



West Fresno Health Care Coalition **Sweet Potato Project**

African American youth ages 10 -16

2017-2021



WEST FRESNO
HEALTH CARE COALITION INC.

The Sweet Potato Project is part of the California Reducing Disparities Project Phase 2. The Sweet Potato project was made possible by funding from the California Department of Public Health.

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The Sweet Potato Project (SPP) at the West Fresno Health Care Coalition (also known as West Fresno Family Resource Center) is a community-based effort harnessing the strengths of African American culture to address the co-occurrence of mental health conditions and socioeconomic challenges in West Fresno. Adapted from the St. Louis Sweet Potato Project, which was developed to provide at-risk youth with self-sustaining, entrepreneurial, small business, sales and marketing skills, the West Fresno Sweet Potato Project aimed to increase mental health resiliency. As a prevention program, it aimed to prevent and/or reduce school dropout, gang involvement, and substance use initiation for African American youth ages 12-15 by decreasing internalized oppression, hopelessness, and low collective efficacy. At the same time, it increased engagement in collective economic activity, college intentions, mentoring, and leadership development. Beginning in 2016, over 100 students have completed the program.

Through funding from the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP), a first of its kind Prevention and Early Intervention initiative funded by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA, or Proposition 63). SPP launched three cohorts of students which began in April 2018 that went through each program component participating in



Program Components

Sweet Potato Club

The club begins in April-May of each year meeting weekly to discuss life, school, and community issues. Throughout the year, they continue to learn about issues like depression, isolation, self-esteem, and leadership. The club includes a full year curriculum of skill-based learning, guest speakers, and an end of the year field trip.



Farming

Youth learn about urban agriculture and sustainability and plant sweet potato slips on an acre of land at the African American Farmers demonstration site. The youth will also harvest the sweet potatoes with the help of farming mentors.

Entrepreneurship

Youth participate in entrepreneurial and business skills training taught by California State University, Fresno professionals from the Lyles School of Business. Youth learned how to create a business plan and marketing plan for turning sweet potatoes into a product that can sold. Youth participate in a "pitch day" like event to highlight lessons learned and promote group product. Youth will also use entrepreneurial and business skills to take orders for sweet potatoes and sweet potato muffins.



Mentorship

Throughout the year, students receive mentorship from elders like Patrick Hamilton, the program coordinator, and numerous guest speakers. In addition, farmers and other leaders in the community have become ongoing mentors and champions for the program.

the Sweet Potato Club, farming activities, entrepreneurship classes, mental health resiliency, higher education, and mentorship. The classes included learning about sweet potatoes as both a farming practice in the African American community as well as the importance of entrepreneurial skills, identifying stressors and developing coping mechanisms, goal setting, and self-esteem. The students met from the months of April-December, with summer classes at Fresno State focused on entrepreneurship and marketing. Students were also offered a variety of mentors each year, ranging from farmers to business owners in the African American community.

The program was evaluated for three years using a mixed methods qualitative and quantitative approach. In addition, a comparison group offered the opportunity for students to still engage in a virtual encouragement where evaluation staff sent weekly inspirational quotes for 13-15 weeks on resiliency and hope by African American leaders. Sweet Potato Project students and comparison group students all took pre and posttests assessing college intentions, gang involvement, substance use, and collective efficacy. In addition, qualitative data was gathered during each year measuring programmatic success through interviews and focus groups with parents, community stakeholders, and staff members. Finally, qualitative data using spoken word and focus groups was collected for Sweet Potato Project student participants every year at the end of the program year.

Evaluation of the program intended to answer the following questions and had the following findings: How does WFFRC adapt and implement Sweet Potato for the West Fresno context? What activities took place? How often did they occur? How did WFFRC keep participants engaged?

The evaluation found that WFFRC were able to successfully adapt and implement the Sweet Potato Project into the context of an urban setting. They were able to overcome transportation barriers to the farming site by using community assets such as parents, staff, and the local community-policing program. An unexpected finding was the role that the WFFRC staff as strong African American role models played on the students and the parents to keep them engaged. Staff connected with both the students and parents, and helped them navigate hardships related to school, life, and relationships that would have otherwise hampered continued engagement. The program creatively worked “outside the box” of just the program and the curriculum to engage students as young people living in a difficult context by teaching them every day resiliency and coping skills.

Evaluation Question #1: What are social and mental health risk characteristics of Sweet Potato participants and controls? How do they differ on school participation, college intentions, gang

involvement, and substance use at baseline? How do they differ on collective efficacy, internalized oppression, and hopelessness at baseline? How did WFFRC ensure stakeholders engagement and buy-in to adopt the program because it makes good business sense?

We identified that many of the students had experienced suspension from school, even as young as 8 years old. Others had experienced fighting, and a few of the students had used smoking or vaping products at the start of the program. In addition while most of students saw themselves graduating high school, they did not see themselves finishing college. The evaluation found that the comparison group and the Sweet Potato Project students were not significantly different at baseline in risk factors, hope for the future, or college intentions. However, they were significantly different when it came to self-efficacy; Sweet Potato Project students were more likely to strongly agree that they had the ability to handle the problems that might come up their lives.

My career goals was about being a business man. Shark tank stuff that helped. It boost my confidence to sell stuff, be an entrepreneur, speak in front of a big crowd.

Evaluation Question #2: *How do Sweet Potato participants and controls differ in mental health risk characteristics at follow-up? Controlling for baseline features, how do they differ on school participation, college intentions, gang involvement, and substance use at follow-up? How do they differ on collective efficacy, internalized oppression, and hopelessness at follow-up?*

At follow up, both Sweet Potato Project students and comparison group students reported having less risk factors than at baseline. When it comes to the comparison group for a baseline analysis, we did not find significant differences due to large methodological issues we encountered with consistent timing of surveys in year two and a low participation rate for comparison group for year 3. However, we did find that when looking at the Sweet Potato students alone, year after year the program increased their college intentions, hope for the future, and collective efficacy. There was even a re-framing of how their past experiences were able to shape their life; students tended to think their past experiences were going to shape them to a higher degree in the pre-test than they did by their post-test.

Evaluation Question #3: *How do participants and controls understand the key experiences that shape their sense of hopefulness and their potential risk activities? Are there program experiences that participants view as most important?*

Sweet Potato Project students were interviewed at the end of each of the program years and they overwhelmingly demonstrated an increased hope for their future, resilience in the shape of wanting to overcome their adversities and their current situations, as well as their sense of community. As one stakeholder noted “knowing their own history allows them to reflect on what happened in the past and what they can overcome,” which spoke to the key lessons in the Sweet Potato Club about resilience and strong African American role models.

I didn't think I was going to pass 8th grade. I was getting bad grades kind of, but more so I was giving up. After participating, I try at least. I try.

Evaluation Question #4: *How do participants and controls understand the key experiences that shape their sense of hopefulness and their potential risk activities? Are there program experiences that participants view as most important?*

Students saw the participation in the farming activities and the club as key in the way they see the world, and their place in it. Through focus groups, participants identified how their self-esteem, their hope, and how the West Fresno Family Resource center and the staff at the center were going to shape their opportunities in life.

You can outreach community and you can give back to the community and you will get back from the community.

While the program did not change their systematic barriers in their community such as gang violence, poverty, and systemic racism that breeds low opportunities, the Sweet Potato Project students' outlook on how to overcome those barriers did change. When asked, "what has the Sweet Potato Project helped you learn to do better since you have been meeting?" one student replied "Less getting in trouble, but teaching me not to go down the wrong path."

The Sweet Potato Project is evidence that students can gain important skills to navigate life, as well as skills that help them reach higher education goals through targeted programs that rely on strong racially concordant mentorship. The Sweet Potato Project is continuing and finding ways to remain a sustainable program as the community views it an essential asset to their neighborhood and their young people. The Sweet Potato Project successfully helped give students a sense of hope for their future and increase their mental health resiliency.

You know it's crazy out here in these fields
Many of us thrive to survive while some of us kill
Every 3 seconds someone dies to a gang
While many struggle to prepare food for the next day. ---Lyrics by Sweet Potato Participant

Sweet Potato Project Students and Staff visiting the California State Capitol



Introduction

The Sweet Potato Project is a part of the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP), a first of its kind Prevention and Early Intervention initiative funded by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA, or Proposition 63). The West Fresno Health Care Coalition, also known in the community as the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC) is a 501c (3) non-profit organization created in 2001 to address growing health disparities and lack of health services and to provide a healthier way of living for West Fresno families. The Sweet Potato Project (SPP) at the West Fresno Family Resource Center is an implementation pilot project that seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of a culturally relevant approach to addressing mental health disparity in the community of West Fresno. It aims to prevent and/or reduce stigmatization surrounding mental health issues for African American youth ages 10-16 by increasing educational opportunities for young men and women in West Fresno and providing the opportunity to earn money and gain job training through dignified work.

There are two main objectives of the program for its participants:

- 1) Provide educational opportunities for students in West Fresno, providing the opportunity to earn money and gain job training through dignified work.
- 2) Increase neighborhood safety and decrease gang activity by supporting a West Fresno neighborhood to be more economically reliant and self-sustainable.

The focus of the Sweet Potato Project is to instill leadership skills into the students and for them to see themselves as African American leaders. Through mentorship and skill-based farming education, students are in a community surrounding that is intended to promote well-being. It also does so through neighborhood safety, increasing a sense of community and thus reducing gang activity. This report outlines how the program functioned as a CRDP Phase II Implementation Pilot Project and how the evaluation tied to the program. The Sweet Potato Project is building longevity in the community through the extensive partnerships developed over the years, and is gaining sustainability through committed funding partners who see the positive impact the program has had on students and the community.

Literature Review

Mental Health

Evidence suggests that concentrated poverty, along with low socioeconomic status and discrimination in academic institutions, can have a negative impact on mental health (Assari & Caldwell, 2017). In addition, systemic racism and institutional discrimination with microaggressions in educational settings can also affect the mental health of African American students. These forms of socioeconomic status microaggressions can cause higher levels of anxiety and depression (Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2021). However, research indicates that academic bonding and higher social bonding in educational programs can increase positive mental health (Rose et al., 2017). Similarly, when subjective well-being is addressed in African American students, they reduce mental health outcomes and improve with grade retention, lower suspensions, and increase positive mental health (Rose et al., 2017).

Perceived racial discrimination can have lasting impacts and can exacerbate mental and behavioral health among African American individuals. When perceived racial discrimination exists in earlier stages of life, it can diminish the psychological well-being and have long-lasting outcomes of mental health effects (Lee, Anderson, Hope & Zimmerman, 2020). Intergenerational trauma and chronic stressors in African American families can extend to family members (Murry et al., 2018). Chronic stressors, however, can be mitigated through religiosity, racial socialization, and kinship support (Murry et al., 2018). The Sweet Potato Project has a strong foundation with the community, neighborhood, and other faith-based communities, and these social factors promote growth.

Perceived racial discrimination can especially impact African American students because they are trying to develop a positive sense of worth as a minority (Harris, Valrie, Kurtz & Rowley, 2007). Research indicates that racial discrimination in African American youth can lead to low self-esteem and contribute to negative mental health effects (Lee, Anderson, Hope & Zimmerman, 2020). These mental health effects include anxiety and depression. Seaton (2009) found that collective racism at the systemic and institutional levels can also contribute to negative mental health outcomes. To help cope and mitigate these risk factors, the discussion of racial socialization can help mitigate the

associated negative mental health risk factors (Harris, Valrie, Kutz & Rowley, 2007). The Sweet Potato Project helps the students to identify with one another and with agricultural farming, the students get to interact with one another, and share these enriching experiences that promote positive self-efficacy through meetings of the Sweet Potato Club.

Racialized injustices and atrocities have existed throughout history. Racial profiling with African Americans historically have had negative experiences with law enforcement (Nordberg et al., 2018). Significant racial disparities in African American youth can lead to harmful experiences and contribute to Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) exposure (Bernard et al., 2020). A study conducted with African American youth showed in interviews that they felt that if they were their white peers, they would not have the same school experiences (Tallent, Shelton, & McDaniel, 2020). Having a sense community solidarity and interconnectedness are important for African American youth support.

Resiliency in Farming, Students Academic Success, and Mentorship

Farming, community-based gardens, and the access to community contribute to growth for disadvantaged youth (Allen et al., 2008). Other literature sources also cite the importance of community-based gardens for at-risk youth because these positive influences allow youth to cultivate community, and creates positive relationships with community members (Allen et al, 2008). In addition to community bonds and kinship, farming development creates invaluable knowledge and entrepreneurial skills that can create economic futures for disadvantaged youth (Hung, 2004). Farming and agriculture development can also allow youth to see their importance in their communities (Hung, 2004). The literature suggests that youth are creating spaces to empower other youth members (Hung, 2004). Acquiring land is also difficult due to the historical racism with redlining. However, the Sweet Potato Project is a unique opportunity for African American youth because although they may not be landowners currently, the knowledge and skills acquired will help youth to become agricultural leaders, as stewards of the land (Touzeau, 2019). Literature also suggests that shifting power back to African American communities has brought freedom and healing. Planting and harvesting in urban settings have helped African American farmers regain an increased positive outlook and heal from generations of trauma due to systemic discrimination and racism (Penniman & Washington, 2018; Ramirez, 2015).

Disproportionately low educational opportunities, programs for students, lack of community support, and at-risk behaviors can contribute to a significant public health crisis (Cytron; Rose et al., 2017).

In Fresno County, there were over 200,000 students enrolled in public schools during the 2018-2019 academic school year. However, African American students accounted for less than 5 percent of the student population (González, 2020). Educational attainment is a significant predictor of income and healthier choices, including housing, diet, medical care, and other options supporting physical and mental health. African American students are at risk for lower educational achievement because of the economic barriers, low socioeconomic status in family households, and disinvestment. In West Fresno, 37.1 percent of adults over 18 did not graduate from high school or receive a GED, more than double the state rate of 16.4 percent, and 22.1 percent higher than the City of Fresno (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Although West Fresno is under-resourced, rural students of color in programs that promote subjective well-being and exposure to higher education are more likely to pursue higher education. According to Means (2019), when rural students of color were taught in middle school about higher education, more students would elect to pursue higher education. In addition to positive safety support nets, African American mentors have the capacity to instill a close bond within African American youth. Mentors and leaders can instill a close bond and create a sense of racial pride by having a positive approach. Natural mentors may bolster students' racial pride via modeling or displaying positive regard toward the youth; it is to be expected that these experiences will have greater influence on youths' sense of racial pride within the context of a close relationship (Wittrup et. al., 2019). Thus, it is very crucial that African American students receive mentorship from African American leaders in their communities. These mentors can have a strong impact on their academic success. Wittrup et. al., (2019) found potential significance among mentorship and increased academic engagement among African American youth, especially those experiencing school-based discrimination. Researchers discovered that positive natural mentoring relationships with youth counteract the negative effects of school-based racial discrimination on academic performance.

Community support/Connectedness and Hope

Community support and connectedness are essential for young communities of color. Multiple studies indicate that when African American students are given social support, their outcomes improve significantly for their future. When there is an increased sense of hope in marginalized students, students will be less likely to engage in substance abuse. When students were less likely to misuse substance abuse, it was due to higher hope (Brooks et al., 2016). All forms of community support can help with student's development for hope and increased self-esteem. For example, the Sweet Potato Project has a community surrounded by Faith-based community members. Although

this was not a formal component of the Sweet Potato Project, the staff did recruit participants at local churches, and the community support from African American religiosity and faith-based members of West Fresno supported African American students. Faith-based members and religiosity for African American students improved self-esteem and coping (Rose et al., 2020). Students of color in a rural study demonstrated that higher education was essential and interconnected to fulfilling their future goals. Their aspirations of higher education and hope for the future were all due to a well-cultivated social network, which consisted of primary, secondary, and tertiary kinship, school staff, and extra-curricular programs (Means, 2019). Family encouragement, conversations, and aspirations also helped students be motivated to do well in school (Means, 2019). The rural students suggested the programming and organizational capacity of the community program was a source of support and assisted in the development of students' goals (Means, 2019). In addition, when students and youth have social support networks, they will have better preparedness to encounter daily life challenges (Kernan & Morilus-Black, 2010). The wrap-around process allows the communities to become experts of their individualized needs, and in turn, these safety nets enable students and their family members to expand their social support systems.

West Fresno African American students and communities of color have experienced racial injustices, but urban farming has created solidarity and a home for African American students. According to Penniman and Washington (2018), urban planting, agriculture, and harvesting in Boston's most challenging neighborhoods have created a sense of life-giving crops and the African- American community.

Background on West Fresno

West Fresno is considered a culturally diverse community; many people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds live in this community. The arrival of many minorities and immigrants erupted in the 1880s due to the growing agriculture hub, low-income housing, and the discriminatory housing policies known as redlining (Cytron, 2009). The geographic isolation of West Fresno was the most significant area to experience redlining (Aguilera, 2015). Before geographic isolation, numerous businesses flourished in Chinatown, the central location for diverse business owners in Fresno. The inequality arose when the Highway 99 construction took place in the 1950s (Cytron, 2009), when the framework and structure of the highway superseded neighborhoods and created isolation of the West Fresno community. The demolition of homes and businesses plummeted the once-thriving economy and created an influx of challenges for the residents of West Fresno. The residents

experienced increased racial and geographic isolation as the years progressed. High poverty levels increased in West Fresno due to disinvestment and lack of commercial centers (Cytron, 2009). Nevertheless, West Fresno minorities and immigrants remained in agricultural service jobs. In West Fresno, most BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) community members (22.5%) currently work in service and farm industry jobs (County, 2021).

West Fresno Risk and Resiliency Factors

Poverty

Based on the data, West Fresno has one of the highest forms of poverty and is environmentally at risk. According to Kneebone and Holmes (2016), Fresno has the second-largest form of concentrated poverty, at 86.9 percent, and 20 percent of residents fall below the federal poverty line. Based on the United States Census Bureau, the City of Fresno has a poverty rate of 25.2%, compared to the national poverty rate of 11.4 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Concentrated poverty perpetuates growing inequality. African American people in concentrated poverty areas have minimal access to quality education, public transportation, and grocery stores. In addition, there is more violence, crime, and police violence (Eberhardt et al., 2020). Therefore, developing a culturally sensitive, relevant, and effective program for urban low-income African American teens and adolescents is critical.

SWEET POTATO CLUB RAP

I don't want to end up on no tall tag
 I don't want to see my homie in no body bag
 I'm just trying to make it out they just tryna lag
 I'm just running out of time and it's going fast
 Too much violence in my hood right now
 Ain't nobody feeling too good right now
 feeling so misunderstood right now
 And pain been running through the woods right now
 Right now, right now (x5)

I want to make a better place cause everybody gettin traced
 Now you get caught just like a case so Ima have to have a bait
 to build a better chase for the people of my race and this money and bank deposit like I was working for Chase
 People buildin away
 never focusin on the snake
 Focusing on the change and not focusing on the snake
 Steady I keep my pace
 people go around my way
 My dogs ready to eat and you lookin like some steak
 I pick the dirt up from the ground and sling it all around
 And it remind me of the Shingles welcome to this town
 It come together nothing ever could knock us down
 Since I was down for this cause I might just stick around

Yea I might stick around
 You grew up around a gang and now you claiming that you bang catch a body with a cane police all they know yo name

Everybody know yo name it ain't happen cause of fame
 Everybody know yo name it ain't happen cause of fame

We could make a big change with the dog year
 Just know I ain't gon walkin a short bridge
 What goes around comes around and come and hitcha
 The monster inside ya eat and it come n getcha

I don't want to end up on no tall tag
 I don't want to see my homie in no body bag
 I'm just trying to make it out they just tryna lag
 I'm just running out of time and it's going fast
 Too much violence in my hood right now
 Ain't nobody feeling too good right now
 feeling so misunderstood right now
 And pain been running through the woods right now

Right now, right now (x5)

The current median household income for West Fresno residents is \$23,277 (Healthy Fresno County). Although residents of West Fresno are employed, the unemployment rate is currently 11.7 percent, compared to California’s unemployment rate of 5.8 percent (Healthy Fresno County). In addition, these communities are disproportionately affected by environmental burdens, such as air pollution and increased health burdens (CalEnviroScreen Version 3.0, 2017). More than 26.6 percent of households are estimated to depend on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps. In California, West Fresno is considered severely disadvantaged based on household income and criteria under for disadvantaged communities and is considered an environmental justice community under SB535, which is used as a guide to assign climate investment program funds to disadvantaged communities with significant environmental burden. With high unemployment and poverty rates, economic development and job opportunities remain important goals, hand in hand with improved graduation rates and higher education attainment. Overall, West Fresno has high levels of systemic injustices and inequities.

