wave 2: Oct.-Nov. 2009
Students finding sessions with Ismael to be very helpful	67.2%	83.5%
Students finding discussion topics to be very relevant to their experience	62.1%	80.8%

What is particularly notable about this improvement is that it is based on the assessments of a greater number of students than the initial evaluation survey. Even with an additional 25 youth Ismael still managed to considerably improve his students’ responses to questions evaluating their sessions with him. Furthermore, most of these youth were new to the program since the initial survey in May, meaning that the majority of these assessments are not based on a long-term familiarity with Ismael, but rather on more effective outreach sessions that have taken place over the course of a few short months.

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Family

In the second wave of surveys we see most of the same patterns we noticed in the first wave. The one big difference that we can see from the first surveys is the jump in the level of respect the students indicate they hold for their parents. Over 86% of the youth report that they usually or always respect the kind of person their mother is (compared to 77% in wave 1) and almost 66% say they usually or always respect the kind of person they see in their father (up from 55% in wave 1). There was also a noticeable increase in the number of students claiming that their parents usually or always made them feel trusted (49%, up from 37% in May). These three questions showed the most improvement within the parental attachment section between the two waves of surveys. While it is hard to determine from this data if the students' attachment to their families is any stronger on average than it was in the first wave, these are encouraging signs that indicate positive developments in the relationships between students and their parents.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Your parents always pick on you	29.9%	33.8%	24.7%	6.5%	5.2%
You respect the kind of person your mother is	2.5%	1.3%	10.1%	12.7%	73.4%
You respect the kind of person your father is	11.4%	8.9%	13.9%	13.9%	51.9%
Your parents make you feel trusted	5.1%	15.2%	30.4%	25.3%	24.1%

The questions regarding the level of guidance and encouragement (shown in Table 16) the students feel they receive from their parents again largely mirrored the distribution patterns we saw in the first wave of surveys. One pattern we can see is exemplified in the question asking students if they agreed with the statement that “your parents try to understand your problems”. Considerably more students answered “sometimes” in this wave than did in the first wave (20.7% in wave 1 vs. 35.4% in wave 2). This change was accompanied by a small drop in students reporting that their parents usually or always tried to understand them (45.6%, down from 50% in May), but also a larger drop in students feeling that their parents never or rarely made this effort (19% compared to 29.3% in wave 1). This same pattern can also be seen in comparing the students' responses to “your parents praise you when you do well”. More students answered that their parents sometimes praise them (up from 20% to 31.6%), but fewer replied that their parents usually or always praise them (from 61.7% to 57%), or that they never or rarely praised them (from 18.3% to 11.4%).

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
You talk about your future plans with your parents	7.6%	19%	35.4%	20.3%	17.7%

You can talk to your parents about anything	6.3%	19%	38%	12.7%	24.1%
Your parents try to understand your problems	3.8%	15.2%	35.4%	22.8%	22.8%
You depend on your parents for guidance	2.6%	17.9%	32.1%	24.4%	23.1%
Your parents praise you when you do well	6.3%	5.1%	31.6%	24.1%	32.9%

While there were some small decreases in the percentages of students’ answering positively to these two questions, it is encouraging that there were more significant drops in the numbers of students responding negatively. There was also a noticeable drop in the students responding that they could rarely or never talk to their parents about anything (33.3% to 25.3%). Group sessions and individual mentoring that emphasize the importance of family may be encouraging some of these youth to be more open with their parents and try to talk about things with them that they might not have otherwise. If the students feel validated through outreach programming at school, they will likely feel more confident discussing issues at home with their parents. It would make sense that these students would gradually become more open with their parents by ‘sometimes’ discussing their issues or problems with them, particularly if they are not used to having these conversations. The responses regarding family attachment did not vary much from the initial wave of surveys, but these are some of the interpretations we can make from the handful of differences that we can identify.

