



Youth Civic Engagement and Community Well-Being in East Oakland

Laneisha Butler, Xavier Gantt,
and Veronica Terriquez, Ph.D

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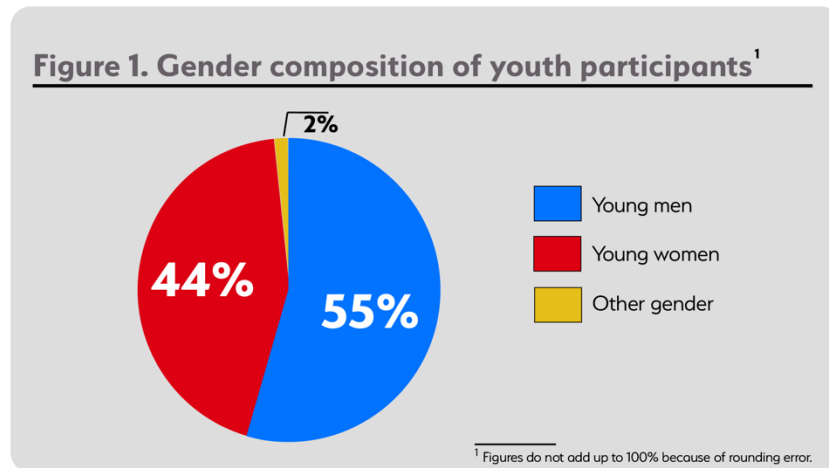
Since 2010, The California Endowment (TCE) has invested in youth leadership and youth-led organizing groups as a key component of its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. These youth groups have sought to support the healthy development of their members while engaging them in organizing, advocacy, and other efforts to advance their community's well-being. As part of a longitudinal evaluation, this report focuses on BHC-affiliated youth programming in East Oakland. ¹ Located in the San Francisco Bay Area, Oakland is one of fourteen BHC sites in California.

This survey draws on survey data collected from regular participants, or “core” youth members, of eight organizations that engage their members in grassroots organizing and advocacy, media production and the cultural arts, practices that promote healing and well-being, and/or other activities. These groups include: AYPAL, Black Organizing Project, Communities United for Restorative Justice, Health for Oakland's People and Environment (HOPE) Collaborative, Oakland Kids First, The Unity Council's Latino Boys and Men project, Urban Peace Movement Youth Alive, Youth Radio, and Youth Together. Most of these groups are featured in a 2014 report on BHC affiliated youth programming in East Oakland.²

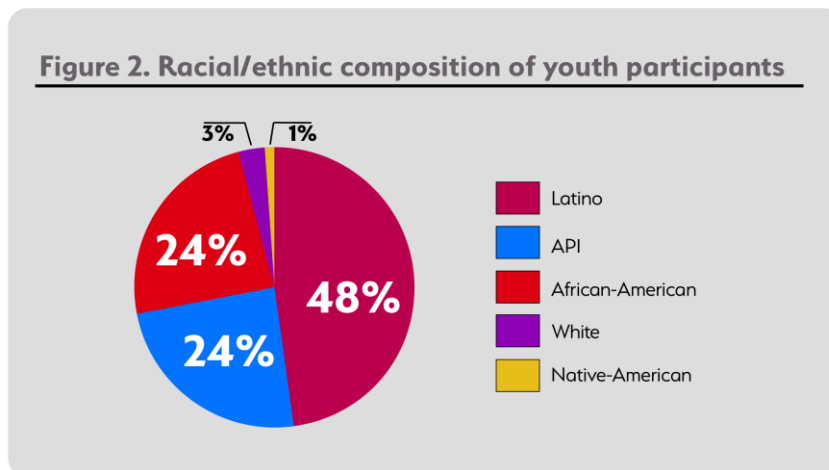
This report contains four main sections. First, we begin by providing a demographic profile of core youth leaders in BHC-affiliated groups. Second, we describe why and how youth came to participate in their BHC group. Building on earlier evidence from this evaluation, we then present self-reports of how youth acquire a range of civic and educational skills, while also enhancing their own well-being. Lastly, we conclude by briefly summarizing interviews with key stakeholders to show how BHC-affiliated youth organizations have collectively engaged their youth members in addressing health, safety, educational, and other school and community concerns. In sum, this report provides further documentation of youth leadership efforts just past the midpoint of the 10 year BHC initiative.