The City of Fresno’s Southwest Specific Plan (2017), which sought to rezone West Fresno to increase economic development, included table of the risk factors of West Fresno in comparison to key risk factors facing West Fresno residents:

Fig 1. Risk Factors of West Fresno

Risk Factors	West Fresno	Fresno City	Fresno County	California
Percentage of Adults in Poverty	36.8%	22.1%	19.7%	12.4%
Percentage of Children in Poverty	58.6%	37.1%	33.9%	19.3%
Violent Crimes/100,000 residents	696	463.5	463.5	433.5
Property crimes/100,000 residents	3,226	4,148	3,407	2,290.3
Adults 18+ who did not graduate from high school or receive a GED	37.1%	22.1%	23.3%	16.4%

The program aim population of African American middle school students ages 12-15 and their families are subject to all the risk factors cited in the CRDP African American Strategic Plan like homelessness, juveniles in legal custody, incarceration, foster care, living below the poverty level (California Reducing Disparities Project, 2021). However, the primary mental illness disparity risk

factor targeted by this intervention is poverty. Other risk factors for the target population are criminal and gang activity, and lack of safety and educational attainment.

Crime and Safety

Another significant risk factor in West Fresno is crime and violence -- particularly gang and drug-related crime. In 2014, the City of Fresno recorded a crime rate of 463 violent crimes per 100,000 people, but in West Fresno, violent crime was 50 percent higher: 696 violent crimes per 100,000 residents. Lack of organizational capacity, student programs, and disinvestment have led to increased gang activity. Neighborhoods impacted by gang activity serve as a safety net and trust for African American and brown students. Many juvenile African American and brown students encounter carceral systems because of the growing poverty and lack of investment in programs (Lopez-Aguando, 2013).

West Fresno Family Resource Center as a Safe Space

Despite the risk factors in West Fresno, the students see the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC) as a social support system. Although the students may face oppressions and systemic barriers, their interconnectedness, and the safety net, continues to be an anchor of social support. This support is a viable resource and helps students to face the challenges the students may encounter in the future (Odafe, Salami & Walker, 2017). Although chronic stressors can have a lasting impact on African American youth, the Sweet Potato Project provides a unique safety net in which they have a safe space to interact with other African American youth. The African-American youth are not only learning economic and entrepreneurial skills, they becoming leaders in their communities.

The West Fresno Family Resource Center's Sweet Potato Project

The Sweet Potato Project is a 9-month program that immerses middle school through high school-aged students in a club that teaches about mental health resiliency skills, farming, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. Each year, 25-35 students who are predominantly African American, enroll in the Sweet Potatato Project. Activities take place primarily at the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC), expanding during summer months to Fresno State for

entrepreneurship classes, and to the sweet potato field in Fresno County for planting, weeding, and harvesting. While Sweet Potato Project began as a project to build resiliency among young people, it became a core way students received mentorship, parents participated in a support network, and the West Fresno Family Resource Center became a second home for students to build community.

Program Purpose

The Sweet Potato Project at the West Fresno Family Resource Center was established as a prevention program to prevent and/or reduce school drop-out, gang involvement, and substance use initiation aimed at African American youth ages 12-15 by decreasing internalized oppression, hopelessness, and low collective efficacy, while increasing engagement in collective economic activity, college intentions, mentoring, and leadership development. The Sweet Potato Project was designed to address the CRDP Phase I African American strategic recommendations to focus Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) on community-based efforts that specifically address African American culture and to address the co-occurrence of mental health conditions and socioeconomic challenges.

The Sweet Potato Project in Fresno is modeled after the St. Louis Sweet Potato Project, which sought to provide at-risk youth with self-sustaining, entrepreneurial, small business, sales, and marketing skills. They allowed participants to learn how to farm and sell a sweet potato product that allowed them to make an income while allowing them to develop leadership skills and a hope for a better life. While the St. Louis Sweet Potato Project had seen great success in the lives of the students, they reported that ongoing challenges remained transportation, home life, and building a sustainable funding source for a program that students wanted to return to year after year. The CDRP funding has allowed five years for the Sweet Potato Project to flourish, and program staff at West Fresno Family Resource Center have worked through the challenges of transportation and the importance of integrating the family into the project so that students can be successful. The Sweet



Potato Project has had over 130 students complete the program.

Program Staff Description

An unexpected finding with the Sweet Potato Project was the importance of the staff as strong African American role models in the lives of the students. Not all parents were easily engaged with the program at the start, but the trust-building between staff, parents, and students made the program a success and helped students continue to feel part of the West Fresno Family Resource Center. Staff were integral in not only ensuring programmatic fidelity year after year, and successful implementation of programmatic components, but they also played an integral role in the lives of the students, providing mentorship and even conflict resolution between parents and youth. The staff proved to be valuable members of a strong program team, and part of the “secret sauce” of the Sweet Potato Project in Fresno.



Yolanda Randles, Executive Director

Yolanda Randles was born and raised in West Fresno, California. She grew up in a single-parent household with eight siblings. They often received donations from their local community resource centers, so Yolanda deeply understands the resources family need and importance of community services. When growing up, it was always stressed that she receive an education, which is what Yolanda did. Yolanda received her Master of Public Health at the California State University, Fresno. Her foundation growing up is what drove her to establish her career in West Fresno.

As Executive Director of the West Fresno Family Resource Center for 20+ years, Yolanda has continued to give back to her community. She exemplifies servant leadership, as her primary goal is the well-being of the West Fresno community. Over the decades, Yolanda has strived to make connections among local officials, building lasting relationships with community members and city and county politicians. Yolanda continues to work with many to keep the West Fresno community at the forefront. Yolanda established the Sweet Potato Project to give youth the opportunity, skills, and confidence to overcome hardships living in West Fresno. She also wanted to provide youth a space

to thrive academically and gain important skills to navigate life as well as skills that help them reach higher education goals. In addition, the Sweet Potato Project provided opportunities for youth to get involved and give back to their community.

Yolanda's overall role as the Executive Director of the Sweet Potato Project was to oversee the logistics to running a successful program. She supervised all program staff, and ensured staff had all materials needed to fulfill their duties. She reported the budget and tracked monthly invoices to the state. She also ensured that the goals and objectives of the Sweet Potato Project were met each year.



Patrick Hamilton, Program Manager

Patrick Hamilton was born and raised in West Fresno and is a father of teenagers. Patrick is someone from the community who understands the youth's family dynamics. He was determined to help change the pathways of families as he has personally witnessed generational gang violence and youth not graduating from high school throughout his community. As a parent in the community, Patrick understands that parents want better opportunities for their children, they want to see their children excel academically and personally. As an African American male figure in the West Fresno Community, Patrick knew his role as a Program Manager for the Sweet Potato Project would be a growing opportunity to connect with his community. In addition, he helps shape the minds of African American youth to seek success beyond what they are exposed to in their community.

Patrick's role was to coordinate all program activities and mentor the youth. He established a curriculum for the lessons that were provided for the youth. He was very interactive with the youth as he coordinated guest speakers, field trips, outreach events that youth participated in over the five years. Patrick understood their perspective and was able to effectively communicate with the youth. Patrick was the person whom the children went to if they had any problems; the epitome of an adult

male figure/ remodel to the youth of West Fresno. He also made it a goal to have open communication with both youth *and* with their parents. He ensured the parents that their children were in good hands and if there were any problems with the youth, Patrick sought to communicate with parents and help solve any issues. Patrick is currently a college student at Capella University studying liberal arts and social work.



Andre Smith, Operations Assistant

Andre Smith was born and raised in the West Fresno Community. He grew up around gangs and the violence within the community, eventually participating in gang activity himself and being incarcerated during his youth. Yet, as an African American male coming from a troubled background, Andre was able to turn his life around. He went to seminary school, obtained a bachelor's in faith-based counseling. However, due to the stigmas of incarceration and gang activity among African American males, it was difficult for Andre to gain employment, but WFFRC offered him an opportunity to work with the Sweet Potato Project as an Operations Assistant.

Andre's role was to support and carry out the daily operations of the program. He supervised the sweet potato field to ensure that the potatoes were planted, prepped, and ready for the harvest. He helped youth with the production, sales, and distribution of sweet potatoes. Andre also supported Patrick with youth activities. As he lived the experience of growing up in West Fresno and now as a father, Andre understood youth. He could relate to the daily challenges youth faced living in their community and help them overcome these obstacles. The youth looked to Andre as another adult male figure/ remodel in the West Fresno community. In addition, as a faith-based counselor, Andre also brought the faith component to the Sweet Potato Project. He was able to go into the neighborhoods as he gained respect in the gang environment and in his community. Through his work in West Fresno, Andre also earned the respect of local leaders such as the Fresno Police Department (PD) and city officials.



Rick Darrough, MSW, Research Assistant

Rick Darrough is a local Social Worker at the West Fresno Family Resource Center. He obtained a Master's in Social work from California State University, Fresno. Rick is well known in the West Fresno Community as he has a history of working with parents and youth in the community. Through his ties in the West Fresno community, Rick was hired onto the Sweet Potato Project as a Research Assistant for years 1-3. As a research assistant, Rick was responsible for comparison group recruitment and distributing the local and SWE surveys to Sweet Potato Project participants and comparison group participants. He was also responsible for distributing weekly motivational quotes to the comparison group and tracking their participation each week. Rick also assisted Patrick with the recruitment of the Sweet Potato participants. Through his work as a social worker in West Fresno, Rick understood some of the struggles youth faced in their community. He would connect with the youth by listening to understand and help them get through the problems they encountered.

Program Recruitment

Patrick, Andre, and Rick would visit neighborhoods in the West Fresno community to talk with students and parents, particularly families living in a negative environment. The staff would discuss what the Sweet Potato Project had to offer youth, and how the program could positively impact teenagers' lives, such as their children who come from a troubled community. These men also recruited youth at the local Boys and Girls Club, faith-based communities, and other local community centers. Staff also posted Sweet Potato Project information on Facebook, distributed flyers, and placed posters in local community areas. During the end of year 1, the Sweet Potato Project youth participants began to help with recruitment for years 2 and 3; they were heavily involved with the program and they would tell their friends. Their friends would then show up during Sweet Potato Project meetings, and eventually joined the year 2 and 3 cohorts.



Program Description

The program was broken up into two phases. The first phase focused on relationship-building, learning entrepreneurship, and farming. The second phase moved the students to learn how to apply their skills to make products from the sweet potatoes and sell them at different events and farmers markets, including the Livingston Sweet Potato Fair and their own Expo at WFFRC. They also engaged in outreach activities about the program, often tabling at events related to the center. There was also a community engagement component where students volunteer at events hosted by the center like “Back to School Backpack Giveaway,” Halloween, and Juneteenth. In addition, they had an end-of-the-year celebration, which consisted of a field trip and a celebration at WFFRC for parents and students to celebrate the accomplishments of the students throughout the year.

Phase 1: Sweet Potato Planting and Summer at Fresno State

April-May

The West Fresno Family Resource Center staff began recruitment for program participants. They engaged in conversations with schools, school districts, and parents to recruit participants. They also held informational sessions so that students and parents could ask questions about the program.

These informational sessions often had past participants give testimony as to their experience and past posters of the program were displayed for people to see what students did throughout the year. Sweet Potato Club began meeting at the WFFRC on a bi-weekly basis. They did team-building activities and discussed goals



RECRUITMENT

and expectations for the program. In addition, they discussed life, school, and community issues.

In May, participants began going to the field to plant the crop through a “Plant Day” field trip. Students work in groups to receive hands on training on farming and plant science. It is an opportunity for parents and community members to observe the program in action. It is also an opportunity as one-on-one engagement with students and talk to them in a more private setting to see how they are doing. It also serves as a team-building session where students get to learn more about each other in a more informal setting.

June



Will Scott Jr., President of African American Farmers of California
Photo Credit: ABC 30 February 13, 2019

Students learned about urban



agriculture and sustainability and planted sweet potato slips on an acre of land at the African American Farmers demonstration site. They learned about everything from how root plants grow to how to properly plant, water, and maintain

a sweet potato field. They did this as a team with the supervision of staff. In the past, when transportation was a challenge, the Fresno Police Department volunteered to drive the students to the field to make sure they participated in the planting process. Other parents and staff also volunteered to overcome the transportation barriers. The students farmed on a 20-acre plot donated by the African American Farmers Association, and the founder and President of the African

American Farmers Association, Will Scott Jr., personally spent time with students to guide them and provided mentorship. Other farmers within the association also engaged with the Sweet Potato Project students to teach them about farming and provided life advice. Students continued to meet weekly for sessions which included discussions about depression, isolation, self-esteem, and leadership.



Every Year, Sweet Potato Project youth participated in the Juneteenth celebration. This event attracted around 5,000 people from the Central Valley community, highlighting the multitude of skills that students are learned in the club and how the continuity of the program from year to year as had a staple presence in the community. The students hosted a table that displayed educational material they had created about the sweet potato process. At the yearly celebration, students sold their “Sweet Shake,” which was a milkshake they had

developed from their own product. Another group of students also went out into the crowd to pass out a coupon for

Youth making the “Sweet Potato Shake”



Sweet Potato Education



Sweet Potato Fun Facts



the Sweet Shake as a way to invite the public to attend their table. The students rotated so that everyone got a chance to be part of the education, the outreach, and the business aspect of the event.

July

Photos by: Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and West Fresno Family Resource Center



The Fresno State experience was unique in many aspects for the students in the Sweet Potato Project. It allowed students to go on to Fresno State campus, which many had experienced for the first time, to take entrepreneurial and business skills training taught by California State University students, staff and faculty the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Prior to COVID-19



the

from

restrictions, students went twice a week for six weeks. During this time, they learned about creating a business plan, marketing, and they developed a plan to turn the sweet potatoes into a variety of products.



They also learned about the university and the importance of higher education. The African American campus recruiter became an ally during this process and mentored the students on their best academic path towards being accepted into a four-year university. Speakers in the summer program included:

Davion Baker - Office of Black Student Success

Wendy Nelson - African American Initiative Coordinator, Outreach & Special Programs (OSP)

Marc Jones (Coach Q) - Motivational Speaker

Terrance Frazier - CEO TFS Investments, LLC



Students participated in a “pitch day” event to highlight lessons learned and promoted their group product. This event took place in front of judges, peers and family. This event incorporated the curriculum they had learned during the marketing classes with the university professors and students. The event included a taste test of their product for the judges, and a video presentation of their product, along with an oral presentation of what made their product unique. They also included a jingle that they developed for the unique product. The presentation was also a full business plan presentation, where they presented how their product would be manufactured, packaged, and the estimated price point. The business plan presentation was incorporated the 7 P’s of Marketing that they learned during their classes. The seven P’s of marketing included Place, People, Packaging, Price, Positioning, Product, and Promotion. Each student had a role to play in the development of the presentation as well as the

Page A4 The California Advocate August 25, 2017

Innovation

SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE FRESNO STATE

Sweet Potato Project

Sponsored by Fresno State & the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC) hosted a five-week summer entrepreneurship crash course.

Special thanks to:
WFFRC, Graduate Committee
Faculty Members: WFFRC
Adriana, Richard, Cynthia
Clemente, Dr. Michael
Mondry, Phyllis, Mary, G.
Brennan, Phyllis
Thomas, David, Lisa, Christine
and Holly, Steve, Grace, and
Kathleen, John, a Playgroup
Fresno State, San
Joaquin, Thomas, Phyllis,
David, Richard, Lisa, Holly, Lisa

For the second year, the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship had the pleasure to partner with the Sweet Potato Project of the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC) to host a five-week summer entrepreneurship crash course.

The middle and high school students have learned the basic entrepreneurship concepts to help them with their sweet potato products. It includes developing and marketing a product, managing customers, pricing, product pricing and budgeting, and also branding and packaging a product.

As we wrap up the program with the Shark Tank-style pitch competition, we hope the students walk away with valuable information and skills that they will use that they will use for a lifetime.

family resource center FRESNO STATE

FRESNO STATE

day-of event. The pitch day was not just a presentation but a presentation in the form of a “Shark Tank” competition. The competition aspect helped students be motivated to present a product that would set them apart from the rest of the groups. There were 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place prizes. The two popular products that emerged from this competition included the sweet potato muffin, which has been given to state representatives and sold at fairs and the “Sweet Potato Shake,” which has been sold locally and is now a favorite people still ask for today. During the month of July, students continued to meet at the center weekly to include sessions on depression, isolation, self-esteem, and leadership.



An African American farmer, owner of Royal Roots Family Farm, and artist Lauren Nefesha approached Yolanda Randles with her willingness to host a workshop with the Sweet Potato Project students to be able to do healing through art mosaic. The students all had one block of wood to work with where they chose one word or theme to express

something they were feeling. Ms. Nefesha and Patrick helped students think through what they wanted to put on their mosaic piece and reflect on its meaning. At the end of the activity, each student shared with the group the meaning behind their art and what they were feeling. The students really enjoyed the activity and were proud of their artwork. During the process, the students were reflective, and some put headphones on to listen to music for further inspiration to have their art be a true reflection of their feelings and work. As an American woman and business owner, Lauren Nefesha also provided mentorship to the students.



African

Phase 2: Harvesting and Selling Products

The second phase focused on applying many of the skills students had learned up until this point in addition to the harvesting and the selling of their products.



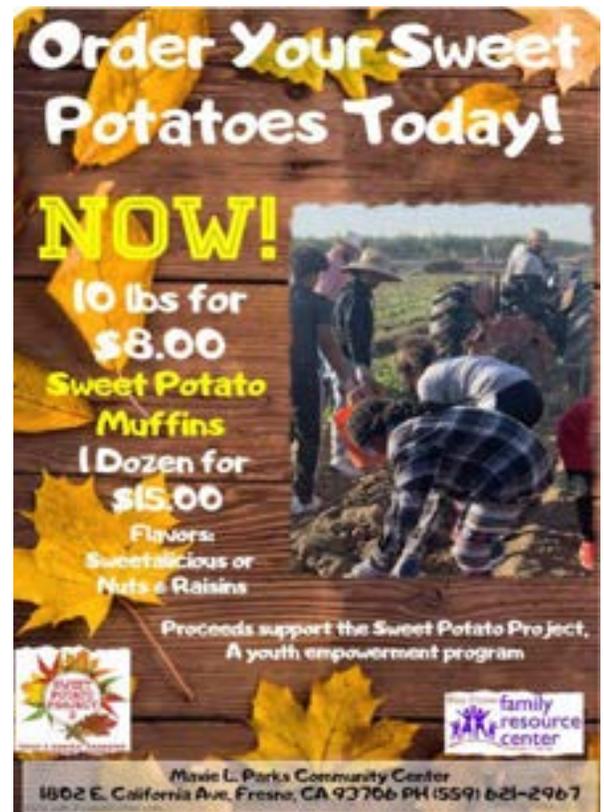
During the months of October through November students began the harvest in teams, with the supervision of farmers and program staff. They also took this time in the club to engage in civic engagement and implemented their leadership skills. This last part of the program was also an opportunity to take a deeper dive into the challenges students faced. Through the club, Patrick used this time to teach them skills needed to overcome systemic barriers and situational challenges they faced as young African Americans living in a historically segregated city. The final weeks of the program also provided an opportunity for students to help the staff plan the end of the year

celebration and prepare public remarks for their families and mentors that attended the event.

September-November

Students used their entrepreneurial and business skills to sell and take orders for sweet potatoes and their sweet potato muffins. Each student had to identify additional tactics to sell their sweet potato products, which allowed them to integrate their ideas and work together as a team to accomplish their plans to make additional sales. They sold their products from the farm stand that they helped build, which Wells Fargo sponsored.

The Sweet Potato Project also participated as a vendor at the Sweet Potato Festival in Livingston, CA. During this event, the students and Patrick sold their products and sweet potatoes. The club had made a consistent appearance at the festival since 2018 and used this opportunity not only to sell their products, but also to learn about the farming business.