Community

In the survey questions pertaining to their level of attachment to home communities, the students provided some very interesting responses. According to the survey data, the students enrolled in the program are more involved in local community organizations than they were at the time of the first research wave. An impressive 53.8% of surveyed students claimed that they get involved in neighborhood organizations on a somewhat frequent basis. This represents a significant increase from the 26.7% who gave the same answer back in May. There was also a very small rise in student involvement in student organizing to address social issues. The students’ sessions with Ismael have likely not only exposed them to many programs available in their neighborhoods, but session observations also point out that much of the mentoring the youth receive highlights local issues and the importance of contributing to struggles in the community. This influence of the outreach program has likely steered many of the youth towards participating in local community programs.

	Not Frequently At All	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently
...with community programs in your neighborhood	43.8%	53.8%	2.5%
...in organizing your community to address social issues or economic justice	58.8%	33.8%	7.5%

In the second round of community survey questions we also see some important reductions in students reporting specific kinds of dangerous encounters. The percentages of students reporting feeling pressured to join a gang dropped both at school, and more dramatically off campus. This is an exciting development because it may indicate that some of the students enrolled in the program are learning to deal with factors that may otherwise push youth into gangs without feeling pressured to follow this trajectory. Consider that the positive responses to this item decreased despite small increases in the items asking about threats and attacks coming from gang members. These increases are unfortunate and may be influenced by changes in local gang activity that we cannot determine from this survey, but the fact that fewer students are feeling pressured to join up with gangs in the face of higher levels of gang threats and attacks is an very important change to note. The percentage of students still feeling pressured is still high, but the amount it has dropped in this initial period is certainly encouraging and indicative that the program is on a progressive track.

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This most important development we can take from these questions is an indication that some students are learning to handle threats of violence without resorting to joining gangs. Also noteworthy is that the rate of students claiming to have been in a fight at school is just over half of what it was in the first wave of surveys. There was also a small reduction in the number of students reporting having received threats at school from other students in the previous month. Students learning to invest more of their efforts into school or communicate with their parents may also be gradually learning to avoid violent or dangerous situations, which will certainly help reduce gang recruitment. Most of the other response rates were fairly similar to the previous surveys, and there remains a wide discrepancy between the number of threats and acts of violence that occur at school and in home communities.

	Wave 1		Wave 2	
	At School	Off Campus	At School	Off Campus
Threatened by another student	23.3%	N/A	17.5%	N/A
Threatened by gang member	13.3%	38.3%	17.9%	40%
Pressured to join a gang	25%	44.1%	21.5%	33.3%
Been in a fight	27.6%	41.4%	13.9%	39.2%
Attacked by another student (at school or off campus)	16.7%		16.3%	
Attacked by a gang member	23.3%		24.1%	

(at school or off campus)		
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Unfortunately, more worrisome than the slight increases in the rates of reported gang threats and attacks are the changes we see in the students’ perceptions of their home communities. In the second wave of surveys, considerably more of the students enrolled in the program indicated that they see their neighborhoods as dangerous places than had in the first wave. While only 16.6% of surveyed students responded that their neighborhoods were never or rarely safe places for them back in May, this number rose dramatically to 41.8% in the second round of surveys. This coincided with a drastic drop in the percentage of students who always or usually felt safe in their communities, from 53.3% all the way down to 33%. It is hard to determine from this data what the cause of this sizeable shift in perceptions of neighborhood safety may be. It again may have something to do with changes in local gang activity or might also be influenced by new students taking the survey, but it is still unclear why these youth would perceive their neighborhoods as so much more dangerous than the first group of student who took the survey. These results further underline the importance of mentorship focused on helping youth learn to navigate dangerous communities in ways that best allow them to avoid becoming personally involved in violence. On the bright side, it is worth reiterating the significance of the declining rates of students pressured to join gangs when we consider how many of them see their neighborhoods as dangerous places.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Do you feel that your neighborhood is a safe place for you	16.5%	25.3%	25.3%	16.5%	16.5%
Do people in your community judge you when you walk down the street	8.9%	8.9%	27.8%	21.5%	32.9%