DESCRIPTION OF BHC YOUTH PROGRAM REGULAR PARTICIPANTS

This study draws on 189 surveys collected from young people who regularly participate in BHC youth programs in Oakland. Survey respondents represent 88% of youth leaders in participating organizations. The average age of these members at the time of the survey was 17, but they ranged in age from 13 to 24 years. As Figure 1 shows, young men represented just under 55% of participants, likely reflecting TCE's additional investments in the well-being of boys and men of color in Oakland. Women comprised 44% of participants, and under 2% did not identify along the gender binary.



Participants were generally representative of the racial/ethnic diversity of the community. As shown in Figure 2, approximately 48% identified as Latino/a, 24% identified as African-American, and 24% identified as Asian-Pacific Islander. The remaining 4% percent identified as White or Native American.

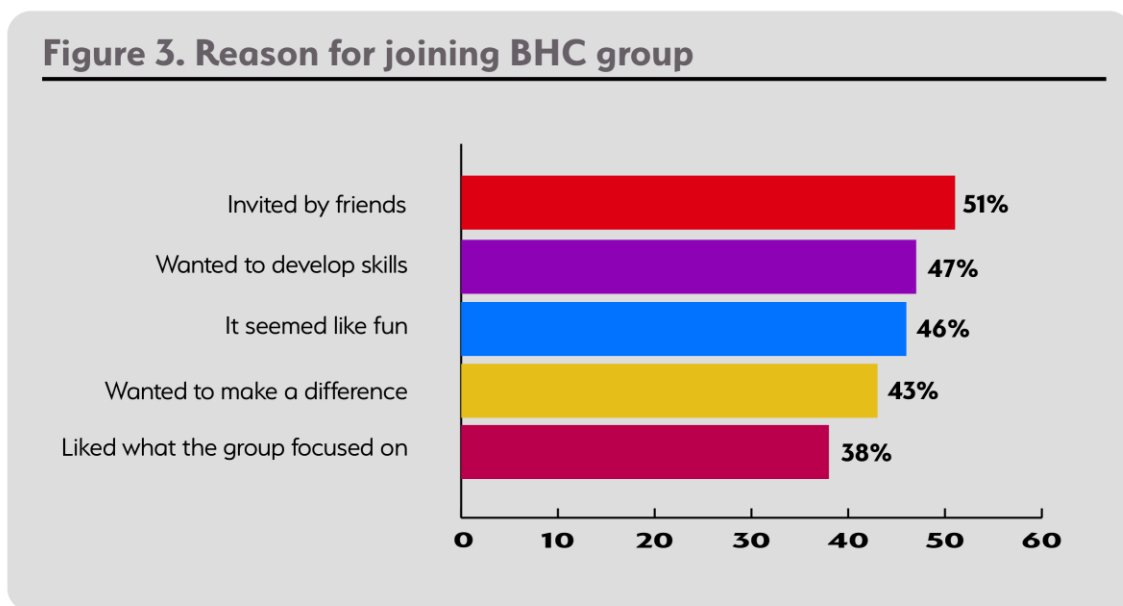


Most youth came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 74% were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school. Only 9% were raised by a parent with a bachelor's degree.

MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT

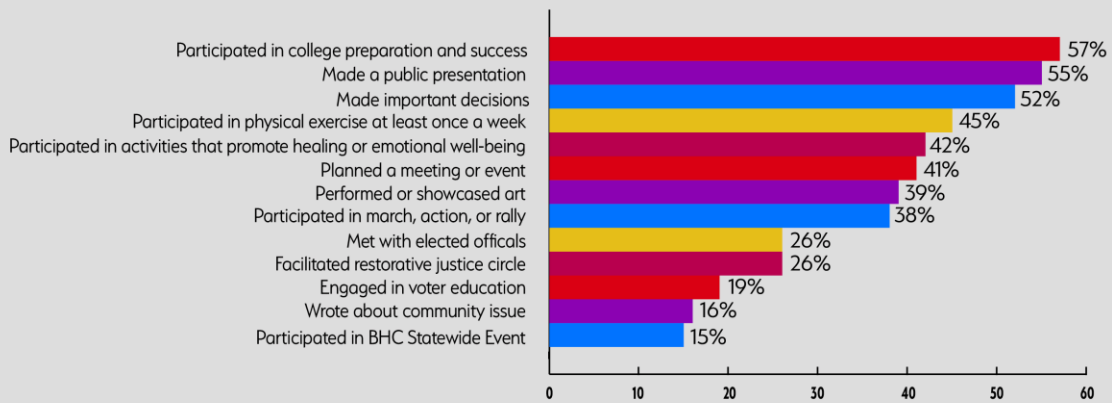
Youth in East Oakland varied in how long they had been involved in their organizations. Quite notably, over half of study participants—65%—had been involved in their BHC-affiliated organization for at least a year. This suggests that overall, BHC organizations were able to retain many youth, offering them extended opportunities to develop their leadership capacity over time. Of the remaining youth, 12% had been involved 6-11 months, 12% had been involved less than 6 months, and some did not specify how long they had been involved in their organization (11%).