While at the festival they also did numerous one on one interviews with members of the public about their experience in the club. Students met with policymakers who attended the event, which have included the mayor of Livingston, Assembly member Dr. Joaquin Arambula, and Congressman Jim Costa. Even during the pandemic, students attended the festival and successfully staffed their stand. Attending the festival has allowed them to have a place with other vendors as fellow farmers and entrepreneurs.



**Sweet Potato Festival
and Farm Tour.**



PICTURED WITH YOUTH, CONGRESSMAN, JIM COSTA AND THE LARGEST SWEET POTATO GROWER IN CALIFORNIA (6,000 ACRES), MR. AV THOMAS.

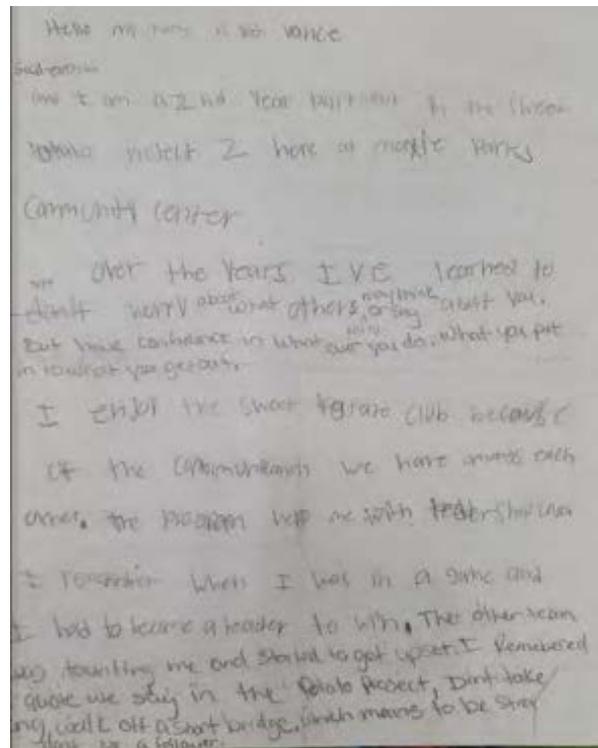


During Halloween, the students employed their leadership, planning, creativity, and public speaking skills. Each year the West Fresno Family Resource Center puts on a Halloween event for the community. Students were always responsible for hosting a station and lead an activity. In the past, they planned, built, and hosted a haunted house, with each student overseeing the development of a different section to allow them to use their own creativity and make a product that represented their work. Students devoted a significant amount of time towards this haunted house activity and were proud to be the ones to offer a service to the other young people in their community. On the day of the event, some students were the actors, while others helped pass out candy or helped with logistics. In 2020, the students participated and hosted a station during the center's "Trunk o' Treat"

event. In addition to hosting a spooky station, they also had the opportunity to donate sweet potatoes to the community members as part of a larger food giveaway.



The students continued to meet weekly to discuss depression, isolation, self-esteem, and leadership, and completed a special session on “You are what you think,” where students watch motivational videos from African American public figures. They also did another series called “Lose your focus, lose your life,” where students go over scenarios they may encounter in their neighborhood like drunk driving. During this session, students were able to discuss ways in which they could overcome the situation to evade a bad outcome, for example, to call Lyft or Uber instead of getting behind the wheel. Since students did this as a group, it was an opportunity to solve problems as student community and build empathy and bonds amongst each other. This session acknowledged the trauma that may be unavoidable in their neighborhood and families so that they can build skills that focus on resilience. The exercises also



a

helped them identify their character strengths and weaknesses and helped identify how to best overcome difficult situations. On the right is an example of the reflection's students wrote about their experiences in the club and the skills they have gained.

December

Students did a series of reflection processes in preparation for the end of the year celebration. They talked as a club about what it meant to be in the program, wrote down their experiences and prepared a presentation for their community. They also had to complete the memorization of the "Sweet Potato Creed" to carry it as a motto for them to use throughout life, as they find themselves in situations of adversity. Students also participated in end-of-the-year events that included a reception and celebration with parents and community members where students were recognized for their accomplishments throughout the year. Students received numerous recognition awards at the end of the year. Two of the cohorts did an end-of-the-year trip to Magic Mountain. In addition, students received gift cards and were taken on a celebration-shopping spree. The program concluded at the end of winter and began again with a new cohort of 35 participants in late spring. Past participants were also part of the planning and recruitment process for the future cohorts. Below you can see pictures of the end of the year celebration, quotes from students as they reflect on the past year in the program at the end of the year, and the creed they learned to help guide them throughout life.

I AM TODAY'S HARVEST CHANGING
TOMORROW'S FUTURE. I WILL FIGHT
AGAINST ALL ODDS THAT STANDS
AGAINST ME. MY CIRCUMSTANCES SHALL
NOT DEFINE ME. I WILL NOT BE SHACKLED
BY FEAR, INSECURITIES, OR DOUBT. MY
PASS STRENGTHENS MY PRESENT,
WHICH COMPLEMENTS MY FUTURE. I WILL
NEVER GIVE UP, EVER! I SHALL SUCCEED.
-SWEET POTATO CREED



Mentorship

The students and the parents all had Patrick’s phone number; students could call Patrick if they were having a rough time with their parents, and then the parent would call Patrick. Parents, in particular single parents, would call Patrick and use him as the disciplinarian in the household, using phrases like “I’m going to tell Patrick.”

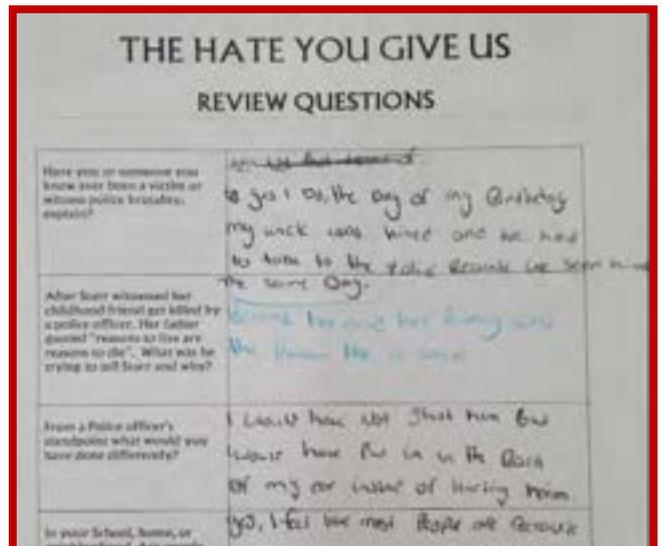
Patrick also served as a mediator between the parents and children to help them understand each other, strengthen their relationship, be a voice for the child, and help the parent see where the child is coming from. While originally the program had the idea of having program staff to lead the students in their activities and help them complete the program, it soon became evident that Patrick and other African American male program staff were a strong motivator for participants to join and stay in the program. Students wanted to continue being a part of the program because they not only found comradery with each other, but with their staff mentors as well, especially Patrick.

Ya’, 12-year-old male (Communication)—I enjoy the Sweet Potato Club because of the communication we have amongst each other. The program has helped me with leadership. I remember playing games that taught me to be a leader in order to win. For example, the other team was taunting me and I started to get upset, I remembered a quote that Patrick often said in the program: “Don’t take a long walk off a short bridge,” which means to be strong and don’t be a follower.

Joy, 12-year-old female (Leadership & Entrepreneurship)—I have used some of the things I learned in the program in my everyday life. I have learned about leadership and what it takes to be a good leader. One of my favorite parts of the program was learning what it takes to be an entrepreneur. We learned those qualities at Fresno State during the summer. I like the program because of the different topics and games we have played that will help us in our everyday lives and in our future.

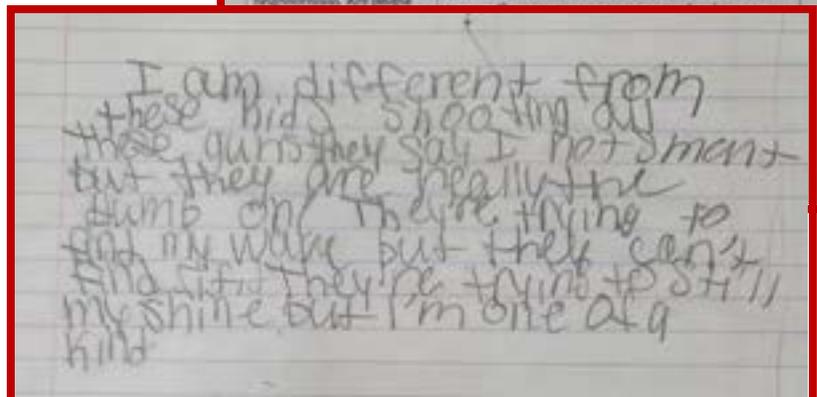
Learning about Race Relations

Students watched the film “The Hate you Give” and wrote a reflection exercise about the film. Through a facilitated conversation by Patrick, students reflected on the experiences seen in the film. The reflections were a powerful reminder of how students experience racism and how they cope with it in their community.



Community Engagement

Students also participated in back-to-school events hosted by the center. At community events, the students wore their Sweet Potato



Project shirts with pride and were happy to give back to their community. At community events, the club would usually have a table where at least one member is available to explain the background of the program and how other students can become involved. Examples of events the students have attended include a partnership with Fresno Police Activities League (Fresno PAL) for the Back-to-School Youth Explosion, COVID-19 Vaccines events, among others. Yolanda Randles has also participated in public events where she describes the program and how students have given back to their community.



COVID-19

In March 2020, the Sweet Potato Project hosted the program orientation, for over 50 students, along with the local evaluation team. State and county-wide Stay At Home Orders were initiated just after the orientation. Several program components were changed to adapt to COVID-19. For example, with face-to-face meetings restricted, the Program Manager Patrick created an online program, in which students would complete weekly assignments. Those students with no access to the internet, parents would pick up printed packets. In addition, Patrick also searched neighborhoods for students who participated in the orientation. For example, when not all students were contacted, Patrick knew some of the families, and students also assisted in letting Patrick know which neighborhood students lived.

Patrick worked with parents to teach them how to use the digital platforms for learning

<https://www.fresnobee.com/news/coronavirus/article245344060.html>

When the Stay at Home Orders were lifted, the WFFRC could not return to their building, but a local church agreed to host the students. The Sweet Potato Project students were divided so that they could safely distance themselves, and the center and the church provided hand sanitizer and masks for the students. They were able to continue this format for a month before Stay at Home Orders were reinstated in June 2021.

Students as Researchers

Due to the restrictions and public health mandates, Sweet Potato Project students wanted to gauge the demographics and the effects among the students in the West Fresno community and their respective families. Through a grant from Jobs for the Future, the students in the Sweet Potato Project were provided with an employment opportunity to develop a Student COVID-19 survey tool. Students demonstrated their leadership and community engagement skills by developing a survey about the effects of COVID-19 on the lives of their peers. Once the tool was developed, students paired into groups to administer surveys to local peers in their communities and during events at the center. The survey was also put on the WFFRC website. The students in the community were asked a series of questions regarding their demographics, challenges during the pandemic, effects of not attending school, and additional support the students needed during the pandemic. They were also asked about the endeavors and responsibilities they had to attend during the pandemic. The students were also given questions around top priority needs during COVID-19. While they had time to be present with family members, students were also given questions related to quality family time and their overall experience during the pandemic.

The Central Valley Health Policy Institute analyzed these results. These results were disseminated to the Mayor of the City of Fresno, the city council representative for West Fresno, and their Fresno Unified School District Trustee. Results can be seen in Appendix A.

Curriculum

The curriculum was a robust and highly advantageous curriculum for the students. Classes were two hours a day, for three days a week, in total for 39 weeks. The classroom was hosted at Maxie Parks Community Center, until the WFFRC had to move to a different building, every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 5:00 PM-7:00 PM. The students were given contracts to sign, highlighting the importance of the students' willing to work and punctuality. In their contract, it also stated a zero-tolerance policy to any fighting, horse playing, bullying, disrespectful remarks towards staff or

peers, sexual harassment, or destruction of any property. Attendance was also emphasized, and students were asked to always respect the program. Once students signed the contract, Sweet Potato Project students were offered incentives for their participation; they received a \$50 monthly stipend. Students followed the policies and respected the shared space.

Due to the public health mandates and mandatory stay-at-home orders, the students were asked transition to virtual classroom via Zoom. The digital divide contributed to decreased retention rate, but the Program Manager, Patrick, was able to retain students through motivational, self-esteem workshops and guest speakers. Patrick always started the virtual classroom with recitation of the Sweet Potato Creed, and the students participated in self-esteem journaling. The curriculum composed of self-esteem workshops, guest speakers, reviews and quizzes on the material presented in their virtual classroom. Self-esteem workshops encompassed written materials based on time management, goal setting, importance of achievements and positive characteristics. In addition to self-esteem, it also highlighted the importance of students being authentic and the importance of students doing the right thing. An example of a worksheet consisted of identifying low vs. high self-esteem. One student indicated low-self-esteem was, "*to feel shy*", while high self-esteem showed, "*feel motivated to conquer the day.*" When students reported low self-esteem, Patrick also had reading material that showed recommendations to improve low self-esteem. In addition to self-esteem worksheets, Patrick prompted students to believe in themselves. There were worksheets centered around believing in oneself and their abilities. The qualitative findings did show that students believed in their capabilities, overall. Students also had to journal on their reflections of self-love. All of these workshops helped students promoted positive self-efficacy, and positive growth.

Impact Beyond West Fresno

The Sweet Potato Project has been recognized locally and statewide for the innovative ways they engaged young African American students and the positive impact the students and staff have had on their community. The impact of the project goes beyond the four walls of the West Fresno Family Resource Center, and this project had become a model for engaging students. In addition, the COVID pandemic also gave an opportunity for the project staff, especially Patrick, to further be recognized and looked to as an example of best practices for reaching parents beyond the digital divide.

Media

The Sweet Potato Project has been recognized for its unique way of students gaining economic and entrepreneurial skills through agriculture training. Students and staff have been highlighted in broadcasting news stations for their positive impact on the community and neighborhoods of West Fresno. West Fresno Family Resource Center is active on digital platforms such as Facebook, and YouTube. Yolanda Randles, Executive Director of the Sweet Potato Project, and Patrick Hamilton, the Program Manager have worked collaboratively to uplift the students and their efforts. West Fresno Family Resource Center has highlighted the significance of the program and the impact it has had on the Sweet Potato Project students and the community. ABC news station has illustrated the importance of the project, and the West Fresno Family Resource Center has been a safe haven

for

African



American students. Yolanda Randles stated to ABC news that the program has been beneficial to the personal development of the African American youth. Patrick Hamilton also expressed in interviews how the students are incorporating leadership skills into their daily lives.

2017

Fresno State News, August 2017

[Sweet Potato Project Underway: 'Shark Tank'-Like Competition Set](#)

The partnership between Fresno State's Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship was highlighted in the Fresno State News Service, with a special emphasis on the training in urban agriculture, business skills, and higher education mentorship.

The Advocate, August 2017

The local African American newspaper *The Advocate* did a feature story on the summer course at Fresno State.

2018

Advocate of the Sweet Potato Project 2018

The Advocate did a feature piece of the Sweet Potato Project. The story highlighted how the project was a skilled based program that helped many students from West Fresno to stay focused on school and teach them some life skills that they cannot get anywhere else.

CA GROWN Blog, September 2018:

[Meet a Farmer: The Sweet Potato Project](#)

The Sweet Potato Project was shared through a farming industry website, CA GROWN, whose blog featured Sweet Potato Club students getting into the field to plant sweet potatoes. In the article, Yolanda Randles said:

"With agriculture being such a big economic driver in our community, we thought it made sense to give these young students a chance to experience agribusiness."

Education Matters Series [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#), November 2018

Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools and the local NBC affiliate did a two-part series highlighting the project.

2020

On November 8th, 2020, the program was a featured story on the local ABC station. This story highlighted the efforts of the program and gave an opportunity for the public at large to purchase sweet potatoes. The flyer selling the product was featured on the story web page.

-Patrick had been called to be on panels and interviewed for his practices with young people]

[West Fresno group aims to help local youth gain interest in agriculture](#)

ABC 30, November 8, 2020:

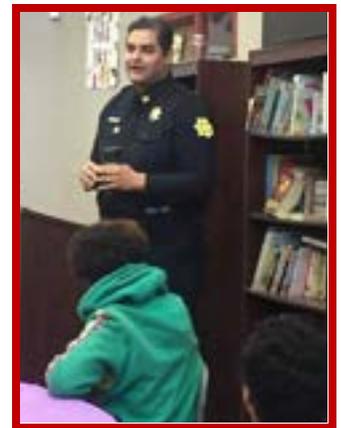
The Sweet Potato Project was reported through the ABC30 news, which described the project in West Fresno as serving local youth to help gain interest in agriculture while teaching them some important life lessons. The Sweet Potato Project was able to get dozens of teens to help harvest more than 3,000 pounds of sweet potatoes.

Additional videos of the students working on their activities and reflecting about the project can be seen [here](#).

Impact with Decision-Makers

The Sweet Potato Project has made an impact on local decision-makers, who have become champions for the program. State Assembly member Dr. Joaquin Arambula has attended several events with the Sweet Potato Project and has identified himself as a champion for this program. In 2018, the students and staff were invited by the assemblymember to Sacramento to be acknowledged at the Assembly floor. This has not only brought on further recognition of the project on a statewide level, but also helped highlight the success of the efforts of the CRDP overall.

Another early champion of this work is Dr. Joseph Castro, now Chancellor of the California State University system. He not only helped facilitate and secure the summer program at Fresno State while he was president of the university, but he also met with the students over the years to provide mentorship and guidance on the importance of being a first-generation college student. In addition, the students have also met Congressman Jim Costa, who has praised the program as an example of effective after-school programming for youth. Pictures below clockwise are Dr. Joaquin Arambula with the Sweet Potato Club at the state capitol in Sacramento, CA, Congressman Jim Costa meeting with Sweet Potato students during one of their expo events, Dr. Joseph Castro meeting with students and giving them a tour of his office during the summer entrepreneurship class, and Fresno Police Deputy Chief Mark Salazar talking to the students at the West Fresno Family Resource Center.



Evaluation

The Central Valley Health Policy Institute at Fresno State (CVHPI) worked with WFFRC to conduct both a formative and summative evaluation of the Sweet Potato Project implementation for the program years 2017-2020, which included a total of three cycles of the program. The formative evaluation engaged staff, students, and community members in formulating the program and evaluation approach and describing the process, challenges, and achievements of WFFRC in adapting the Sweet Potato Project model. The evaluation design focused on the Sweet Potato Project participants, as well as the use of a comparison group, which CVHPI co-recruited with WFFRC. Through continuous quality improvement efforts, the evaluation team collected the follow-up survey in two steps for Southwest Fresno and their multi-purpose community service. Recruitment of Sweet Potato Project participants had taken place in schools, Faith-based organizations, canvassing neighborhoods, and snowball technique. The CVHPI team described the evaluation at each Sweet Potato Project orientation, and all Sweet Potato Project students were given the option to voluntarily participate in the evaluation, separate from participation in the program.

To increase and organize recruiting efforts as well as to be culturally responsive to program needs, CVHPI hired additional racially concordant staff for outreach and recruitment. The comparison group received a weaker principal investigator (PEI) intervention: regular Afro-centric motivational quotes via email that were interactive content encouraging academic performance and development of self-esteem. Students provided informed assent to participate, and the parents provided informed consent. Baseline surveys were conducted in-person, by phone, or by email link.

After post-survey data collection, a cultural-linguistic measurement was introduced as the qualitative data for year 1. Spoken word/ creative expressions were assigned to the intervention group, and the student participants expressed spoken words around community, self-esteem, and goals. In years 2 and 3, the intervention group did not develop spoken word/ creative due to difficulty of accessing the necessary applications to develop the lyrics. In substitution of the spoken words, the evaluation team collected qualitative data by conducting student participant focus groups among the intervention group.