The students also report more extensive experiences with criminalization than was reported in the initial surveys. One of the clearest examples of this is seen in the greater number of students who are identified as troublemakers in their neighborhoods. Whereas only 36.7% of surveyed students in the first wave of surveys reported that they were usually or always judged by the people in their community, this number jumped to 54.4% in the most recent data. The number of students claiming that they never or rarely experienced this judgment from community members fell from 35% to 19.8%. Similarly, more of the students also report being stopped by police (rising from 77.6% to 86.1%) and feeling that police treat people in their community unfairly (up from 59.3% to 68.8%). Again, group sessions and mentoring may influence student perceptions of community policing or how they are viewed by others, but we cannot really know if these results are due to recent developments in neighborhood dynamics and policing or if they caused by experiences unique to the survey’s new respondents swaying the data. What we can draw from these results is that the youth’s encounters with these criminalizing processes represent an important need that must remain a central focus in future programming.

Table 20: Students & Police, Wave 2			
	Yes	No	Not Sure
Do you think the police tend to treat people in your neighborhood fairly	8.8%	68.8%	22.5%
Have you ever been stopped by the police in your neighborhood	86.1%	13.9%	N/A

Assessing School and Parental Attachment

In addition to comparing the student responses between the two waves of surveys, we were also able to analyze the surveys of 26 students who participated in both rounds of research to determine how their enrollment in the program influenced their individual responses. Finding students who completed a survey in each round gave the research team an opportunity to observe the influence of the program over time and compare how their responses have changed. By collecting the longitudinal data on specific students the evaluators can statistically analyze the program's effectiveness in strengthening school and parental attachment.

In the survey, we incorporated two previously developed scales to assess both school attachment and parental attachment. This allowed us to detect if Ismael's program is having a noticeable impact on these issues. Tables 23 and 24 include the specific questions that comprised each scale, along with the 5-point Likert scale responses to each question. We assessed change in school and parental attachment by summing the scores on both scales for each student for each wave of data collection. This allowed us to determine mean scores from each wave that could be used to represent the students' attachment to school and family respectively, and by examining how these scores changed between waves we could verify the influence the program has had on these students' survey responses.³

As the Descriptive Statistics tables indicate below, the mean scores for the school attachment scale indicate an overall slight improvement in school attachment in Wave Two (32.91) as compared with Wave One (32.79). However, this difference does not appear to be statistically significant according to the nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and the nonparametric sign test, the slight differences are not statistically significant at the .05 level ($p = .936$ and $p = .648$, respectively).

However, what is important to note about these measures is that they do not include the survey items that demonstrated the most dramatic signs of student progress between the first and second wave of surveys. The questions designated for the school attachment measures (as shown in Table 23) were chosen at the onset of the evaluation because they reflected how the students felt about being at their particular school. While these survey items did not show a significant amount of progress between the two rounds of surveys, the students did show tremendous progress through the survey questions measuring student attitudes about education and educational goals. These items were not included in the longitudinal analysis, but they do make a powerful case that the program has strengthened the students' attachment to school by teaching them to value the importance of education.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
SCHSUMW2	23	32.91	4.889	18	41
SCHSUMW1	24	32.79	3.611	27	38

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Sign Test

³ See Appendix for attachment scales.

Test Statistics^b

	SCHSUMW1 - SCHSUMW2
Z	-.081 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.936

- a. Based on positive ranks.
- b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Test Statistics^b

	SCHSUMW1 - SCHSUMW2
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.648 ^a

- a. Binomial distribution used.
- b. Sign Test

Turning to parental attachment, we again find that there are slight differences between the first and second waves with regard to the mean parental attachment score, although the mean score for the second wave (46.88) is slightly lower than the score for the first wave (47.88). Again, we find that the differences in scores between the first and second waves is nonsignificant, according to both nonparametric tests ($p = .322$ and $p = .405$, respectively). Thus, based on this longitudinal analysis alone, Ismael’s program has not had a noticeable effect on the questions designated to represent school and parental attachment among the program youth, at least during this initial period.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
PARSUMW2	25	46.88	9.244	34	62
PARSUMW1	24	47.38	10.684	21	65