Youth were asked to list up to three reasons they joined their BHC-affiliated youth organization. Figure 3 lists the top reasons for joining. In East Oakland, the most common reason was that youth were invited by peers to join (51%). Almost half of the participants (47%) joined because they wanted to develop skills. Other frequently reported reasons for joining their organization included the desire to have fun (46%), wanting to make a difference (43%), and liking what the group focused on (38%).



Youth in BHC-affiliated youth organizations were asked to report on the types of activities that they engaged in as part of their BHC group. The list was based on common activities reported by BHC staff in an earlier survey.³ As shown in Figure 4, most youth (57%) participated in college preparation and success. Many made a public presentation (55%), and more than half made important decisions (52%).

Figure 4. How youth participated in their BHC group



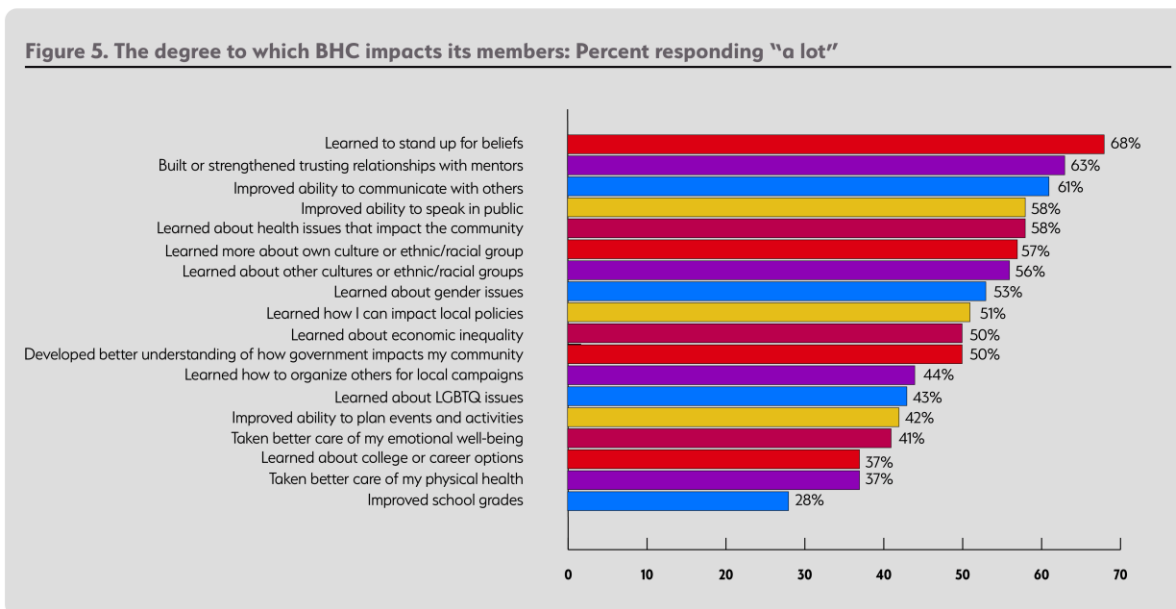
In East Oakland, youth also frequently participated in physical exercise at least once a week (45%), participated in activities that promote healing or emotional well-being (42%), planned a meeting or event (41%), performed or show cased art (39%), and participated in a march, action, or rally (38%). Youth also met with elected officials (26%), facilitated restorative justice circles (26%), talked to voters about elections (19%), wrote about community issues (16%), and participated in BHC Statewide Events (15%).