In years 1 and 2, the comparison group received 13 Afro-centric quotes via email throughout the project. Due to the difficulty of recruiting a comparison group during the COVID-19 pandemic, in year 3, evaluators delivered a shorter program of eight Afrocentric quotes via email throughout the project to the comparison group. Our focus in analyzing this data was to identify if the intervention and comparison groups experienced different trajectories of change in substance abuse, gang involvement, college intentions, and school participation. We also explored how any changes in collective efficacy, student risk behavior, resilience, gang affiliation, substance use, and hopelessness parallel and contribute to mental health outcomes. Program data, resource use, and progress towards sustainable funding developed the business case for this Community Defined Evidence Practices (CDEP) model. The formative and summative evaluation data was shared with the project's staff and advisory groups regularly. Their questions, understandings, and interpretations of the data served as another key input to the regular reporting of project findings.

Evaluation Questions

With the aim of capturing increased mental health resiliency within the Southwest Fresno African American youth community, the evaluators asked four evaluation questions centered on how well the program used the cultural richness and context of Southwest Fresno as an asset in the program. In

addition, it measured how major risk factors middle-school aged students face were affected by their participation in the program. Finally, the evaluation captured how resilience factors were strengthened by student participation in the program. The evaluators sought to measure these changes within the Sweet Potato Project, as well as through the additional check of using a comparison group that was evaluated using the same quantitative measures as the Sweet Potato Project students.

Evaluation Question 1

How does WFFRC adapt and implement the Sweet Potato Project for the Southwest Fresno context? What activities took place? How often did they occur? How did WFFRC keep participants engaged?

Indicators

Sweet Potato Project components that used the cultural and local contexts, the interest of students joining the program more than one year.

Instruments/data sources used to measure key indicators

The evaluation team assisted the West Fresno Family Resource Center complete the statewide program activity reports and captured the key ways in which the context of the place was having an effect on the program. In addition, evaluators captured how many years participants were in the program. The evaluation staff observed Sweet Potato Project events, such as recruitment meetings, club sessions, and reviewed recorded videos of the participants speaking about the program. In addition, participating students were invited to participate in a focus group each year to speak in depth to staff about their program experiences.

New instruments or modifications to existing instruments due to cultural and linguistic considerations

Early on in the observation period, it became evident that the importance of racially concordant research was going to be a key component of the evaluation in order to build and sustain trust between the evaluator team and the program staff, students, parents, and community. Original lead researchers took a less prominent role in the evaluation. In addition, an African American male faculty was recruited to be a part of the evaluation team. Racially concordant staff interviewed participants during the focus groups. Latinx and African American research assistants led the data collection throughout the three years of data collection. In addition, program staff were asked to comment on the findings to ensure cultural representation and accuracy of the findings.

Evaluation Question 2

This question addressed whether or not the treatment and comparison group differ at baseline. What are the social and mental health risk characteristics of Sweet Potato Project participants and controls? How did they differ on school participation, college intentions, gang involvement, and substance use at baseline? How did they differ on collective efficacy, internalized oppression, and hopelessness at baseline?

Indicators

1) Substance use; 2) Gang Involvement; 3) College Intentions; 4) School Participation; 5) Collective Efficacy; 6) Hopefulness

Instruments/data sources used to measure key indicators

Using computer-assisted survey methods, researchers collected quantitative data on all participants and control group members, including the SWE Core Measures for Adolescents and additional measures at baseline and one-year follow-up. For the first year of data collection, evaluators collected data during the fall (after approval of the evaluation plan) and then appropriately adjusted the additional measures. This collected data on the primary outcomes as well as collective efficacy, student risk behavior, resiliency, gang affiliation, substance use, and hopelessness.

New instruments or modifications to existing instruments due to cultural and linguistic considerations

In addition to the core measures, we drew on the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), and additional sources. The additional sources to measure collective efficacy and hope have established use with African American adolescents, while the Family Affluence Scale (FAS) has been used primarily to determine social inequalities. In a qualitative assessment of the instrument and consultation with the CRDP Statewide Evaluator, PARC-LMU, the local evaluation team adjusted this measure to fit appropriately. After the first pre-test in year 1, staff were uncomfortable with the internalized oppression questions and local evaluation staff took those questions out to have an evaluation that better reflected how the program wanted to be studied.

Evaluation Question 3

This question addressed how treatment and control groups differ at follow-up and how baseline features are related to these outcomes. How did Sweet Potato Project participants and control group members differ in mental health risk characteristics at follow-up? Controlling for baseline features, how did they differ on school participation, college intentions, gang involvement, and

substance use at follow-up? How did they differ on collective efficacy, internalized oppression, and hopelessness at follow-up?

Indicators

1) Substance use; 2) Gang Involvement; 3) College Intentions; 4) School Participation; 5) Collective Efficacy; 6) Hopefulness

Instruments/data sources used to measure key indicators

In year 2, evaluators collected qualitative data on spoken word/ creative expressions around community, self-esteem, and goals for the treatment group. In year 2, evaluators also collected qualitative data by conducting a student participant focus group among the treatment group. In year 3, evaluators incorporated the fidelity component for the treatment group. In years 1 and 2, the control group received 13 Afro-centric quotes via email throughout the duration of the project. In year 3, we delivered 15 Afro-centric quotes via email throughout the duration of the project. The focus in analyzing this data was to identify whether the intervention and control groups experience different trajectories of change in substance abuse, gang involvement, college intentions, and school participation. Evaluators also explored how any changes in collective efficacy, student risk behavior, resiliency, gang affiliation, substance use, and hopelessness parallel and contribute to mental health outcomes.

Evaluation Question 4

How did participants and comparison group members understand the key experiences that shape their sense of hopefulness and their potential risk activities? Were there program experiences that participants view as most important?

Indicators

1) Life experiences that shaped hopefulness, and risk behaviors, and risk behaviors. 2) Program experiences that shaped hopefulness, racial pride, and collective efficacy, and risk behaviors.

Instruments/data sources used to measure key indicators

During year 1, evaluators explored asking participants to write in their journals and speak with each other about the experiences, including overall program satisfaction, experiences with program components, most impacting their mental health, and intervening factors. Narratives also documented participant experiences around mentoring and leadership development. Evaluators identified the best ways to engage students in relating narratives and identifying key themes across

narratives. Evaluators specified methods for collecting similar narratives and thematic trends for the participants and controls in subsequent years. This data was extremely important to the articulation of essential program components for subsequent years.

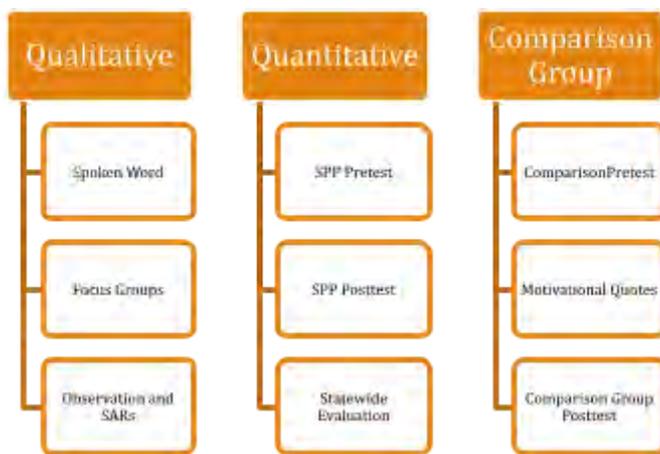
New instruments or modifications to existing instruments due to cultural and linguistic considerations

In year 1, written and spoken word creative expressions were developed by student participants to identify lived experiences among the treatment group. The creative expressions were centered around community, self-esteem, and goals. In year 2, a student focus group was conducted to examine the changes among participant health risks and protective/resilience factors, such as mental growth and barriers surrounding community, self-esteem, and goals for the treatment group. In year 3, evaluators developed a fidelity component and focus groups about the program.

Evaluation Design

The local evaluation team used a mixed method approach that sought to capture the richness of the program process, experience, and important mental health outcomes. In addition, the use of a comparison group with its own intervention offered an opportunity to see how the deep connections of mentorship, entrepreneurial skills learned through farming, and the leadership skills exercised throughout the program would impact mental health risk and resiliency factors.

Fig 1.



A quasi-experimental design was utilized for the pre-and post-surveys with a comparison group design to determine if the Sweet Potato Project intervention was beneficial to the Southwest Fresno students. The comparison group was a convenience sample of students with similar demographics

to the Sweet Potato Project participants; however, these students did not participate in the Sweet Potato Project activities, and as a result, these students did not receive the same level of community support, mentorship, and increased leadership skills. Instead, the comparison group received weekly motivational messages for 8-13 weeks. Researchers emailed or texted comparison group inspirational quotes from prominent African Americans throughout history. The participants in this group would then let the researchers know that they read the quote. Participants among the comparison group received a stipend for responding to all quotes. The comparison group participants also received stipends for participating in the pre-and post-surveys during the same periods as Sweet Potato Project evaluation participants.

Qualitative

The local evaluation team used a grounded theory and ethnographic studies approach. During Year 1 of data collection, evaluators collected qualitative data to develop a formative evaluation (Fig. 2). Through observation of program events and interviews with ten adult program leaders, including from WFFRC, Fresno State, and the USDA, the evaluation documented the adaptation of the St. Louis Sweet Potato program to the Southwest Fresno context, key program components, and lessons learned in their implementation. The interviews and investigator memos also identified areas for strengthening how each program element is designed to contribute to program outcomes. Beginning in Year 1, Evaluators collected and categorized written and oral narratives on key programs and other experiences that shape program outcomes. Written and spoken word creative expressions were developed by student participants to identify lived experiences among the treatment group. The creative expressions were centered around community, self-esteem, and goals. Evaluators highlighted 5-10 narratives each year, continually refining these methods over time. During Year 2 of the evaluation, the evaluation team continued formative evaluation by documenting through files. All physical records have been destroyed after coding and data entry. Observations and interviews (at least 10/year) documented how WFFRC continued to adapt and implement the Sweet Potato Project. In years 2 and 3, student focus groups were conducted with 10 participants to examine the changes among participant health risks and protective/resilience factors such as mental growth and barriers surrounding community, self-esteem, and goals for the treatment group. Also, a parent focus group and a staff and board members interview were conducted to develop key themes for understanding how the program and its context influenced outcomes. Qualitative data was collected through personal interviews and focus groups with individual participants, family members, staff and other program assistants, and community stakeholders. All

interviews and focus groups followed established interview or focus group guides. Interviewers created written summary notes and audiotapes, and updated and enriched their written summaries on key questions based on a review of the audio recordings. All interviews and focus group notes have been retained as electronic files on a locked computer in a locked office. The audio recordings were also maintained as electronic.

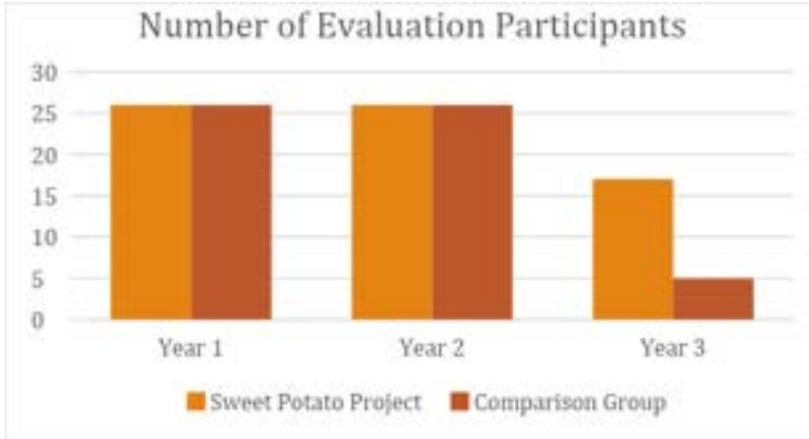
Fig 2.



Quantitative

The quantitative analysis included a combination of descriptive statistics year-to-year, as well as a composite longitudinal analysis that sought to analyze the most promising questions asked to participants. In total, the local evaluation survey participation included 26 Sweet Potato Project students and 26 comparison group students in year 1, 26 Sweet Potato Project students and 26 comparison group students in year 2, and 17 Sweet Potato Project students and 5 comparison group students in year 3 (Fig 3). In total, 69 Sweet Potato Project students and 57 comparison group students participated in the evaluation study.

Fig 3.



Community-Based Participatory Research

The evaluation work plan and performance indicators were reviewed intensively by WFFRC leadership and members of its key stakeholders (parents, other caregivers, partner organizations, and community members) and advisory groups. CVHPI provided quarterly updates on achievements relative to the performance indicators and these were reviewed in quarterly in-person project meetings held at WFFRC. Based on these quarterly updates, WFFRC leaders, in consultation with stakeholders and advisors, proposed any needed changes to the work plan, including evaluation plans. They sought consensus from participating stakeholders on any proposed changes to the work or evaluation plan. Before implementation of any changes to the evaluation or other work plans, WFFRR sought input from the statewide evaluator and CDEP contract manager before implementation. Any changes to the evaluation plan were documented in the annual updates.

Intersectional Approach

When discussing inequity within the African American community, it is important to recognize the ways in which the systems of oppression intersect with one another in limiting an African American person's capacity to succeed at society's standard. It is especially critical that African American youth are educated on the historical contexts of oppressive policies that manifest generations of trauma for them and their community members to survive and heal from (Murry et al. 2018).

Understanding the role that class, gender, race, and ability have played on the African American community is significant in advancing any form of equity. The evaluation approach does address intersectionality. The secondary quantitative analysis examined how gender and other individual features independently, and in interaction with the intervention, influence key study outcomes. The

project incorporated the Family Affluence Scale to highlight the geographic, social, technological advances, and socioeconomic diversity. In the Affluence Scale, the ladder scale allowed students to select their family's economic background. The top of the ladder represented where they saw their family's socioeconomic status, and if their family had technological devices such as, bedrooms, washer, dryer, computers, and smartphones. The lowest portion of the ladder represented low socioeconomic status, and not many technological advancements. While the ladder provided a visual illustration of their family's socioeconomic status, students felt their families were at the middle and top of the ladder. In addition to economic status, the project incorporated reasonable incentive payments to research respondents, respecting their economic conditions. The evaluation sought to explore how attitudes and beliefs around race/ethnicity interact with other potential sources of resilience and stress in the lives of urban adolescents (Hartley, Levin, K., & Currie, 2015).

Sampling Plan

Table. 2 Evaluation Sub-Populations

Demographics	Category
Language	English
Age	10-16
Racial/Ethnic Group	African American
Educational Level	Middle School and High School
Gender Identity	Male and Female
Sexual Orientation	Unknown
Geography	Urban
SES/Income	Economically disadvantaged/living in poverty

[Evaluation Sample Size](#)

No interviews were collected on Year I participants because of the IRB delays. As a result of the delays, the Year II data collection did not begin until late July of 2018. Most of the year 1 participants returned for year 2. By the time sample data collection for year 2 was initiated 9 of the 26 year 2 participants had stopped participating in the program/ Two other year 2 participants were not granted parental permission to participate in the survey. We followed -up with the program leavers to understand what precipitated their choice. For year 3, there were 25 in each group and pre-test interviews were completed at the time of initial program enrollment.

Sampling Method

The local evaluation team used convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods, inviting all Sweet Potato Project participants to voluntarily take part in the evaluation. The Sweet Potato Project required a considerable amount of time and effort by the participant and his/her family. It was not clear if participation in an agricultural experience fit the preferences of all African American teens and families. It seemed more efficient to randomly assign persons who had already self-identified as having an interest in support for academic and life success. Evaluators recognized that this limits the generalization of the findings to all African American adolescents and their families. In this context, it seems like a program to randomly sample African American students (say from a door-to-door, churches, schools, businesses, and PAL) and then assess their interest in the Sweet Potato Project would also be more useful once we have established that teens and families that want to participate benefit from the program. Our approach to sampling and recruitment builds on the cultural context and current climate in Southwest.

Recruitment/Retention Plan

Sweet Potato

Researchers recruited African American students that were already going to participate in the Sweet Potato project. Researchers would attend yearly orientation to introduce themselves to the students and the parents/guardians. Researchers would speak about the importance of the evaluation, the process, and the incentives for participating. During this time, researchers would answer any questions or concerns parents/guardians had about participating in the evaluation. Afterward the orientation, the research assistants would handout the assent and consent forms for those who were comfortable with participating in the evaluation. Each year researchers were able to obtain over 20 consent and assent forms from the participants. While the aim of the Sweet Potato Program was to

recruit students ages 12-15, participants in the program varied in age outside of the aim, and the evaluation staff recruited students 10 to 16 years old into the evaluation study.

Comparison Group

Evaluation Research Assistant and Rick Darrough recruited comparison group participants for the three years of the evaluation through his work as a social worker at the West Fresno Family Resource Center. When recruiting the comparison group, the goal was to match the number of participants with the number of Sweet Potato students participating in data collection to prevent unequal variances between samples. Rick utilized a referral list of (1s and 2s) minor cases of youth received by Fresno County CPS. These youth were of similar age (10-16 years old) and background of youth participating in the Sweet Potato Project. Researchers also gave the parents/guardians and students consent and assent forms to sign for the students to participate in the evaluation.

While most program participants were likely to maintain contact with the program throughout the evaluation period, it was necessary to apply additional retention efforts to ensure that these individuals are available for the post evaluation. These issues became even more significant with comparison group members. Evaluators checked the contact information on both treatment and comparison group members at every opportunity and reached team members who developed relationships with participants at events and reached out to them individually on at least a quarterly basis. Similarly, there was quarterly individualized outreach by telephone, email, and social media to all control group members to support retention by Sweet Potato Project staff. Evaluators closely tracked the retention of subjects and worked closely with community advisers and program staff to retain relationships with study members.

Consent and Assent

Through WFFRC's partnership with the neighborhood middle school, student participants were invited to an informational session to participate in the Sweet Potato Project, which also included an introduction of the voluntary evaluation. Outreach/recruitment and acquisition of informed assents and consents were collected by research assistants. We obtained written informed assent from student participants and comparisons to participate in the project and all data collection. We obtained written informed consent from the adult responsible for each study member for all project activities and data collection. Students were required to bring signed assent and consent forms to the introductory session. Following the recommendations of the Fresno State IRB, research staff with

IRB training were also available to student potential study members and their parents to explore the conditions for informed assent/consent with each individual by phone, email, or by person. All research staff completed IRB training and followed our research center's established procedures for ensuring confidentiality.

Student participants and parents agreed to participate in the data collection and returned their signed consent form to the program coordinator or research assistants. Consent forms addressed the standard format including a) describing what the evaluation of the study will involve, b) the fact that participation will be voluntary, and that they may not answer questions they feel uncomfortable to answer, possible risk of participating how they will be addressed. The physical consent forms are housed temporarily during data collection at the research assistant's personal locked office at WFFRC and then permanently at CVHPI.

Study Incentives

Sweet Potato Students were compensated \$20.00 in the form of cash for completing the local evaluation pretests and another \$20.00 for completing the post-tests. In addition, students were offered an additional \$20.00 for their participation in the end of the year focus groups. During the year 1 pre-test process, evaluation staff used gift cards as an incentive, but received feedback from parents and staff about the difficulty of using cards in their area due to poor access to commercial centers and transportation to get to those. Evaluation staff then received special university permissions to distribute cash and have since made it an institutional policy for other projects in Southwest Fresno to use cash for compensation.

Comparison Groups were also offered \$20.00 for each test they completed, but in addition were also given an additional incentive of \$20.00 for viewing all of the quotes. Comparison group participants had to reply to study staff every week that they received and read the quotes to be considered as ongoing participants in the study eligible to receive the \$20.00 for participating.

Rick Darrough, evaluation study Research Assistant and also West Fresno Family Resource Center staff who worked closely with the students also saw a need to provide the students with additional refreshments during their time spent filling out the surveys since it was an unusually long test for them to take outside of a school context. Data Collection staff provided juices, snacks, and during year 2 when all study participants were able to be at the center at the same time to complete the posttest, and the evaluation staff provided pizza for all of the students. Snacks were used as a way

to recognize the dignity of each of the students and how evaluation staff were not just extracting the data and compensating them with cash incentives, but also giving them an informal opportunity to casually eat and interact with evaluation staff.