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Test Statistics^b

	PARSUMW1 - PARSUMW2
Z	-.991 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.322

- a. Based on negative ranks.
- b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Sign Test

Test Statistics^b

	PARSUMW1 - PARSUMW2
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.405 ^a

- a. Binomial distribution used.
- b. Sign Test

Though we have attempted to assess the association between Ismael’s program and the variables of school and parental attachment, these tests alone do not control for several factors aside from Ismael’s program that may impact the sense of attachment students feel to their school and family. Other school-related factors, such as the extent to which a student feels safe at school and experiences with discrimination can also impact school attachment, regardless of the intervention and counseling Ismael may offer to students. Parental attachment may, of course, be influenced by family-level factors that are out of the control of school instructors, counselors, or administrators. Further research assessing school-level and parental-level factors, ideally with a larger amount of students participating in multiple waves of data collection, would be warranted to determine the ways in which Ismael’s program and other elements of the school environment might be address the needs of these youth.

9. Interview Findings

The interviews the evaluation team conducted with the students enrolled in the program support the survey and observation findings. In the interviews the youth primarily discuss the program in terms of how they feel Ismael has helped them stay out of trouble and been a good role model for them. Many of the youth simply stated that they found him helpful, that he stressed the importance of doing well in school and going to college, and that he helped them learn how to stay out of trouble.

“He went through what we’re going through, he knows more than us. Some people go ‘oh yeah, this and that’ and then they don’t know what’s up with it, and this guy he actually knows what’s up. He tells you straight up, and that’s what I like about it.”

The students also indicate that they appreciate sessions in which Ismael has shared some of his personal stories because they feel that they can relate to some of his experiences and it demonstrates that he can understand some of the things they go through. Having someone who has gone through the same things they experience seem to be very important for the youth that were interviewed: “He went through what we’re going through, he knows more than us. Some people go ‘oh yeah, this and that’ and then they don’t know what’s up with it, and this guy he actually knows what’s up. He tells you straight up, and that’s what I like about it.”

Some of the youth got a lot out of field trips, particularly the one to Homeboy Industries, a community organization that focuses on helping gang members that want to leave the streets behind and find employment. One of the youth described his reactions to the trip: “It was different, you know? Everybody got along instead of fighting. It trips you out because you see all these fools that are like from different hoods and they actually give them opportunities. Not like other people look at them as different people and they don’t want to give them jobs, and they have helping hands, you know? Helping everyone” This student found it inspiring to find a place where not only traditional enemies could get along but also where they could get help instead of being treated as outcasts. Another student described how this trip taught him to rethink the trajectory he was on; “the stories of the people that they were telling us, like it kind of makes you think, you know? Kind of makes you think like if you want to be in a gang, if you don’t, or what are the consequences for being in a gang?”

The most significant influence Ismael and the outreach program have had on the youth, according to the interview transcripts, was that they felt he offered them good advice based on his own experiences, which they see as closely relating with many of the struggles they encounter. Hearing other people’s stories, both through Ismael and through the field trips to Los Angeles, have also had a tremendous impact on how the youth view their own lives. As in the surveys, the students have demonstrated that they find their enrollment in the program as relevant to their lives and above all, very helpful in teaching them how they can stay away from gang involvement.

Youths in the Program

There were a handful of themes that emerged in the interviews that teach us a lot about the youth enrolled in the program and some of the important issues in their lives. One of these themes described

their interactions with teachers at school. While the youth talk about having problematic encounters with some of their teachers, most of them also say that they actually get along with most of their teachers and that that except for a handful of “bad ones” they believe most of them are “good teachers.” One youth explains: “I see more good ones than bad ones... I think most of my teachers try to motivate me, 9 out of 10. But then there’s some that don’t try.” Another student elaborates “the ones that have [encouraged me] tell me to stay after class or something, to do homework and then try to help me out and the ones that don’t they just don’t listen to the kids in class or just ignore them.” A few of the students also said they tend to get along better with the younger teachers because they feel that these teachers understand them more and make more of an effort to communicate with them.