HOW YOUTH BENEFIT FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT

As demonstrated in earlier phases of the BHC youth program evaluation, BHC youth organizations contribute to their members' healthy development in a variety of ways and to different degrees.⁴ In the survey, we asked members to rate the degree to which their group involvement impacted different aspects of their personal development—did it have *no impact*, *very little impact*, *some impact*, or *a lot of impact*? Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents who reported that their organizational involvement had “a lot” of impact on each of the areas of personal development included in the survey.

Survey findings indicate that members felt particularly empowered around learning to stand up for their beliefs (68%). A significant proportion (63%) also reported building or strengthening trusting relationships with mentors. Youth also reported improving their ability to communicate with others (61%) and their ability to speak in public (58%). Youth frequently learn about their own cultures and the diversity of the California population: 56% reported learning about their own culture or ethnic/racial group, while 57% learned about other ethnic/racial groups. About half of youth participants developed their capacity to impact policy change (51%), and 50% learned about economic inequality. Meanwhile, 44% learned how to organize others to participate in campaigns that benefit their communities and 43% reported learning about LGBTQ issues.

Participation also had implications for members' health and educational outcomes, as 41% percent of youth reported taking a lot better care of their emotional well-being and 37% percent claimed to have taken a lot better care of their physical health. At the same time, over a third learned a lot about college and career options, and 28% significantly improved their grades in school.



COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

In addition to supporting the healthy development of members, most BHC-affiliated youth organizations collectively made a positive impact at the community and state levels. Their efforts addressed the following issues:

- **Meeting the Needs of Diverse Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Students:** API students in Oakland come from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. To ensure that the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) understands and addresses the varying needs of this diverse population, youth have demanded that the district disaggregate data for the different API ethnic groups and make it publicly available. Youth formed delegation meetings with school board members to resolve this need for aggregated data. The youth argued that stereotypes about API individuals' socioeconomic backgrounds and career paths can misrepresent their communities and silence their needs. They won their campaign on June 8th, 2016, after which the OUSD publicly released the data on attendance, discipline, English Language Learners, academic performance, and other indicators for the 13 Asian and Pacific Islanders groups represented in Oakland schools.
- **Gentrification and Displacement:** Many current Oakland residents are being displaced from their communities by gentrification. Youth and their adult allies have taken

measures to raise awareness about this displacement and related concerns about economic inequality and the need for living-wage jobs for local residents. For example, in April 2016, youth challenged Oakland's City Council members' proposal to turn a vacant space in downtown Oakland into a Hampton hotel. Youth instead proposed that the space to be used for schools, affordable housing, community organizations, and/or a community garden that would produce healthy foods. Unfortunately, youth did not win this campaign; the city moved forward with the originally proposed project. Now, youth are beginning a participatory action research project to explore the possibility of acquiring a business improvement district designation for Chinatown, which would provide resources for the community. By June 2016, youth had raised \$11,000 through their crowd source fundraiser to support this project.

- Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Young people and their allies have sought to challenge the criminalization of Black and Brown youth by demanding alternative forms of safety that do not involve police, including restorative justice and other alternative consequences for nonviolent actions. They have attended district meetings demanding the reduction and eventual elimination of police in schools. Moreover, youth have sought the elimination of "willful defiance" as a cause for suspending or expelling students. This is because teachers and administrators have a lot of discretion on whether or not to administer punitive discipline to students for minor infractions (such as chewing gum) that defy the orders of school personnel. On July 1st, 2016, youth claimed a victory when the OUSD School Board eliminated "willful defiance" as a reason for suspending or expelling students, effective during the 2016-2017 school year. Moreover, OUSD banned suspensions and expulsions for non-violent actions in elementary, middle, and, high schools. Youth expect to monitor the implementation of new disciplinary policies in targeted schools.
- School Funding Reform: In effort to further ensure students' academic success, youth, parents, and other community members have sought to have a voice in the K-12 education budgeting process. To this end, they have provided input into the OUSD Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), as specified by the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which is a state policy that provides additional funds for high-needs students. Youth and their adult allies have met with school board members and the superintendent to demand budget transparency. They have also collected data on student needs and demands, raised awareness about the budgetary process, and served on advisory committees. Youths' efforts have been met with some success, as the OUSD has committed some funding for restorative justice, support services for high-needs students, and resources that advance student health. OUSD, however, did not provide resources to address LGBTQ bullying and safety, in spite of youths' demands.