Procedures for Protecting Against or Minimizing Potential Risks

Due to possible COVID-19 exposure, the consent and assent forms were described in detail and what steps were taken to mitigate the risk of exposure to COVID-19. The evaluation team conducted screenings for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure before individuals entered the building, provided personal protective equipment (PPE) for each participant and staff, sanitized each area before and after admitting groups in WFFRC. Youth sat in separate areas at least six feet apart to reduce the physical risk of exposure. We also requested that research participants notify staff of any COVID-19 diagnoses within 14 days of the research procedures and give information about how to report this. In turn, research participants were also informed of any COVID-19 diagnoses among research staff within 14 days of the data collection.

A number of measures took place to protect the confidentiality of the participants: a) No individual identifiers were noted on-survey instruments, such as name or social security number. In addition, an ID number was allotted to each instrument of each consenting student and assenting parent. Data were analyzed as a group experience and not as individuals. Qualitative quotes did not have identifiable information.

To minimize risk the curriculum and the instruments we used were pre-tested for age, language, and cultural appropriateness, we did a pilot test for all instruments prior to use. The informed consent/assent forms contained assurance of confidentiality. Survey questionnaires were administered on-site at WFFRC at designated intervals by trained and skilled graduate students from the Central Valley Health Policy institute, California State University, the designated evaluators.

Completed survey forms were immediately sealed and sent to the designated evaluation personnel, for storage in a secured cabinet pending data entry. Similar data generated from the survey are stored in a password-secured database. Only authorized research staff will have access to the data. We applied and obtained approval of the two Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) from the California State University—The University IRB and the departmental IRB. We had annual renewals of the IRB over the entire project period.

All study personnel completed and will have on file documentation of recent completion of an NIH-approved training program on the protection of human subjects. The project team sent documentation to IRBs if any adverse consequences to participants occurred. Any unanticipated risks were minimized by allowing only well-trained health educators and research staff to perform study procedures, according to standard practice, and were made sure that the study participants and their families/guardians understood study procedures before and during the study. As part of the training and supervision process for health educators, there was ongoing discussion of any potential unforeseen negative consequences for participants as well as the development and implementation of strategies to reduce participant discomfort. There were specific protocols to ensure safety and the well-being of study participants, should there have been any negative consequences. At each site, all study personnel who had contact with study participants were asked to immediately report any adverse event to the program Principal Investigator. In the event that any of the participants and/or their families had any concerns or issues, or some other adverse event occurred, the evaluator would report to the principal Investigator would advise in the IRB in writing within 24-hours of the adverse event and provide as much detail as required for effective oversight.

COVID-19 Questionnaire

Due to the emergence of COVID-19 and the changes brought upon by this reality to student participants. The Sweet Potato participants administered a survey to sweet potato project participants about their experiences. Their names were not recorded on the surveys. CVHPI agreed to do the analysis for those surveys and reports as an added component of the overall evaluation. However, our study staff was not part of data collection or knowing any of the identifiable information like which participants chose to take part in the survey. We analyzed the survey by entering data onto our Qualtrics account and then downloaded it to SPSS for further analysis. Any hard copy survey information that was given to us was returned to WFFRC after data input was completed. Analysis and the report of the survey focused on aggregate findings, presented in Appendix __A__.

Continuous Quality Improvement

As part of our proposed formative evaluation of the WFFRC CDEP project, CVHPI assisted WFFRC in developing a detailed work plan with measurable performance indicators and explicit expectations for quality. The performance indicators addressed such questions as the rate of participant/comparison accrual, the effectiveness of the sampling process, and the scope and intensity of educational and other interventions. The work plan and performance indicators were

reviewed intensively by WFFRC leadership and members of its key stakeholder (parents, other caregivers, partner organizations, and community members) and advisory group. CVHPI provided quarterly updates on achievements relative to the performance indicators and was reviewed in quarterly in-person project meetings held at WFFRC or online through Zoom. Based on these quarterly updates, WFFRC leaders in consultation with stakeholders and advisors proposed changes to the work plan, including evaluation plans. Before implementation of any changes to the evaluation or other work plans, WFFRR sought input from the statewide evaluator and CDEP project officer before implementation. Any changes to the evaluation plan were documented in the annual updates. There were two major changes relevant to the evaluation that took place during the process. The first was the change in measures, which was documented in the earlier section about instruments that took out the measurement of internalized oppression. The second change was switching from lyrics to focus groups in years 2-3 to account for lack of resources to continue to work with students and have the right software to produce the songs the students were creating.

Methods

Mixed Method Approach

Data collection began in 2018, after all refinement of the evaluation protocol, final development of self-report interview tools, agreements to access secondary data on student intervention and comparison participants, and state IRB approval was obtained. Formative focus groups with program staff and key community stakeholders occurred during year 1. Qualitative focus groups with student participants and parents/caregivers occurred in year 2. Fidelity review and focus group components occurred in year 3 data. Annual reports on findings and annual updates of the evaluation were submitted for years 1, 2, and 3.

Training of Researchers

All research staff handling data collection and analysis completed a NIH protecting Human Research Participants course and study data collection training. Study data collection training was completed with all program and research staff. Any new program or research staff who join the project in subsequent years also received this training. There were bi-annual supplemental data collection training team meetings to amplify and extend adherence to study procedures. The initial training focused on overall research goals and evaluation questions, the origins and purpose of each data collection process, how to support participants in completing computer assisted, written and other measures. Any measures, such as engagement in program activities, that require judgments by

program staff were explored through scenarios and in-depth definition discussions, coding practice, and a test of inter-rater reliability. Psychological and ethical issues in data collection with adolescents were also included in the training. Key messages from the human subjects training were reviewed and study specific methods and procedures examined.

Instruments Used

1. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Substance use items
2. National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement (NSALAS). College intentions items
3. Gang participation/School Performance. A Guide to Assessing Your Community's student Gang Problem (OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Behaviors)
4. Familial Affluence Scale (FAS III). Selected items.
5. Hope, purpose, contribution to neighborhood, collective efficacy. Stoddard and Peirce (2015)
6. Neighborhood cohesion. Hurd Stoddard and Zimmerman (2013)
7. Demographics

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) Scale

The YRBSS survey administered in middle schools is used to surveil the health risk behaviors that contribute to students' social, mental, and behavioral health. Therefore, the behavioral questions selected pertained to behavioral health (YRBSS 2017).

Racial Profiling Scale

Racial profiling questions examined whether perceptions of racially biased policing against African American adolescents were a function of neighborhood racial composition, net of other neighborhood- and individual-level factors (Stewart et al., 2009).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Gang Model Scale

The OJJDP is a comprehensive approach to reduce and prevent gang participation. The study explored and delivered 5 core strategies and the core strategies are as followed: Community mobilization, social intervention that included street outreach; provision of opportunities, suppression and institutional organizational change (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009).

Family Affluence Scale

The study explored the socioeconomic and geographic diversity of youth and created a new, valid Family Affluence Scale (Hartley, Levin & Currie, 2015).

Among the 17 items that measured family affluence, eight items significantly loaded onto one factor, including questions about ownership of a bed, computer, washing machine, dryer, cellphone, access to outdoor space, and receiving an allowance. Factor loadings ranged from .31 to .87 and had an $\alpha = .729$ measure of internal consistency.

Hope for the Future and other Scales on Expectations and Community

Evaluation team used the Stoddard & Pierce tool (2015), which showed the relationship between the contribution to community, neighborhood collective efficacy, purpose, hope and future expectations, and tested a mediation model that linked contribution to community and collective efficacy with future expectations through purpose and hope in a sample of 7th grade students. (Stoddard & Pierce, 2015).

Evaluation team used the Hurd, Stoddard & Zimmerman tool (2013). The study explored neighborhood characteristics to American adolescents' symptoms of anxiety and depression via adolescents' social support and perceptions of neighborhood cohesion (Hurd, Stoddard, & Zimmerman, 2013).

Data Collection Protocol

The tools/instruments were administered via computer-assisted programs at the West Fresno Family Resource Center (WFFRC). Trained research assistants were available to explain assent/consent and provide any other technical assistance and answer questions. The Survey interview took 40 minutes to complete.

Data Collection Protocol

Participants spent time during the program learning to provide written narratives about their experiences. We further developed methods for collecting these narratives during Year 1. The narratives were completed near the end of the summer educational program and near the end of the program Year. Participants wrote about their overall experience and satisfaction with the program.

Beginning in Year 1 of data collection, evaluators collected and categorized written and oral narratives on key programs and other experiences that shape program outcomes. Written and spoken word creative expressions were developed by student participants to identify lived experiences among the intervention group. The creative expressions were centered on community, self-esteem, and goals. The first year of the evaluation.

In year 2, a student focus group was conducted with 10 participants to examine the changes among participant health risks and protective/resilience factors such as mental growth and barriers surrounding community, self-esteem, and goals for the intervention group. In addition, a parent focus group was conducted to develop key themes for understanding how the program and its context influenced outcomes.

In Year 3, evaluators conducted a focus group with 10 student participants on experiences in the program, protective/resilience factors they experience in the community, and adaptability to the new circumstances after COVID-19 shelter in place orders. Participants were invited to join in on the focus group via their Sweet Potato Club. Participation in the focus group was voluntary for those that have already signed the consent to take part in the evaluation. Those student participants who accepted to take part in the focus group were given a password-protected Zoom link to join through our university website. Evaluation team used the university VPN to administer the focus group. In addition, the evaluators interviewed program staff and board members of WFFRC who have given input on the evaluation design for Years 1-3. These interviews took place over Zoom using a similar protocol to the project participant focus group.

All interviews and focus groups followed an interview or focus group guide. Interviewers created written summary notes and video recorded through Zoom. Interviewers updated and enriched their written summaries on key questions based on a review of the video recordings. All interview and focus group notes that were collected in the past years were retained as electronic files on a locked computer. The video recordings are maintained as electronic through the password-protected Zoom program and accessed using the VPN. The narratives were completed near the end of the fall educational program and near the end of the program Year. Participants will write about their overall experience and satisfaction with the program.

Data Storage

The spoken word, creative expression data were collected as written or tape-recorded, then written records from participants during program meetings. Program staff and Research Assistants provided some training on narrative writing using spoken word poetry, hip-hop/rap, and traditional writing models. They worked with each participant to tell, and then record, a story. Each participant responded to questions on overall program experience and satisfaction, experiences with program components, and leadership development and mentoring experiences. The narratives were content coded and a set of quantitative measures for key elements of satisfaction, mentoring, and leadership development were derived. The narratives were stored as paper files in a locked file in a locked office with limited access. The quantitative measures derived from the narratives were electronic data and were stored in a locked computer and only research staff had access to it. Electronic data will be processed through an encrypted channel through our university password protected Qualtrics data storage. Electronic downloads were only allowed into password-protected folders, and only investigators and Human Subjects trained staff essential to data analysis will have access. Physical copies were stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked room and only research staff with Human Subjects training that are essential to data analysis had access to it. All other data analyzed by Research Assistants was non-identifiable and aggregated.

Statewide Evaluation

The CRDP Statewide Evaluation consisted of quantitative data that was collected on all Sweet Potato Project students who consented to participate in the evaluation. The SWE Core Measures for Adolescents were collected in the pilot year and each subsequent year. For years 1, 2, and 3, 32 SWE pre-surveys and 45 post-surveys were collected. The questions asked in the SWE were not analyzed as part of the local evaluation.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative Measures

The local evaluation assessments consisted of a pre and posttest with a total of 85 questions. Measures included demographics (7 items), racial profiling (3 items), hope for the future, individual and collective efficacy (18 items), college expectations (4 items), social support and sense of community (4 items), family affluence (19 items), risky behaviors (22 items), gang involvement (7 items), and socioeconomic status (1 item).

Fig 4.

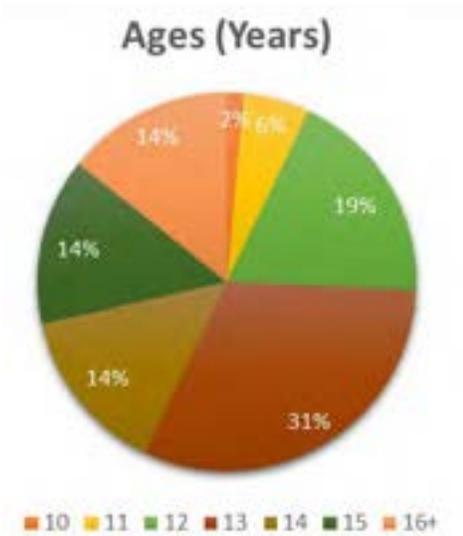
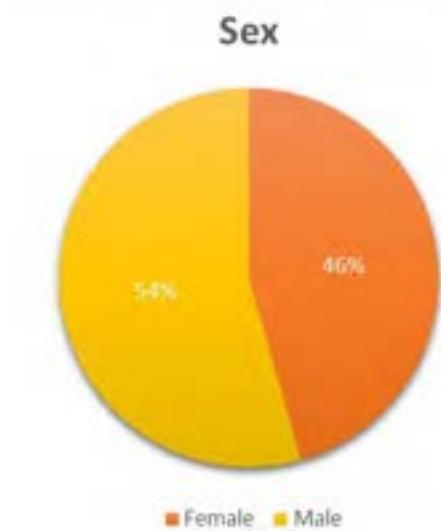
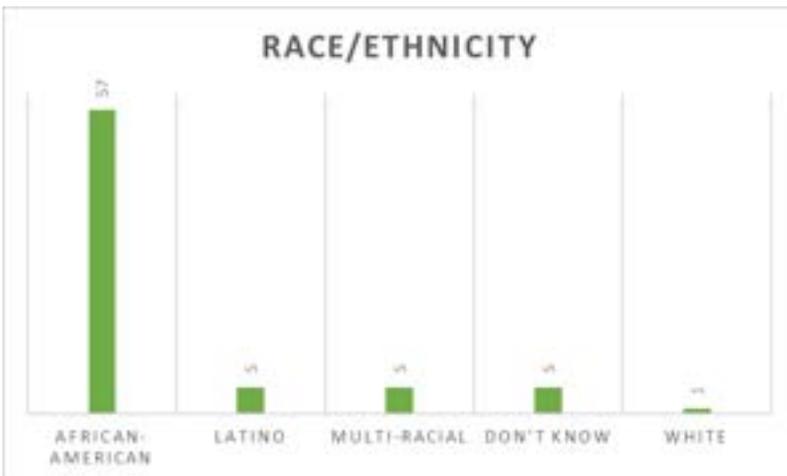


Fig 5.



The majority of Sweet Potato Project students were between the ages of 12-14 years old (**Fig 4.**), male (56%) (**Fig 5.**), and African American (**Fig 6.**). However, there were students that identified as Latino or multiracial that participated in the program. There were also 5 students throughout the program duration that identified as “Don’t Know,” which indicates the need for a further discussion among middle school aged students their conceptualization of race and how they identify in the world.

Fig 6.



Sweet Potato Research using Factor Analysis

The evaluation team conducted an exploratory factor analysis across the scales to identify latent constructs that could be used further to explore the Sweet Potato Project's effect on participants. Orthogonal varimax rotation was examined to ensure that loading was consistent across rotated and unrotated factor matrices. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy was assessed. Each scale had a minimum of 0.6 or greater on the KMO sampling test of adequacy, indicating that it is appropriate to assess latent variables. Screen plots and eigenvalues were used to assess the number of factors to be extracted and the extent to which variance was explained by each factor. For each scale, items were retained if they had a factor loading of .4 or greater. Only one factor was extracted from each scale. Factor loadings are reported below. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency across the items. Furthermore, measures of item deletion were examined to ensure that all items improve the reliability of the factor.

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Substance use items

The first scale was developed using our items from the Youth Behavioral Risk Surveillance Survey (YRBSS, 2017). To assess middle school risk behavior, the study developed a composite measure of smoking, vaping, and alcohol use related to problem behaviors among middle school students. To form the composite measure, this study used the Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability to assess if the feelings of substance abuse and problem behaviors can be combined into a single measure. The responses to these questions were as follows:

"Have you ever tried smoking, even one or two puffs?"

"Have you ever used an electronic vapor product?"

"During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or dissolvable tobacco products, such as Redman, Levi Garrett, Beechnut, skoal, Skoal Bandits, Copenhagen, Camel Snus, Marlboro Snus, General Snus, Ariva, Stonewall, or Camel Orbs?" (Do not count any electronic vapor products.)

"Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips?"

The first scale was developed using our items from the Youth Behavioral Risk Surveillance Survey (YRBSS, 2017). The exploratory analysis revealed three items about smoking, vaping, and alcohol use had a strong relationship ($KMO = .65$). It describes these items as those having to do with whether participants had ever tried smoking, vaping, or drank alcohol and whether or not they had tried other tobacco products in the past 30 days. In addition, these three items had a Cronbach's Alpha of .72, demonstrating that most of our scales do have latent variables that are valuable in further analysis of these items.

Racial Profiling Scale

To assess racial profiling, the study developed a composite measure of racial profiling and the systemic barriers associated with students in Southwest Fresno. To form the composite measure, this study used the Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability to assess if the students were unfairly stopped, searched or kinship were unfairly stopped and searched by police force, and they were combined into a single measure. The responses to these questions were as follows:

"Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by the police?"

"Have your parents or other family members ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by the police?"

Over time, all of the scales showed that young people, whether in pre or posttest and across the years, show the mean of racial profiling questions at 5.4 and 4.45, respectively. This indicates how the systemic barriers continue to be a challenge for students regardless of their experience in the program. While this scale identified had an $\alpha = .35$, there is potential for analysis of these as individual items in a pre, post, and dosage analysis. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the means throughout the surveys demonstrates what our qualitative data pointed to about systemic barriers not moving, but their individual hope for the future and other individual resiliency factors being impacted by the program.

The factor analysis in our other scales showed promising results for all of our scales, as the National Survey American Life Adolescent supplement and HBSC Family Affluence Scale also showed factors within the scales at Cronbach's Alpha .821 and .729, respectively.

OJJDP Gang Model Scale

To assess OJJDP Gang model scale, the study developed a composite measure of gang participation and school performance associated with students in Southwest Fresno. To form the composite measure, this study used the Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability to assess if they participated in gang activity, engaged in risk behaviors or carried weapons, and they were combined into a single measure. The responses to these questions were as follows:

"How many times in the past year (12 months) have you: - Been suspended from school?"

"...- Carried a handgun?"

"...- Sold illegal drugs?"

"...- Stolen or tried to steal a motor vehicle such as a car or motor year?"

"...- Been arrested?"

"...- Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them?"

"...- Been drunk or high at school?"

"...- Taken a handgun to school?"

Among the 18 items that measured gang participation and school activity, eight items significantly loaded onto one factor, including questions about systemic and institutional racial injustices that occur in people of color, particularly Black students. Factor loadings ranged from .64 to .89 and had an $\alpha=.921$ measure of internal consistency. This indicates how the systemic and institutional barriers continue to be a challenge for students regardless of their experience in the program. While this scale identified had an $\alpha=.921$, institutional barriers, and racial injustices continue to take place, regardless of the analysis. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the means throughout the

surveys demonstrates what our qualitative data pointed to about hope, positive protective factors, and their hope for the future.

Family Affluence Scale

To assess the Family Affluence Scale, the study developed a composite measure of socioeconomic and geographic diversity associated with students in Southwest Fresno. To form the composite measure, this study used the Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability to assess if the students owned materials, adequate housing and socioeconomic standards, and they were combined into a single measure. The responses to these questions were as follows:

"Do you have your own computer?"

"Do you have a bed of your own?"

"Does your home have an outdoor space attached, (e.g. garden)?"

"Does your family have a washing machine?"

"Does your family have a dryer?"

"Does your family have internet access at home?"

"Do you receive an allowance? (Allowance is receiving money from your parents)"

"Do you have a cellphone?"

Among the 17 items that measured family affluence, eight items significantly loaded onto one factor, including questions about ownership of a bed, computer, washing machine, dryer, cellphone, access to outdoor space, and receiving an allowance. Factor loadings ranged from .31 to .87 and had an $\alpha = .729$ measure of internal consistency. The scale was not significantly coherent, so it was not included in the final results.

National Survey American Life Adolescent Supplement Scale

Using the National American Life of Adolescent supplement study, the study developed a composite measure of activities and schools associated with students in Southwest Fresno. To form the composite measure, this study used the Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability to assess if the students had hope for their future associated with academic, and they were combined into a single measure. The responses to these questions were as follows:

"How far would you like to go in school?"