The interviews indicate that the youth frequently encounter problems with police in their communities. Many of them describe getting pulled over or harassed and feel that they are targeted because of their race and because of how they dress. One example of this was one student who described an occasion in which he and a few friends were followed by police and then searched for no clear reason. The police started asking the youth about their gang affiliations, even though they did not identify as gang members. The student felt that they were seen as gang members by the officers, and publicly interrogated and seated on the curb to make a display of them; “there was people across the street, watching us. Out of nowhere people stopped and staring. Like you know, and like, like they would just stop, everyone stop what they were doing, and just stare and pointing at you and shit you know. Right there, they just sat us down. Basically, all dirty and shit”. The experience was an embarrassing example of how some of these youth are marked as criminals by some of the authority figures in their communities. These are experiences that are out of the programs or school district’s control, but assisting youth in handling or avoiding these situations need to be an important focus for outreach programming.

The youth who participated in our interviews discussed some serious problems they have to endure with violence in their neighborhoods. One of these students even described a drive-by shooting that occurred just outside his family’s home: “where I used to live, down in the Westside by Valerio, in was on New Years and there was a drive-by. We were inside though and we just hear a bunch of gunshots. We ran to the windows to check and I saw that the guy was running down the street.” Another student describes a terrible incident in which his brother was stabbed; “he saw he was drunk and they just took out a knife I guess and stabbed him twice. Or three, one right here, and one right here, and one right here. And then he stabbed him and then, he started running.”

Incidents such as these quite clearly illustrate why the program youth perceive their neighborhoods as dangerous places. Consistent threats like these are a significant factor in pushing youth towards street gangs, in which they may feel some level of protection from the possibility of violence. As the number of youth participating in the program increases, it is becoming ever more essential that mentorship offering legitimate advice on how to avoid neighborhood violence remain a central component to this program if it is to be a beneficial force in these students’ lives.

Student Recommendations for Future Programming

Youth describe wanting opportunities to get out of their element more often. When they were asked about what they would like to see in programs catering to them, some of the youth expressed wanting to go on more field trips and learn activities that they don’t normally get to do, like surfing. Many of

the students do not often leave their neighborhoods or the greater Santa Barbara area. Considering the strong impact some of the trips in college campuses and Homeboy Industries had on many of the students, it would be helpful to make more visits to this location.

There were also some recommendations the youth made that reflected how they see the weekly group sessions operating at their campuses. Some of them mentioned the program sometimes experienced trouble finding a space or desks for all of the students. These problems occasionally resulted in the youth being unsure if they were even meeting on some weeks, and when they did the youth did not all fit into small classrooms that were provided. The students also commonly explained being confused when they were referred to the program, or that some of their teachers did not understand what the program was about or why they were involved.

They also responded that they thought there should be more people involved in the program that could help out in terms of its implementation. Some of them referred to having more volunteers or helpers that could help keep the program on a regular schedule or that could assist Ismael with events like field trips. Others talked about wanting mentors that could help guide them through college application processes or simply help them with personalized advice and support.

10. Discussion and Recommendations

Effectiveness of Current Program

Based on the data collected for the evaluation, the Santa Barbara School District's violence prevention program appears to be making a strong and constructive influence in the lives of enrolled students. The outreach caseworker, Ismael, has been successful in developing a motivational approach that has effectively inspired the students to advance their education. In their sessions with Ismael, the students have been able to participate in a lot of programming that has not only encouraged them to go to college, but also made them more familiar with the resources and people that can help them get there and bolstered their confidence. Participation in the program has improved the students' attitudes concerning the importance of education and has also impressively transformed their educational aspirations. The majority of the youth enrolled in the program now desire to earn a university degree, which represents significant progress in terms of connecting them to school.

Participation in the program has improved the students' attitudes concerning the importance of education and has also impressively transformed their educational aspirations.