- Healthy Corner Stores: East Oakland youth in multiple organizations have partnered with schools and community employers to encourage certain grocery stores in Oakland to provide healthier and more affordable food to the shoppers of 3 corners stores. In the summer of 2014, youth helped host “Taste Test Tuesdays” to test recipes that would be used in these corner stores.
- Overhauling Juvenile Sentencing in California: East Oakland Youth have played a role in reversing elements of Proposition 21, passed in 2000, which resulted in an increased number of juveniles sentenced to adult prison. Youth leaders’ testimony and efforts informed the development of Proposition 57, an initiative approved by California voters in November 2016. Among other criminal justice reforms, Proposition 57 provides judges, rather than prosecutors, greater discretion on whether or not to try juveniles as adults.
- Enhancing Student Engagement and School Climate: Youth leaders at Fremont and Castlemont High Schools have sought to incorporate students’ voices into school operations and policies. Along with parent and community allies, youth have engaged students in forums to provide input into school culture and safety, academic support, health and wellness, and youth and family engagement practices. Additionally, they have established student leadership positions during advisory periods, as well as Student Delegate bodies with elected representatives from each grade to provide student voice in developing school improvement plans. Youth leaders also collaborated with school staff to develop and implement a “Code of Respect.”⁵ This code seeks to promote a positive school climate as envisioned by both students and staff, while also reducing suspensions and expulsions. As part of this effort, youth actively sought to implement this Code of Respect into their schools’ Positive Based Intervention System (PBIS) which promotes positive academic and behavioral outcomes. They have promoted the Code of Respect by conducting professional development trainings for school staff, making classroom presentations, and participating in assemblies. Quite notably, at Castlemont High School, the implementation of the Code of Respect has coincided with a decline in suspensions and expulsions between the 2013-14 and 2015-2016 school years. Meanwhile, in 2015, youth leaders at Fremont High School were invited to join the school’s “Culture Team,” which is responsible for the oversight of the Code of Respect, after they led a 400 student walk out to protest the code being violated by some school personnel.
- Increased Access to Public Transportation. In coalition with community and faith-based leaders, youth have sought to guide the implementation of a Free Youth Bus Program (funded by County Measure BB, which was passed in November 2014). As part of this effort, youth met with members of the Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC) and turned out to ACTC meetings. To date, this effort has led to the implementation of a free youth bus pass pilot program for low-income students and the

distribution of bus passes in schools. Youth are seeking to provide further input into how remaining Measure BB funds can be used to expand the free bus pass program.

THE LASTING IMPACT OF YOUTH’S CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Since the inception of the BHC initiative in 2010, affiliated youth BHC organizations have expanded meaningful opportunities for their young leaders to advance their community’s health. These youth leaders are likely to continue their public service and activism as they transition to adulthood. Moreover, youths’ efforts may have a lasting imprint on community health and well-being in East Oakland.

USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) is a research unit within the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts & Sciences. Laneisha Butler is a native of the East Oakland an undergraduate senior in the department of sociology at UC Santa Cruz. Xavier Gantt is a native of East Oakland as well and a core leader at Urban Peace Movement and HOPE Collaborative. Veronica Terriquez is an Associate Professor of Sociology at UC Santa Cruz and PERE faculty affiliate.



¹ For a list of publications related to the BHC youth program evaluation visit: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/bhc-youth-leadership/>

² Allen, Tiffany, Layidua Salazar, Robert Chlala, and Veronica Terriquez. 2014. "Youth Leadership in Oakland: Results from the Youth Program Evaluation." Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/Oakland_Oct2014_03.pdf

³ Terriquez, Veronica and Abdiel Lopez. 2016. "BHC Youth Program Inventory Survey: Key Findings." Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/VT_BHC_Youth_Program_Staff_Inventory_Report.2016.pdf

⁴ Terriquez, Veronica and Gabriela Dominguez. 2014. "Building Healthy Communities Through Youth Leadership." Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: <http://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/BHC-youth-leadership/>

⁵ Youth leaders at Oakland Tech in North-West Oakland also implemented the Code of Respect.