"As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?"

The factor analysis in our other scales showed promising results for all of our scales, as the National Survey American Life Adolescent supplement also showed factors within the scales at Cronbach's Alpha .821.

Hope for the Future and other Scales on Expectations and Community Scale

To assess the hope for the future and other scales on expectations and community, the study developed a composite measure of hope for the future associated with students in Southwest Fresno. To form the composite measure, this study used the Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability to assess if the students had hope for the future, a sense of purpose, and how they feel they are contributing to the community. These were combined into a single measure. The responses to these questions were as follows:

Future Expectations

"I will handle the problems that might come up in my life."

"I will handle my school work."

"I will have a happy life."

"I will have interesting things to do in my life."

Hope

“I energetically pursue my goals.”

“My past experiences have prepared me for my future.”

“I've been pretty successful in life so far.”

“I meet the goals I set for myself.”

Purpose

“I have a purpose in my life that says a lot about who I am.”

“I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.”

“I have a purpose in my life that reflects who I am.”

Contribution to Community

“I want to make a difference in the world.”

“I currently contribute to my community.”

“It is important for me to contribute to my community.”

We identified four other scales in the dataset that also have the potential for future analysis (Table 16). This includes items about hope for the future (4 items $\alpha=.806$), a sense of purpose in life (3 items $\alpha=.828$), and how much they feel they are contributing to their community ($\alpha=.786$). These themes are of particular interest because they showed the most significant results in our qualitative data year after year.

Results

The data was analyzed using IBM's SPSS, a research quality statistical software program that allows researchers to solve statistical problems through statistical analysis, data management, and data documentation. A one-between-one-within subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze data through SPSS. A one-between-one analysis of variance “is used when two independent variables are evaluated on a dependent variable of interest.” In a one-between-one ANOVA, one of the independent variables is a between-subject factor (Sweet Potato Project and

Comparison group) and the other is the within-subject factor (time). The between-subject factor consists of two or more levels in which each participant receives one level of treatment (intervention, or no intervention). The within-subject factor can consist of two or more levels where each participant receives all levels of treatment (pre- and post-surveys) (Yockey, 2011).

A 2 x 2 one-between-one within ANOVA on student measures was conducted among 7 scales with group 1.0 and group 2.0 (Sweet Potato Project, and Comparison group) as the between-subjects factor and time (the difference in pre and post answers) as the within-subjects factor. The results showed among the middle school risk behaviors scale (**Table 3.**) there was no significant main effect for Sweet Potato students, $F(1, 62) = 1.52, P > 0.5, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$, and no significant main effect for time, Greenhouse-Geisser adjusted $F(1, 62) = .87, P > 0.5$.

Table 3. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

Middle School Risk Behaviors by Time						
Sweet Potato			Comparison Group			
Time	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	22	1.24	.22	22	1.40	.34
Post	42	1.29	.31	42	1.34	.30

Among the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang model scale (**Table 4.**), results showed no significant main effect for Sweet Potato students, $F(1, 79) = .83, P > 0.5, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .00$, and no significant main effect for time, Greenhouse-Geisser adjusted $F(1,79) = .27, P > 0.5$.

Table 4. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Behaviors by Time
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	Sweet Potato			Comparison Group		
Time	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	34	1.1	.57	34	1.35	1.32
Post	47	1.23	.78	47	1.40	1.41

Results showed that among racial profiling scale (**Table 5.**) there was no significant main effect between Sweet Potato students and the comparison group, $F(1, 79) = .12, P < 0.5$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, however; there was a significant main effect for time Greenhouse-Geisser $F(1, 79), P < 0.5$. The mean score at pretest was lower than the reported mean at posttest for the Sweet Potato Project students, indicating they experienced less racial profiling after the program.

Table 5. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

Racial Profiling by Time						
	Sweet Potato			Comparison Group		
Time	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	34	5.32	1.93	34	5.28	1.72
Post	47	4.22	1.61	47	4.87	2.01

Among the National Survey of American Life Adolescent scale (**Table 6.**), results showed there is not a significant main effect among Sweet Potato students, $F(1, 79) = .12, P > 0.5$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, and no significant main effect for time, Greenhouse- Geisser adjusted $F(1,79) = .116, P > 0.5$.

Table 6. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement (NSALAS) by Time

Time	Sweet Potato			Comparison Group		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	34	5.04	1.18	34	4.34	1.56
Post	47	5.04	1.49	47	4.84	1.12

Results also showed no significant main effect for Sweet Potato students when analyzing promoting a positive future expectations scale (**Table 7.**), $F(1, 79) = .85, P > 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, and no significant effect on time $F(1, 79) = .16, P > 0.05$.

Table 7. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

Positive Future Expectations by Time						
Time	Sweet Potato			Comparison Group		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	34	1.47	.51	34	1.68	.75
Post	47	1.62	.87	47	1.78	.74

Among the hope scale (**Table 8.**) there was no significant effect between Sweet Potato Students and comparison group, $F(1, 79) = .37, P > 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$: however, there is a significant effect for time $F(1, 79), P < 0.05$. Hope significantly increased at posttest compared to baseline for both the Sweet Potato Project and comparison group students.

Table 8. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

Hope by Time	
Sweet Potato	Comparison Group

Time	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	34	1.58	.69	34	1.99	.98
Post	47	1.99	1.02	47	2.20	.88

Lastly, the results showed that among the purpose scale (**Table 9.**) there was no significant effect among the Sweet Potato students $F(1, 79), P > 0.5$, partial $\eta^2 = .037$, and no significant effect on time, Greenhouse-Geisser adjust, $F(1, 79) = .99$, and $P > 0.5$.

Table 9. One-Between-One ANOVA Means and standard deviations for Sweet Potato and Comparison group responses before the program (pre-) and after the program (post-).

Purpose by Time						
Sweet Potato				Comparison Group		
Time	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Pre	34	2.92	1.56	34	3.04	1.49
Post	47	3.19	1.53	47	2.87	1.11

Evaluators also tested the number of years in the study and the number of times a person had taken the survey to determine if the variable had any effect on student outcomes. These variables were individually assessed among all 7 measures as a covariate among group 1.0 and group 2.0, and time. After analyzing the results evaluators found that there was no significant relationship between the Sweet Potato Project group and the outcomes measured.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data was collected through a mixed-method approach. The student participant qualitative data was collected through the development of spoken word lyrics in year 1 and focus groups in years 2 and 3. The stakeholders' data was collected through a stakeholder focus group in year 1, parent focus groups in year 2, and a staff and board members interview in year 3. When compiling the qualitative data for the student spoken word expressions, student focus groups, parent focus groups, and staff and board member interviews researchers analyzed the data by identifying emergent themes within participants' responses. These responses were then coded into a thematic structure that reflected common patterns in participants' responses.

The purpose of the focus groups and interviews was to examine if participation in the Sweet Potato project has had short-term effects that improve African American middle school students' well-being and academic performance. In addition to well-being and performance, the analysis also looked at long-term impact in reducing school dropout rates, promoting well-being, positive adult relationships, and leadership skills.

Year 1 Data

In year one, the student participated in the development of spoken word expressions. Participants met for meetings two days per week throughout the fall semester of 2018. Each Friday was dedicated to producing a creative work that included lyrics, poetry, or spoken word and was developed into musical pieces between late September and mid-November. The student participants were placed into groups based on their lyrics, poetry, or spoken word themes. The themes that participants agreed upon were Community, Self-Esteem, and Goals. Refer to **Figure 7.** for more information about spoken word theme frequencies. Participants were asked to say one word that came to mind relative to each. They were then instructed to compose at least one sentence associated with their group's subject. Most provided more prolonged, more detailed works. Each week, members met to refine their statements that best suited their feelings around the subject and to improve fluidity in employment. Each group also chose a musical interlude or backdrop to support the lyrical content. The last session included recording student presentations of these poetic/lyrical samples and preparing these performances for a later upload to SoundCloud for public access. In addition, Stakeholder focus groups were conducted from March 2018 through May 2018. The

participants were professionals and staff from California State University, Fresno, Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and community members involved in the project. Participants consisted of an associate professor, administrators from the Lyles Center for Innovation, and Entrepreneurship, a graduate student, and two community members from Washington Union School District. Refer to Appendix B to review the most frequent themes stakeholders discussed throughout the focus groups.

Year 2 Data

In Year 2, Three (Two parent and one student) focus groups were conducted at the West Fresno Family Resource Center by research analysts from the Central Valley Health Policy Institute at Fresno State. In late November and early December, two-parent focus groups were conducted (N= 4). When analyzing year 2 parent focus groups researchers identified five emergent themes such as the effect of positive role models in their life since joining the SP Project, how entrepreneurship has helped the students with their confidence and work ethic as they work together, taking what they learn in the program and applying it their life, learning about their agriculture background and culture, and seeing the community working closely with the students. The parents' responses were then coded into five different categories found in **Figure 9**. A Sweet Potato student participant focus group was conducted in January 2020 (N= 10). Among the student focus group, some emergent themes that reoccurred repeatedly were students having more confidence in themselves to speak out and do more in their community, living either in a safe or unsafe environment where there is community support and family support, having community members push participants to do better academically and personally, feelings of having more opportunities to choose from in life and looking forward to the future with a positive attitude. Participants also mentioned looking forward to graduating High School and moving on to college, aspiring to focus on chosen career paths, and becoming business owners/entrepreneurs. The year two student focus group responses were coded in a thematic structure that reflects common responses throughout the sessions. These themes were coded into 10 different areas listed in **Figure 10**.

Year 3 Data

In year 3, student focus groups were conducted at the West Fresno Family Resource Center in late March 2021 (N= 10). Some emergent themes that reoccurred repeatedly were that some participants did not respect others but now have gained a sense of respect for others and

themselves. Also, students felt alone and felt like they didn't have any friends before joining Sweet Potato, they felt like they didn't have the support or were not connected to their community prior to the SP Project. Many of the students mentioned that they are excited about their future and moving forward from the COVID-19 pandemic, and they are optimistic about the future. Refer to **Figure 7**. for more information on the four thematic codes researchers identified in the year 3 student focus group.

Staff and board member interviews were also conducted in early April 2021 (N= 4) via Zoom. During the year 3 staff and board members interviews, there were various themes identified throughout the interviews. Some themes included a sense of community communication and support for the Sweet Potato students and their parents, discussions on how student participants can become successful by thinking outside of the box and never giving up and understanding what is important and how to address challenges that they may face in their lives. In addition to having a positive environment for students to interact with their peers so they aren't influenced by their negative surroundings, and students recognize higher education now that they have gone through the program and have goals to not only graduate high school but to continue higher education. After grouping the responses researchers coded responses in 6 different areas as shown in **Figure 9**.

Fig 7. Student Spoken word and Focus Group Themes Table

Themes	Year 1: Spoken Word	Year 2: student Focus Group	Year 3: student Focus Group
Community	4	10	9
Connectedness/ belonging	4		10
Self-Efficacy/ Self-esteem	5	8	
Goals	6		
Mentorship		7	
Leadership		1	

Hope for the Future		9	8
Higher Education		2	
Entrepreneurship		6	
Team Building		3	
Communication		2	
Respect		4	2

Community

Historically, Southwest Fresno was not seen as a relatively safe space for the residents and students. However, Sweet Potato students who reside in Southwest Fresno, or attend middle school or High School in the 93706 districts, know the dangers in their community. When participating in the spoken word raps in year one, Sweet Potato students discussed the dangers, gang activity, and risks in their neighborhoods:

“Every 3 seconds someone dies to a gang. While many struggle to prepare food for the next day.”

“In my community all you hear is fussing, Gang gang all they hear is bussing, If you make it out consider yourself lucky.”

-Student in spoken word raps discussing community

While participating in the program, Sweet Potato Project students also explored their community's resilience and support. Throughout the three years of the implementation of the Sweet Potato Project students have also engaged with their community on principles grounded in family, community, love, and unity.

Based on year 1 spoken word exercises, the program helped students identify their community and neighborhood support. In year two focus groups, participants voiced how they enjoy the program bringing people together and how *“it makes a bond with people (our community).”* The students see people differently in their community as they are more involved and regularly meet people in their community. Students expressed how they can give back to the community and get back from their community.

As students began to believe in themselves and felt that they could produce change through leadership and entrepreneurship, they found peer-to-peer solidarity. The students felt a sense of connectedness and belonging to a group with similar goals and values. It was essential to the students because of team capacity building; they felt a sense of connectedness and could remain goal-oriented. Over the years, the students have discussed the value of working with members, and because of their peer’s similar goals, they developed friendships. The students advocated for one another and developed a sense of love, family, and unity.

“I’ve risen my community full...of..love..and Family, Unity...Having fun and working hard, Full...of..love..and Family, Unity”

-Student in spoken word raps discussing community

During the year one stakeholder focus group, the respondents unanimously agreed that parents, neighbors, and the community supported their students with their agricultural business. The community members had also witnessed their growth and felt this program would inspire them to pursue their goals and dreams. Like the year 2 parent focus groups, stakeholders were able to visibly see the progressed growth of the student and the happiness of the student. The stakeholder focus group mentioned that the community members could participate and celebrate the student’s innovation and entrepreneurship and became a strong pillar of support for their student.

“Sweet Potato Project shows there is a lot of community support and students are getting confident in themselves and the school district has support.”

-Stakeholder discussing the community support for Sweet Potato student

While being interviewed for the year 3 staff and board member's interview, the Executive Director mentioned that the Sweet Potato Project has significantly impacted the Southwest Fresno community from a systemic point of view. During the interview, staff had stated that the program has given the students *"a place of well-being, a place where they feel comfortable."* Throughout the project, the Program Manager has seen the students take pride in the Sweet Potato Project, giving the students ownership and pride in their community. The project has also given parents a sense of community communication with their children within the Southwest Fresno community. parents believed the center provided community solidarity as one parent stated in year two focus group, *"It's good that a lot of people come together and try to show the kids more."*

Self-Efficacy

Students also have powerful stories of perseverance and have exhibited growth throughout their journey with the Sweet Potato Project. During the year 2 focus group, the students reflect on their growth due to participating in the project. They discussed their intelligence, goals, steps to become successful, and most importantly, their character development. Before joining the Sweet Potato Project, the students were reserved, but they now have increased confidence and self-esteem. Students are actively engaging in conversations and identifying themselves as leaders in their communities and neighborhoods. Student participants also have peer support and solidarity with one another. It is shown when they discuss their futures in the spoken word raps. In the year 3 student focus group, the students expressed that they had low self-confidence before joining the program. Students have made new friends throughout the project, contributed to group/community projects, and presented their works to the public. The Sweet Potato Project has helped students grow their self-confidence and instilled a higher level of respect for themselves and others in their community.

"My self-confidence and respect changed because it boosted my confidence a lot. In a group project and I have to present something, I have the confidence to present well."

-Student in a focus group discussing increased self-confidence

Through their community involvement and developmental growth, while participating in the Sweet Potato Project, students believe they can excel in future entrepreneurship endeavors and can attend

higher learning institutions. The social persuasion and lived experiences from their respective leaders have allowed students to analyze their past experiences and community. Innovation and entrepreneurship skills have helped them identify how they see their respective futures. They have had the opportunity to engage in high-risk behaviors but refrained from the negative behaviors while participating in the Sweet Potato Project. The students mentioned in the year 2 focus group, that similar African American representation from the motivational speakers at the summer enrichment program increased their self-esteem and belief in themselves. African American representation and increased soft skills have enabled students to have hope for their future. Their voices demonstrated how they are happy with their life achievements and stay away from gang activities. The powerful lyrics developed in year 1 also indicates how they want to stay far away from drugs and continue their long-term goals. In addition, students expressed how they wanted to excel in academics. The Sweet Potato Project is a significant component to support the students as they heal from traumas living in Southwest Fresno and being able to approach the challenges and goals in their lives. Staff, Community members, and parents involved in the Sweet Potato Project have help students of Southwest Fresno become resilient to the negative behaviors and environment around their community.

"I got goals to accomplish, But people wanna stop it, I gotta stay focused yeah I gotta stay locked in, Can't let these haters get to me, Gotta let these haters see, That there ain't no fear in me, Yeah that there ain't no fear in me."

-Student in spoken word raps discussing their self-esteem

Parents have also acknowledged in the year 2 parent focus group how the Sweet Potato Project has helped students become more vocal and outspoken. The Sweet Potato Project has also instilled confidence in the student. The students not only believe they can reach their dreams, but they also believe in their peers as they support one another through the Sweet Potato Project. During the year three staff and board member focus group, the Project Manager mentioned that the Sweet Potato Project community has *"given students hope that they will become someone and that they are headed in the right direction."*

“He did not want to go. He didn’t feel like he fit in but after continuing to come he wanted to come. He was shy, the program helped with that.”

-Parent discussing Son’s character development

In year 1, stakeholders mentioned that some students had encountered some difficulties from home or in their community. They knew the summer enrichment program was a safe space, and the student had a sense of purpose. Stakeholders witnessed more team capacity building between their peers and saw the happiness radiate from their faces. In turn, they knew this program was inspirational and a guide to their foundation of progressed growth. At the beginning of the program, stakeholders mentioned how students were quiet, reserved, and more confident with public speaking throughout the program. Stakeholders unanimously agreed that students had hope for their future. Stakeholders mentioned that their willingness to learn new soft skills and the African American representation helped the student and their overall development.

“Developed collaboration, the student became outspoken. I saw development and they worked in teams. Parents saw how well they interacted and were happy to see how far their kids had come. Especially with shark tank, this showed how outspoken and capable they were. I got emotional because all of the students had grown. They had personal growth.”

-Stakeholder discussing the growth of the Sweet Potato student

Fig 8. Stakeholder Word Cloud



Mentorship

The mentorship provided throughout the Sweet Potato Project has given the students a new perspective on how they view their community and help better themselves and those around their neighborhood. In the year 3 staff and board member interviews, described how throughout the Sweet Potato Project implementation, staff have seen a change in how the participants usually spoke about their future. *"Kids had goals just graduated high school, but now kids recognize higher education. They think outside the box, not to be a product of their environment, but be an example. Using the Sweet Potato Project as an example to become role models for others and their siblings."*

In the year 2 students focus group, Sweet Potato Project students talked about the importance of their mentors. They discussed the importance of Patrick (SPP Program Manager), Andre (SPP Program Assistant), and Rick (WFFRC Case Manager). Students discussed how Patrick encouraged and motivated them to improve their grades. It is important to note that African American leadership and mentorship has helped with the student's academic success. In turn, the student felt the inspiration and motivation to do well in school. Some students had difficulty keeping up with their academics; they were on the verge of failing their classes. However, with the help of the program manager, the students were able to pick up their grades. The Sweet Potato Project has helped motivate the students to go further in school and has taught them never to give up. Student responses reflect an increased interest in higher education, hope for the future, increased self-esteem, and entrepreneurship. Before participating in the Sweet Potato Project, the students believed they had fewer opportunities and choices to help with life circumstances. Over the course of the Sweet Potato Project, staff have seen a dramatic change in how the students speak about their future. Taking trips to various universities has helped broaden students' views of the many possibilities that are open to them in life. Parents also believe the West Fresno Family Resource Center *"provides a safe place, provides guidance,"* and *"If things are going bad at home, children can come to the center to get help and get peace of mind."* Parents mentioned in year 2 parent focus group that they believe the program offers children hope for higher education, career guidance, and professional experiences. The student's perspective on the future has changed tremendously since joining the program. They now have changed valuable skills and are more knowledgeable of different careers and higher education opportunities.

"I didn't think I was going to pass 8th grade. I was getting bad grades kind of, but more so I was giving up. After participating, I try at least. I try."

-Student participant explains their academic growth

The Executive Director expressed that *"the biggest successful component is having people like Andre and Patrick serve as role models and mentors..."*you know when they are faced with a situation at school or whatever the situation may be that they know they can call Patrick. They know he's going to answer that call and help them, and I think that is huge for these kids." In addition, through the help of Patrick and Andre, parents can identify different approaches to address issues or situations with their children. Parents have gained an understanding of their children and their capabilities in their community. Parents also expressed how the program provided guidance and stated how impactful the program was, especially for children who lack mentorship opportunities and direction. Parents also see a genuine interest in their child or children while in the program.