By making youth more familiar with the application process, taking them to university campuses and emphasizing the importance of earning a college education, the prevention program has generated considerable interest among the students in going to college. Many of these students initially held little interest in attending college, but their enrollment in the program has not only made them see this as a possibility, but a desirable one. In this way the program has been able to develop many of these

youth who previously felt disenfranchised about education into “dreamers” who aspire to accomplish more with their schooling. Additionally, we believe that this emphasis on going to college has not only gotten the students interested in higher education, it has also convinced the students of the importance of doing well in high school in order to reach this level. By getting students excited about the prospects of college and giving them the confidence that they could get there and succeed, the program has been able to effectively strengthen the students’ attachment to school. With further exposure to individuals and programs that make graduating from high school and college a tangible reality, these “dreamers” might learn to transform themselves into “strivers” as they acquire more of the skills necessary to help them achieve their goals. We believe that this should be the ultimate goal for the school district: to continue to expose students to Ismael’s programming and to an additional outreach worker that can help him with his intense caseload.

With further exposure to individuals and programs that make graduating from high school and college a tangible reality, these “dreamers” might learn to transform themselves into “strivers” as they acquire more of the skills necessary to help them achieve their goals. We believe that this should be the ultimate goal for the school district: to continue to expose students to Ismael’s programming and to an additional outreach worker that can help him with his intense caseload.

Evaluation data also indicates that enrollment in the program has had a positive influence on the relationships students have with their parents. Comparing the pre and post test survey results revealed notable increases in the number of surveyed youth who hold a great deal of respect for their mothers and fathers respectively. Outreach mentoring has helped program youth understand some of the struggles that their parents have endured, both through discussions about migration and community issues, and in doing so facilitated greater levels of respect and understanding. This development seems to be gradually establishing youth’s parents as figures they can be more receptive to talking to about issues in their life and over time this will facilitate more open conversations. It is a huge development that these youth have been able to find an adult at school that they can have these kinds of talks with, and programming stressing the importance of family is beginning to teach some of these students that they can find this at home as well.

Interview and survey data both demonstrate that the students enrolled in the program are finding solutions for some of the factors that commonly push youth towards gang involvement. Post test survey responses show that after participating in the prevention program, fewer youth report feeling pressured to join gangs both at school and in their neighborhoods. Additionally, many of these youth used the interviews to provide testimonies of how they feel the sessions with Ismael provide them with helpful advice on how to constructively deal with the troubles they experience. The students have indicated being exposed to this influence both through individual and group mentoring and through some of the inspiring stories they heard during field trips to college campuses and Homeboy Industries.

Teaching youth to manage violent neighborhoods and problematic experiences at school or with

police without looking to street gangs for affirmation and companionship is a significant development for getting them to learn to identify with mainstream institutions like education and strive for success within them. Mentoring young people in ways to navigate situations like these is a powerful influence in reducing their level of gang involvement, and the experience Ismael brings to the group sessions allows him to make this a focus for the program. In this initial period it is already showing signs that this focus is having a positive influence on the students' perceptions of street gangs.

Many of the results discussed have been achieved because the program has been able to provide the youth with a safe space in which they feel free to express their perspectives and concerns without fear of judgment or criticism. The evaluation team has collected convincing evidence that the sessions with Ismael have had positive effects on bolstering the students' sense of self-esteem. This has resulted in youth that now feel better about themselves and about school as a result of their participation in the program. Many of the sessions have focused on helping the youth developing positive and self-affirming concepts of their ethnic backgrounds as a way of creating confident identities for them. With this confidence, the youth have been very receptive to encouragement to further their education and concern themselves with community issues.

In this initial year, the violence prevention program is successful in meeting the school district's goals of strengthening the students attachment to school and reducing the role of gang recruitment in their lives. The evaluation data demonstrates significant gains in the students' attachment to school, as measured by their attitudes concerning school and their educational aspirations. Additionally, the program has also been found to positively influence the students' relationships with their parents and their ability to handle the struggles they encounter without feeling the need to join a gang in order to find support. Finally, we have also found evidence that the outreach programming has been highly successful in helping the youth develop positive and confident identities. These accomplishments of the program are all significant factors that will prevent many of the youth from identifying with gangs or participating in street or school violence, and will better enable them to succeed in the classroom.