"When the kids are dealing with Patrick, he is a mentor. He is a father figure for those who do not have a father figure. Patrick is a positive role model in their life."

-A parent expressing the positive effect of role modeling for student

Stakeholders mentioned the importance of African American representation and role models among the students. African American leadership, mentorship, and representation, such as the project manager, case manager, and project assistant, add great leadership to the Sweet Potato Project. In the parent focus group, parents vocalized how these African American men have positively influenced their children's lives. Their presence and mentorship to the student have enabled their student to become active in their communication. As a result of their mentorship, they believe their children have improved communication skills and are more outspoken in various settings. In addition, these men are knowledgeable of the community that they currently serve. These African American men grew up in Fresno, have lived experiences, and have knowledge of Fresno and the Southwest Fresno community. Their leadership and mentorship role allowed the students to explore, diversify and expand their understanding of themselves and their community. The pillar of support created a foundation of African American excellence, and with community support, Sweet Potato Project students have actively engaged with their elders and community collectively.

Fig 9. Staff and Board Members Interview Word Cloud

Entrepreneurship

The student expressed how the Sweet Potato Project has helped increase their communication, leadership, and business skills. The different work and projects introduced to the student have improved their team-building skills, which brought them closer together. Because the students were constantly involved with one another throughout the weeks, their respect and self-respect have significantly grown. Since joining the program, students have had the opportunity to increase their business and entrepreneurship skills. Students increased their skills through their involvement in planting, harvesting, marketing, and selling sweet potatoes.

“student felt like they had fewer opportunities and choices to choose from. Many of the student didn’t care about or care to think about the future.”

-Patrick Hamilton, the Project manager, explains the student’s lack of hope for the future prior to the Sweet Potato Project

In addition, the student benefited from engaging with mentors throughout the six-week summer enrichment program at the Fresno State Lyles School of Business. The students expressed how they learned about business and entrepreneurship principles from Fresno State instructors. When the student participated in the summer enrichment program, the project teams held themselves accountable for their team projects. Each group had its team leaders, and the stakeholders noted

that strong leadership was exhibited by the student. In addition to the strong leadership presented, stakeholders mentioned the importance of students being exposed to community leaders, such as Patrick. The summer enrichment program helped the students learn how to market their sweet potatoes, and were able to demonstrate their knowledge during the end of the program shark tank presentation. This presentation showcased the students' innovation, business, and marketing strategies. The stakeholders mentioned how the participant's innovation created the student's participatory efforts.

Parents have acknowledged how the program has brought together students in the community and emphasizes teamwork, which enhances their abilities to work well with others and build a great work ethic at a young age. The Sweet Potato Project has also helped students become more vocal and outspoken. The students can interact with and learn from community members about entrepreneurship and leadership. Overall, the program established a community for students in the Southwest area of Fresno. The students have begun to identify with the Sweet Potato Project, *"they feel like they are a part of something."*

Parents also expressed how African American culture was demonstrated throughout the program as the program's significant components focused on farming. For example, harvesting sweet potatoes was a cultural aspect among the African American community because of the importance of cooking with sweet potatoes during the holidays. The project allowed African American farmers to talk with the student about the planting and harvesting of potatoes. This experience has also allowed youth without an agricultural background to learn more about culture and where it started. While the parents explained how the program has increased cultural awareness, they also added how it brings unity to the community and inspires kids, giving their children hope for the future. Other findings from the focus groups can be seen in Appendix B.

"Kids come from an agricultural Background so they are learning about their culture and where they started."

-Parent expressing the programs cultural significance

Fig 10. Parent Focus Group Word Cloud



COVID-19 Impact

Based on the qualitative data from students, parents, stakeholders, and Southwest Fresno Family Resource Center staff, it is evident that the Sweet Potato Project has been successful in self-efficacy for African American students. In addition to self-efficacy, the community has been a strong pillar of support for students overall. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted BIPOC communities, and for the Sweet Potato Project, many participants had to lean on their families for support. In the final focus group, students also said they developed an increased connectedness during the pandemic through the Sweet Potato Project. They have developed more friendships within their cohort and connected with Patrick. During the pandemic, the increased belongingness and connectedness have created a stronger kinship to their families and friends of the Sweet Potato Project. Based on the responses, the student did have a strong sense of connectedness, but they were also affected by adverse mental health outcomes. The COVID-19 lockdowns and mandatory stay-at-home orders also caused emotional and mental disruption. Students expressed the pandemic as “chaos” and “tragic.” Others indicated that the pandemic caused PTSD, and student participants were tired. Even students experienced high levels of stress because their household contained essential workers. Students were stressed and concerned about the well-being of their parents, siblings, and community members. It explains why the Sweet Potato Project student had strengthened connections and relationships with their peers. The social support has provided hope for their future. When asked to describe in one word how 2021 would look like for them, many envisioned a more positive outcome. Students stated they were excited and surprised for 2021 and beyond.

"SPP takes my mind off and out of it. It lets me take my mind off of things for a little bit."

-Student participant explained how the Sweet Potato Project gave student participants a chance to connect with others and take their minds off the pandemic.

Staff interviews showed that the pandemic created barriers to the Sweet Potato Project. For example, Patrick mentioned that virtual classroom barriers existed when staff and students learned to use zoom. In particular, when students had difficulty sharing their screen or learning through Zoom tutorials. In addition, Andre stated students could not participate in planting sweet potatoes, and it was difficult because of social distancing due to public health mandates. The effects of COVID-19 impacted the students. They felt isolated from friends, family, and their community. The student would constantly ask the Program Manager when they could return to the program in person. When the Fresno County health mandated orders were lifted, student participants were happy to be again in the community. However, during isolation, students began to lose motivation. As a result, student participation was inconsistent throughout the pandemic.

"Due to covid kids, they could not go out planting and upkeep. Local contractors had to help and volunteered time and workers. Some were paid, some volunteers. Social distance and spread the entire field with harvest day. Challenge of social distance and no contact due to lockdown."

-Andre, the program assistant discussing the challenges and barriers to the program due to COVID-19

Although the Sweet Potato Project had challenges and barriers, the staff indicated a strong sense of community support, resilience, and strengthened connectedness. As a result, students and staff have increased resiliency and adapted to the challenges of the pandemic. The West Fresno Family Resource Center staff continue to have hope for the program and the student for their future.

Discussion

The active involvement of students in agricultural training, leadership, and entrepreneurship has served as a positive impact on the mental health of African American students in West Fresno. Through community-based participatory research, researchers found a significant connection between the Sweet Potato Project and the improvement of mental health outcomes among middle school-aged African American students. The combination of cultural significance, mentorship, and local community support contributed to the positive outcomes among student participants.

While the quantitative findings showed no statistically significant difference between the Sweet Potato Project participants and the comparison group, the timing of the pre and post-survey did show statistically significant reduction in the racial profiling and increasing their hope for the future. These findings point to the intervention having a positive change in how students were experiencing the world and how they saw themselves beyond their current circumstances. While more analysis of the data is needed, these early findings of the longitudinal analysis point to the Sweet Potato Project being a good investment for the youth who participate.

Qualitative findings in this project were similar to the findings found in Means (2019), where they discussed that participants' social support nets have contributed to positive mental health outcomes. Parents, staff, and stakeholders witnessed first-hand the impact the program had on students. The Sweet Potato Project participants had the opportunity to learn from local community members and mentors who had come from a similar background (i.e., Race, cultural experiences, community). Qualitative findings also show that local community members witnessed the students grow and contributed efforts to continued support for the students. Through mentorship, the interviews from staff showed how students have found hope for their future and stated that the students had the confidence to succeed in life. The evidence from these focus groups coincides with increased hope and aspirations for their futures (Means, 2019).

Farming in West Fresno has created positive self-efficacy and positive growth among the African American students, similar to the findings provided by Allen (2008). Although the stressors and risk factors associated with West Fresno are still present, the students developed a large community support interconnectedness. Although religiosity was not intentionally measured in the evaluation, the program had community-wide support. The community safety net developed from the Sweet Potato program was evident in the qualitative findings, and it empowered students. The community

showed support for the students, and students demonstrated increased leadership. These are similar to the positive outcomes associated to the student's growth, similar to Murray with increased growth, and social support (2018).

Students in the project have gained knowledge, a sense of hope for their future, and gained leadership and resiliency skills. The Sweet Potato Project students have shown growth in self-efficacy, academic success, and the desire to engage in their communities. It is important to note that mentors from within their own community also supported students, and the findings of the evaluation were similar to other findings that show that strong natural mentorship can yield the best success (Wittrup et al. 2019). These mentorships have also helped students desire an interest in their communities. In the qualitative findings, parents and community members indicated that they saw their students as leaders in their community. In addition to positive growth, the findings also suggest that the students have transmitted hope in their communities. The community also noted that they see these African American students as leaders in the agricultural business industry. The Sweet Potato Project has instilled in the students that *"they do not have to be a product of their environment."*

Implications for Future Research

Limitations

The retention rate of the Sweet Potato Project had decreased from baseline, partly due to Sweet Potato Project students that transitioned from the West Fresno location, and moved to other zip codes. Once they moved from the geographic location, they were unable to attend in-person meetings and events, due to lack of access to reliable transportation. In addition to geographic locations, some of the students were a part of extracurricular activities within their school districts. When the COVID-19 pandemic commenced, students were also affected by the digital divide. Parents and families had technological infrastructural barriers when it came to Wi-Fi connection. So, the students were unable to access the internet, and because of this digital divide, the retention rate decreased.

The COVID-19 Pandemic increased isolation and segregation for numerous students. Students were unable to participate with in-person events and were unable to meet with their friends because of the mandatory stay-at-home orders issued by the nationwide public health mandates and lockdown. It was difficult for Patrick and other staff from West Fresno Family Resource Center to keep track of

the students. Although families were able to spend more quality time at homes, the students were affected by the safety support net regularly provided at the WFFRC.

It is important to emphasize that while we did do a quantitative analysis using a comparison group, a lack of comparison group findings in all of the domains we measured should not be interpreted as sufficient evidence that the program does not have an impact on those domains like gangs, substance use, and efficacy. The timing of the data collection from year to year and lack of adequate sample size for the comparison group in year 3 made it difficult to have a full assessment of the comparison group versus the Sweet Potato Program intervention. Furthermore, focus on qualitative data as the focus of the evaluation for the Sweet Potato Project because that was consistently collected throughout the years, providing a better picture of the experiences the students had in the program.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Sweet Potato Project helped students build their own community and give the students somewhere positive to go and build a family relationship with their peers and project staff. They see themselves being college students, business owners, and having a future. In the program, they have hope and use their creativity and imagination to create a future for themselves that are beyond anything that their experiences have given them before. Former Sweet Potato Project students are now among the first in their families who have graduated high school, attending college, and regularly put project staff as references when applying for jobs. They also have a deep desire to continue to give back to their community, with many of them asking to come back to the program as speakers to the new generation of students. Former students are attending universities like Fresno State, Howard University studying Performing Arts and Spanish, and University of Oregon studying Social Work.

The quantitative findings indicate that hope for the future increased among youth when participants completed the program. In addition, the more survey measures related to race and oppression can be explored further. Although there was research around farming, there needs to be more research centered around African American students and the historical significance of farming. Evaluators believe that more Afrocentric agricultural pipeline programs and African American economic internship programs should be developed in Fresno for African American students.

While the Sweet Potato Project has been in place for five years, more funding should be given to community-based organizations to help foster further development in African American students in Fresno County. Further funding could help establish Sweet Potato Projects in school districts.

The Sweet Potato Project had a decreased retention rate over time, which may point to the need to find a way to keep them connected to the program year-round. In addition to summer program internships, increased funding can help provide more incentives to African American students who desire to participate in the Sweet Potato Project. The curriculum is also evolving and since many of the current components are part of the State of California's Educational Pathways including the agricultural, culinary, and business pathways, the Sweet Potato Project curriculum should be a way which students can earn school credits. This would allow students to get more school credits and in turn help increase graduation rates among African American students. In addition, students have expressed the need for more mental health support at schools. This includes not only the availability of counselors, but also counselors that look like them and that understand their everyday experiences.

In the end, program staff shares anecdotes that past participants now attend the same high school and not only are friends with one another, but all see each other as forever part of the Sweet Potato Club. According to stakeholders, parents and staff interviewed, this project has created lasting bonds in and out of the program and created a positive effect in the West Fresno community.



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Appendix A: Methods and Materials

Local Evaluation Survey

We addressed the survey attempting to ask three research questions. The first research question is "what are social and mental health risk characteristics of Sweet Potato participants and controls?" To answer this question, we collected survey questions on the following mental health risk and resilience domains:

- Substance use
- Gang Involvement
- College Intentions
- School Participation
- Collective efficacy (neighborhood questions)
- Hopefulness

The method also included having a comparison group, these same questions were asked pre-test and post-test for both the sweet potato project participants and the comparison. In addition, the participants that are in the club for more than one year are also being tracked and analyzed for significant differences of those participants in the analysis. For the questions, we used tested measures from other sources. See below:

- 1) Substance use. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)
- 2) College intentions. Jackson et al National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement
- 3) Gang participation/school performance. National Gang Center: A Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem
- 4) Hope, purpose, contribution to the neighborhood, collective efficacy. Stoddard and Peirce (2015)
- 5) Neighborhood cohesion. Hurd Stoddard and Zimmerman (2013)
- 6) Family Affluence Scale (FAS) III

Statewide Evaluation Survey Cultural Connection Scale

Culture means many different things to different people but it is something that is usually shared by a relatively large group of people. For some, it refers to customs and traditions. For others, it brings to mind their heritage and way of life. It can refer to beliefs, values and attitudes, your identity, and common history, and membership in a group. These questions were assigned to measure how connected the participants are to their culture. For example, participants were asked how their culture gives them strength. We assigned a score of 1 to responses where they strongly disagreed with a statement about cultural connection. A score of 5 to the statements where they strongly agreed. The scale was a 5 point scale. Based on the data, 4 was the lowest possible score and 20 would yield the highest score.

Isolation Scale

Isolation can entail social isolation and feel disconnected from your social support or culture. These questions were assigned to measure the perceived isolation from school, or marginalized from society. For example, participants were asked if they were marginalized or excluded from society. We assigned a score of 1 to responses where they felt it none of the time. A score of 5 was assigned to the statements where they felt it all the time. The scale was a 5 point scale. Based on the data, 4 was the lowest possible score and 20 would yield the highest score.

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress was measured on a 5 point scale. Participants were asked if they ever felt they were nervous, hopeless, and felt if they were so depressed, nothing could cheer up the participants. We assigned a score of 1 to responses where they felt it none of the time. A score of 5

was assigned to the statements where they felt it all the time. Based on the data, the lowest possible score was 6 and the highest possible score was 30.

Psychological Functioning

Psychological functioning was a 3 point scale. Participants were asked questions about how fears and worries may interfere with their daily lives. We assigned a score of 1 to responses where they felt it none of the time. A score of 3 was assigned to the statements where they felt it all the time. Based on the data, the lowest possible score was 3 and the highest possible will yield 12.

Sweet Potato Pre-Survey

Start of Block: Demographics

Study ID

Q268 Did you participate in Sweet Potato last year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q269 If so, how many years have you been a part of the program?

Q1 How old are you?

- 10 years old or younger (1)
- 11 years old (2)
- 12 years old (3)
- 13 years old (4)
- 14 years old (5)
- 15 years old (6)
- 16 years old or older (7)

Q2 What is your sex?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (4) _____

Q3 In what grade are you?

- 6th grade (1)
- 7th grade (2)
- 8th grade (3)
- Ungraded or other grade (4)

Q4 What is your race and ethnic origin?

Select only one race category and specify your ethnic origin?

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Black or African American: Please specify you ethnic origin(s) (2)

- Latino, Hispanic, or Spanish: Please specify your ethnic origin(s): (3)

- Asian: Please specify your ethnic origin(s) (4)

- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: Please specify your ethnic origin(s) (5)

- White: Please specify your ethnic origin(s) (6)

- Other Race: Please specify your race and ethnic origin(s) (7)

- Multi-Racial: Please specify your origin(s) (8)

- Refused (9)
- Don't Know (10)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2017)

The next four questions ask about cigarette smoking.

Q5 Have you ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID222 If Have you ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs = No

Q6 How old were you when you first tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs?

- 8 years old or younger (1)
- 9 years old (2)
- 10 years old (3)
- 11 years old (4)
- 12 years old (5)
- 13 years old or older (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q7 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?

- 1 or 2 days (1)
- 3 to 5 days (2)
- 6 to 9 days (3)
- 10 to 19 days (4)
- 20 to 29 days (5)
- All 30 days (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q8 During the past 30 days, on the days you smoked, how many cigarettes did you smoke per day?

- less than 1 cigarette per day (1)
- 1 cigarette per day (2)
- 2 to 5 cigarettes per day (3)
- 6 to 10 cigarettes per day (4)
- 11 to 20 cigarettes per day (5)
- More than 20 cigarettes per day (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about electronic vapor products, such as blu, NJOY, Vuse, MarkTen, Logic Vapin Plus, eGo, and Halo. Electronic vapor products include e-cigarettes, e-cigars, e-pipes, vape pipes, vaping pens, e-hookahs, and hookah pens.

Q9 Have you ever used an electronic vapor product?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID223 If Have you ever used an electronic vapor product? = No

Q10 During the past 30 days , on how many days did you use an electronic vapor product?

- 1 or 2 days (1)
- 3 to 5 days (2)
- 6 to 9 days (3)
- 10 to 19 days (4)
- 20 to 29 days (5)
- All 30 days (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about other tobacco products.

Q11 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or dissolvable tobacco products, such as Redman, Levi Garrett, Beechnut, skoal, Skoal Bandits, Copenhagen, Camel Snus, Marlboro Snus, General Snus, Ariva, Stonewall, or Camel Orbs? (Do not count any electronic vapor products.)

- 0 days (1)
- 1 or 2 days (2)
- 3 to 5 days (3)
- 6 to 9 days (4)

- 10 to 19 days (5)
- 20 to 29 days (6)
- All 30 days (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Skip To: QID224 If During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or dissolvable... = 0 days

Q12 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars?

- 0 days (1)
- 1 or 2 days (2)
- 3 to 5 days (3)
- 6 to 9 days (4)
- 10 to 19 days (5)
- 20 to 29 days (6)
- All 30 days (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about drinking alcohol. This includes drinking beer, wine, wine coolers, and liquor such as rum, gin, vodka, or whiskey. For these questions, drinking alcohol does not include drinking a few sips of wine for religious purposes.

Q13 Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID225 If Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips? = No

Q14 Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips?

- 8 years old or younger (1)
- 9 years old (2)
- 10 years old (3)
- 11 years old (4)
- 12 years old (5)
- 13 years old or older (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about marijuana use. Marijuana is also called grass, pot or weed.

Q15 Have you ever used marijuana

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID226 If Have you ever used marijuana = No

Q16 How old were you when you tried marijuana for the first time?

- 8 years old or younger (1)
- 9 years old (2)
- 10 years old (3)
- 11 years old (4)
- 12 years old (5)
- 13 years old or older (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 4 questions ask about other drugs.

Q17 Have you ever used any form of cocaine, including powder, crack, or freebase?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q18 Have you ever sniffed glue, breathed the contents of spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q19 Have you ever taken steroid pills or shot without a doctor's prescription?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q20 Have you ever taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told you to use it? (Count drugs such as codeine, Vicodin, Oxycontin, Hydrocodone, and Percocet.)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

End of Block: Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2017)

Start of Block: Racial Profiling Steward 2009

The next two questions involve you or your family's interaction with the police. We are interested in your experiences with racism. As you answer the questions below, please think of instances in your life in which you experienced racism, whether it was once, twice or several times.

Q27 Have you ever been stopped by police? Did you feel this was unfair?

- Never (7)
- Once (1)
- Two times (2)
- Three or more times (3)
- Don't know (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)
- Other (6) _____

Q28 Have your parents or other family members ever been stopped by police? Did you feel this was unfair?

- Never (7)
- Once (1)
- Two times (2)
- Three or more times (3)
- Don't know (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)
- Other (6) _____

Start of Block: OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model (2009)

The next section asks about your experiences with gangs. (A "crew" or "posse" is considered a gang.) If you have NEVER been in a gang, please skip to the next section.