Recommendations for Future Implementation

For the most part the program seems to be well implemented into the structure of the school district, but one important suggestion that the evaluation team recommends is that the district find a way for the faculty of the respective campuses to collaborate with the program. The research team makes this recommendation for several reasons. Both the observational and interview data both indicated that many teachers seem unfamiliar with the program and what its intentions are. This resulted in some student confusion over why they were being referred to the program, and characterizations of the program as something 'for gang members', which caused some distress among parents.

But more importantly, we have reason to believe that there is tremendous potential in the possibility of teachers collaborating in the implementation of the program. Their involvement in the program would likely be an effective way to develop stronger rapport between the program youth and their teachers. This would provide the teachers with an opportunity to better understand some of their students and the youth with a chance to learn to trust and communicate with their teachers. This would also likely help address some of the issues behind the high rates of reported racial discrimination and cultural misrepresentation in the surveys by creating a better sense of understanding between the youth and their instructors. The additional help will also assist the

program in maintaining a regular schedule and facilitating events such as field trips, which is important for program consistency.

The evaluation team recommends that Ismael have some type of meeting or presentation with the teachers and counselors at each of the campuses he is working at to ensure that the faculty members are all familiar with the goals of the program and how it will be operating at their school. From there it would be advantageous to identify at least a handful of teachers at each campus who would be interested in working with Ismael. This would accomplish a great deal in terms of making school the same kind of safe space the youth find with their friends.

There have also been a handful of minor issues facilitating the program at some school campuses. One of the challenges has been that, as the only outreach specialist working with youth from a half dozen schools, Ismael often has to overextend himself in order to attend to all of the youth in his caseload. There are many weeks where he needs to be everywhere at once, particularly as crises emerge with individual students. These can make it difficult for him to maintain regular session schedules or attend to meetings with school or city officials. Finding a way to get more school employees such as teachers and counselors to get involved in the program, or to recruit volunteers from local universities or community organizations could do a lot to help keep the program on a regular schedule and offer students more individualized attention.

Some schools have also had trouble finding available space or supplies such as desks to allow the youth to get together. Most of these are small problems that should get ironed out as the program becomes more established on campus and school staffs find regular solutions to facilitate the program's implementation. It will also be important to maintain lines of communication with school officials as the program moves forward. Occasionally Ismael was uninformed when one of his students was expelled from the school, which is important for him to know not only for administering the program, but also to have an opportunity to intervene before the student is thrown out.

The evaluation of the Santa Barbara School District's violence prevention program has determined that it has positively influenced the enrolled students in the first year of implementation. The program's primary goals when launching the program was to strengthen the youth's level of attachment to school and reduce the level of gang recruitment among the students referred to the program. Ismael's mentorship has bolstered the self-esteem, which in turn has been instrumental for connecting the youth to school and providing them with the tools to resist the allure of street gangs. Data gathered by the research conducted for the program's evaluation provided convincing evidence that the students' participation in the prevention program has in fact been successful in meeting these goals by improving students' educational attitudes and aspirations and relieve the pressure placed on them to align with street gangs.

Moving forward, the program is well structured for continued success. The experience Ismael brings to the program and the focus of his mentoring have fostered strong connections with the youth that will continue to strengthen their bonds to school and family. Recommendations the evaluation team makes for ensuring the program's continued to success include encouraging teacher's to collaborate with the program as a way to both assist the program but also develop stronger rapport between teachers and students. This should also be productive in addressing some of the problems we found in terms of the perceptions some youth have of their teachers. The violence prevention program has

established itself as a constructive influence in the lives of the youth who participate in it, and maintaining it as a district priority and remaining consistent with the focus of its curriculum will ensure that it continues to be a success in connecting youth to school and helping them avoid violence.