Q21 Have you ever belonged to a gang?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q25 If Have you ever belonged to a gang? = No

Q22 If you have ever belonged to a gang, did that gang have a name?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q23 Are you a gang member now?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q24 How many members are there in your gang?

- 1 to 5 (1)
- 6 to 10 (2)
- 11 to 20 (3)

Sold illegal drugs? (3)	<input type="radio"/>									
Stolen or tried to steal a motor vehicle such as a car or motorcycle? (4)	<input type="radio"/>									
Been arrested? (5)	<input type="radio"/>									
Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them? (6)	<input type="radio"/>									
Been drunk or high at school? (7)	<input type="radio"/>									
Taken a handgun to school? (8)	<input type="radio"/>									

Start of Block: National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement (2004)

Please tell me how far would you like to go in school? Would you say: less than high school graduation; graduate from high school but not any further; vocational, trade or business school after high school; junior college or part of a four year college program; graduate from a four year college; higher level of school after graduating from college; or some other type of education?

Q29 How far would you like to go in school?

- Not Graduate High School (1)
- High School Graduation (2)
- Technical, trade Or Vocational School (Above High School Level) (3)
- Community College (4)
- University Degree (5)
- Graduate/Professional Degree (6)
- Other (specify): (7) _____

As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get? Would you say you: won't finish high school; will graduate from high school but won't go any further; go to vocational, trade or business school after high school; will attend junior college or part of a four year college program; will graduate from a four year college; will attend a higher level of school after graduation from college; or some other type of education?

Q30 As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?

- Not Graduate High School (1)
- High School Graduation (2)
- Technical, trade Or Vocational School (Above High School Level) (3)
- Community College (4)

- university Degree (5)
- Graduate/Professional Degree (6)
- Other (specify): (7) _____

End of Block: National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement (2004)

Start of Block: Promoting Positive Future Expectations during Adolescence (2015)

The following questions are about how you feel. And how things have been with you mostly. For each question please select the one answer that comes closest to the way you have been feeling. Select the answer which you most agree with.

Q49 I will handle the problems that might come up in my life.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q50 I will handle my school work.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)

- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q51 I will have a happy life.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q52 I will have interesting things to do in my life.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q53 I energetically pursue my goals.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q54 My past experiences have prepared me for my future.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q55 I've been pretty successful in life so far.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)

- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q56 I meet the goals I set for myself.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q57 I have a purpose in my life that says a lot about who I am.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q58 I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q59 I have a purpose in my life that reflects who I am.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q60 I want to make a difference in the world.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)

- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q61 I currently contribute to my community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q62 It is important for me to contribute to my community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q63 People in my neighborhood are willing to help their neighbors.

- Strongly agree (1)

- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q64 I live in a neighborhood where people know and like each other.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q65 There are adults in my neighborhood that I can look up to.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

End of Block: Promoting Positive Future Expectations during Adolescence (2015)

Start of Block: Neighborhoods, Social Support, and African American Mental Health Outcomes(2013)

Q66 *The next set of questions will ask about your neighborhood, the social support you receive from your community or neighborhood and some of the issues you may deal with in your community, school or family life. Select the answer that best fits with you.*

Q67 The friendships I have with other people in my neighborhood mean a lot to me.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q68 If I needed advice about something, I could go to someone in my neighborhood.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)

- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't Know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q69 I believe my neighbors would help me in an emergency.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

End of Block: Neighborhoods, Social Support, and African American Mental Health Outcomes(2013)

Start of Block: Ladder

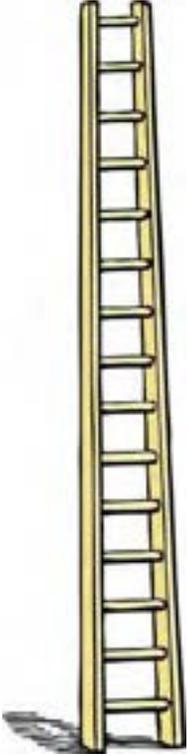
Q70

A ladder has many steps to get to the top of the ladder. If your family is on the first step, it means your family is just starting out and struggling financially. Each of the step of the ladder represents where your family may be.

At the top of the ladder are the people who do not financially struggle. They have the most money, the highest amount of schooling and good jobs.

At the bottom of the ladder are the people who are financially struggling. They have little education, no job or jobs that make little money.

Please tell us where you think your family would be on this ladder by clicking on the place in the ladder on the screen (you should see a dot where you clicked).



End of Block: Ladder

Sweet Potato Post-Survey

Start of Block: Demographics

Study ID

Q268 Did you participate in Sweet Potato last year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q269 If so, how many years have you been a part of the program?

Q1 How old are you?

- 10 years old or younger (1)
- 11 years old (2)
- 12 years old (3)
- 13 years old (4)
- 14 years old (5)
- 15 years old (6)
- 16 years old or older (7)

Q2 What is your sex?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (4) _____

Q3 In what grade are you?

- 6th grade (1)
- 7th grade (2)
- 8th grade (3)
- Ungraded or other grade (4)

Q4 What is your race and ethnic origin?

Select only one race category and specify your ethnic origin?

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Black or African American: Please specify you ethnic origin(s) (2)

- Latino, Hispanic, or Spanish: Please specify your ethnic origin(s): (3)

- Asian: Please specify your ethnic origin(s) (4)

- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: Please specify your ethnic origin(s) (5)

- White: Please specify your ethnic origin(s) (6)

- Other Race: Please specify your race and ethnic origin(s) (7)

- Multi-Racial: Please specify your origin(s) (8)

- Refused (9)
- Don't Know (10)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2017)

The next four questions ask about cigarette smoking.

Q5 Have you ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID222 If Have you ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs = No

Q6 How old were you when you first tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs?

- 8 years old or younger (1)
- 9 years old (2)
- 10 years old (3)
- 11 years old (4)
- 12 years old (5)
- 13 years old or older (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q7 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?

- 1 or 2 days (1)
- 3 to 5 days (2)
- 6 to 9 days (3)
- 10 to 19 days (4)
- 20 to 29 days (5)
- All 30 days (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q8 During the past 30 days, on the days you smoked, how many cigarettes did you smoke per day?

- less than 1 cigarette per day (1)
- 1 cigarette per day (2)
- 2 to 5 cigarettes per day (3)
- 6 to 10 cigarettes per day (4)
- 11 to 20 cigarettes per day (5)
- More than 20 cigarettes per day (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about electronic vapor products, such as blu, NJOY, Vuse, MarkTen, Logic Vapin Plus, eGo, and Halo. Electronic vapor products include e-cigarettes, e-cigars, e-pipes, vape pipes, vaping pens, e-hookahs, and hookah pens.

Q9 Have you ever used an electronic vapor product?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID223 If Have you ever used an electronic vapor product? = No

Q10 During the past 30 days , on how many days did you use an electronic vapor product?

- 1 or 2 days (1)
- 3 to 5 days (2)
- 6 to 9 days (3)
- 10 to 19 days (4)
- 20 to 29 days (5)
- All 30 days (6)
- Don't know (7)

- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about other tobacco products.

Q11 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or dissolvable tobacco products, such as Redman, Levi Garrett, Beechnut, skoal, Skoal Bandits, Copenhagen, Camel Snus, Marlboro Snus, General Snus, Ariva, Stonewall, or Camel Orbs? (Do not count any electronic vapor products.)

- 0 days (1)
- 1 or 2 days (2)
- 3 to 5 days (3)
- 6 to 9 days (4)
- 10 to 19 days (5)
- 20 to 29 days (6)
- All 30 days (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Skip To: QID224 If During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or dissolvable... = 0 days

Q12 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars?

- 0 days (1)
- 1 or 2 days (2)
- 3 to 5 days (3)
- 6 to 9 days (4)
- 10 to 19 days (5)
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- All 30 days (7)
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The next 2 questions ask about drinking alcohol. This includes drinking beer, wine, wine coolers, and liquor such as rum, gin, vodka, or whiskey. For these questions, drinking alcohol does not include drinking a few sips of wine for religious purposes.

Q13 Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID225 If Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips? = No

Q14 Have you ever had a drink of alcohol, other than a few sips?

- 8 years old or younger (1)
- 9 years old (2)
- 10 years old (3)
- 11 years old (4)
- 12 years old (5)
- 13 years old or older (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 2 questions ask about marijuana use. Marijuana is also called grass, pot or weed.

Q15 Have you ever used marijuana

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: QID226 If Have you ever used marijuana = No

Q16 How old were you when you tried marijuana for the first time?

- 8 years old or younger (1)
- 9 years old (2)
- 10 years old (3)
- 11 years old (4)
- 12 years old (5)
- 13 years old or older (6)
- Don't know (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

The next 4 questions ask about other drugs.

Q17 Have you ever used any form of cocaine, including powder, crack, or freebase?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
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Q18 Have you ever sniffed glue, breathed the contents of spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q19 Have you ever taken steroid pills or shot without a doctor's prescription?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q20 Have you ever taken prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told you to use it? (Count drugs such as codeine, Vicodin, Oxycontin, Hydrocodone, and Percocet.)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

End of Block: Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2017)

Start of Block: Racial Profiling Steward 2009

The next two questions involve you or your family's interaction with the police. We are interested in your experiences with racism. As you answer the questions below, please think of instances in your life in which you experienced racism, whether it was once, twice or several times.

Q27 Have you ever been stopped by police? Did you feel this was unfair?

- Never (7)
- Once (1)
- Two times (2)
- Three or more times (3)
- Don't know (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)
- Other (6) _____

Q28 Have your parents or other family members ever been stopped by police? Did you feel this was unfair?

- Never (7)
- Once (1)
- Two times (2)
- Three or more times (3)
- Don't know (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)
- Other (6) _____

End of Block: Racial Profiling Steward 2009

Start of Block: OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model (2009)

The next section asks about your experiences with gangs. (A "crew" or "posse" is considered a gang.) If you have NEVER been in a gang, please skip to the next section.

Q21 Have you ever belonged to a gang?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q25 If you ever belonged to a gang? = No

Q22 If you have ever belonged to a gang, did that gang have a name?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)

- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q23 Are you a gang member now?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q24 How many members are there in your gang?

- 1 to 5 (1)
- 6 to 10 (2)
- 11 to 20 (3)
- 21 to 30 (4)
- More than 30 (5)
- Don't know (6)
- Prefer not to answer (7)

Q25 How old when you first:

Never (1)	8 or younger (2)	9 (3)	10 (4)	11 (5)	12 (6)	13 (7)	14 (8)	15 (9)	16 (10)	17 or older (11)	Don't know (13)	Prefer not to answer (12)
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Been arrested? (5)	<input type="radio"/>									
Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them? (6)	<input type="radio"/>									
Been drunk or high at school? (7)	<input type="radio"/>									
Taken a handgun to school? (8)	<input type="radio"/>									

End of Block: OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model (2009)

Start of Block: National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement (2004)

Please tell me how far would you like to go in school? Would you say: less than high school graduation; graduate from high school but not any further; vocational, trade or business school after high school; junior college or part of a four year college program; graduate from a four year college; higher level of school after graduating from college; or some other type of education?

Q29 How far would you like to go in school?

- Not Graduate High School (1)
- High School Graduation (2)

- Technical, trade Or Vocational School (Above High School Level) (3)
- Community College (4)
- University Degree (5)
- Graduate/Professional Degree (6)
- Other (specify): (7) _____

As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get? Would you say you: won't finish high school; will graduate from high school but won't go any further; go to vocational, trade or business school after high school; will attend junior college or part of a four year college program; will graduate from a four year college; will attend a higher level of school after graduation from college; or some other type of education?

Q30 As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?

- Not Graduate High School (1)
- High School Graduation (2)
- Technical, trade Or Vocational School (Above High School Level) (3)
- Community College (4)
- university Degree (5)
- Graduate/Professional Degree (6)
- Other (specify): (7) _____

End of Block: National Survey of American Life Adolescent Supplement (2004)

Start of Block: Promoting Positive Future Expectations during Adolescence (2015)

The following questions are about how you feel. And how things have been with you mostly. For each question please select the one answer that comes closest to the way you have been feeling. Select the answer which you most agree with.

Q49 I will handle the problems that might come up in my life.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q50 I will handle my school work.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q51 I will have a happy life.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)

- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q52 I will have interesting things to do in my life.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q53 I energetically pursue my goals.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q54 My past experiences have prepared me for my future.

- Strongly agree (1)

- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q55 I've been pretty successful in life so far.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q56 I meet the goals I set for myself.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)

- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q57 I have a purpose in my life that says a lot about who I am.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q58 I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q59 I have a purpose in my life that reflects who I am.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)

- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q60 I want to make a difference in the world.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q61 I currently contribute to my community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q62 It is important for me to contribute to my community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q63 People in my neighborhood are willing to help their neighbors.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q64 I live in a neighborhood where people know and like each other.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)

- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q65 There are adults in my neighborhood that I can look up to.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

End of Block: Promoting Positive Future Expectations during Adolescence (2015)

Start of Block: Neighborhoods, Social Support, and African American Mental Health Outcomes(2013)

Q66 *The next set of questions will ask about your neighborhood, the social support you receive from your community or neighborhood and some of the issues you may deal with in your community, school or family life. Select the answer that best fits with you.*

Q67 The friendships I have with other people in my neighborhood mean a lot to me.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)

- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q68 If I needed advice about something, I could go to someone in my neighborhood.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't Know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Q69 I believe my neighbors would help me in an emergency.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

End of Block: Neighborhoods, Social Support, and African American Mental Health Outcomes(2013)

Start of Block: Ladder

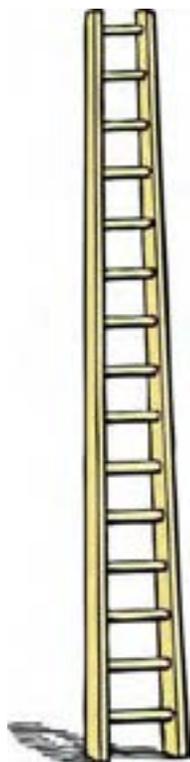
Q70

A ladder has many steps to get to the top of the ladder. If your family is on the first step, it means your family is just starting out and struggling financially. Each of the step of the ladder represents where your family may be.

At the top of the ladder are the families that are not struggling. They have the most money, the highest amount of schooling, and good jobs.

At the bottom of the ladder are the people who are struggling financially. They have little education, no job or jobs that make little money.

Please tell us where you think your family would be on this ladder by clicking on the place in the ladder on the screen (you should see a dot where you clicked).



End of Block: Ladder

2017 Sweet Potato Stakeholder Focus Group: Interview guide

The Central Valley Health Policy Institute has been subcontracted to carry out the evaluation of the Sweet Potato program. As part of this evaluation, we are carrying out face-to-face interviews with stakeholders and project staff. Because of your involvement in the project as {insert role} I would like to ask you a few questions that will help us understand from your perspective how to best prioritize the needs of the youth. The information we gather today will be used to help write the evaluation report which will be submitted to the California Department of Reducing Health Disparity. Please be assured that no local organization or individual will be named in our report and nothing will be linked back to interviewees. Therefore, everything you tell me will be treated as confidential. However, should you mention something that leads me to believe that you and/or someone else is at risk of serious physical and /or emotional harm, I will have to pass this information on to my supervisor.

- The interview will take around 45 minutes
- Are you okay to take part in the interview today? You are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to.
- Do you have any questions before we start?
- Just to help me with my notes is it OK to record our conversation.

Sweet Potato Project:

- 1) Please tell me a bit about yourself?
 - a. Your main job and community roles

- b. Your link to West Fresno community
 - c. Your link to WFFRC
- 2) Please share about your experiences with the Sweet Potato project?
 - a. What motivated you to be a part of this program?
 - b. Can you briefly outline your role and responsibilities?
 - c. How are you feeling about the project? What has your experience been like?
 - 3) In your opinion, how does Sweet Potato impact the youth participants?
 - a. What are the most important components of the project? How do you think youth are receiving these parts of the Sweet Potato project?
 - b. In your view, how effective is this project for the youth?
 - c. Explain a specific experience/story in which you feel the program has impacted yourself and the youth?
 - 4) How does the Sweet Potato Project make a broader impact in the Fresno community? How has the Sweet Potato Project made an impact in the Fresno Community?
 - 5) With your interaction with youth and the program, has this experience turned into a mentorship? Have you maintained a connection with the youth of this program?
 - 6) How do you see African American cultural values* as being expressed and taught throughout the program? How could this aspect of the program be improved?
 - 7) Do you believe the program helps participants develop a sense of purpose? Say why, please.
 - 8) Do you believe the program helps participants recognize the resources and supports available in our community to help them meet their life goals?

* Afrocentric core values are preeminent and these values reside in storytelling, human rights activism and hopefulness. Planting, harvesting and marketing provides cultural retention. For the Sweet Potato program, it also serves as a gender and race component, because youth can communicate in a safe space with adult black men/women. Youth need to envision a purpose and a sense of hopefulness in their community.

2019 Cohort Sweet Potato Project Focus Group: Interview Guide

Welcome and thank you for participating in the Sweet Potato focus group! We value your feedback and thank you for your time.

Background

My name is _____; I am a research assistant for Central Valley Health Policy Institute at Fresno State. I have been working alongside Rick on the data collection for the evaluation of the Sweet Potato program in which you all have been a part of here at the Center. The evaluation examines if participation in the Sweet Potato project has short-term effects that improve students' well-being and academic performance and longer-term impact in terms of reducing school dropout rates, promoting well-being, positive adult relationships, and leadership skills.

The purpose of the focus group is to get some insight regarding the Sweet Potato Program and those participating in the program. The information provided by you all (the students) will help us examine the program and participant health risks and protective/resilience factors.

There are a total of 6 questions that will be asked. All responses will be kept confidential, meaning all answers provided will not be linked to any other local organization or in any future reports. Your

honest opinions are encouraged, as this is an opportunity for us to understand you better and how influential the program has been for you all.

1. In your own words, how would you describe your community (i.e. friends, family, church, classmates, and your neighborhood) before participating in the Sweet Potato Program? How has that changed today and how has the program influenced this change if any changes have occurred?
2. Describe your self-confidence (i.e. a feeling of trust in one's abilities, doing things that you never thought you would ever do before) and self-respect (i.e. believing in yourself, believing that you are worthy of being treated well) before the program? How has it changed since participating in the program and how has the program influenced this change if any changes have occurred?
3. How would you describe your future before participating in the Sweet potato Program? How has that changed today and how has the program influenced this change if any changes have occurred?
4. Describe your professional career goals before participating in the Sweet potato Program. How has that changed today and how has the program influenced this change if any changes have occurred?
5. What were some concerns you had about your academic or professional future, and about your neighborhood before participating in the program? What are some of the things you identified as barriers (i.e. Money/ income, self-esteem, not being accountable for your actions, violence in your community, people who try to bring you down) that you would like to overcome? How has participating in the sweet Potato Program helped you overcome these barriers?
6. What has the Sweet Potato Project helped you learn to do better since you have been meeting?

Thank you for your participation! We will analyze all the responses provided. This information will be provided in our local evaluation report for year 2 of the data analysis.

2019 Parent/Guardian Focus Group: Interview Guide

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in the Sweet Potato focus group! We would value your feedback and thank you for your time.

Background

The Sweet Potato project is one of the programs participating in The California Reducing Disparities Project, which seeks to reduce mental health disparities across the state of California. The Sweet Potato project at West Fresno Family resource center is using a culturally relevant approach to reducing mental health disparities in the community in West Fresno. It aims to prevent and/or reduce stigmatization surrounding mental health issues for African American youth ages 12-15 by increasing educational opportunities for young men and women in West Fresno and providing the opportunity to earn money and gain job training through dignified work. While your child participates in this project, they are learning leadership skills and will see themselves as African American leaders. Through mentorship and skill-based farming education, students are in a community surrounding that is intended to promote well-being. It also does so through neighborhood safety, increasing a sense of

community and thus reducing gang activity to the end of supporting a West Fresno neighborhood that is safer, and more economically reliant and self-sustainable.

(State that we are Central Valley Health Policy Institute, Fresno State and we are the local evaluation team.) The evaluation examines if participation in the Sweet Potato project has short-term effects that improve African American middle school students' well-being and academic performance, and longer-term effects in terms of reducing school dropout rates, promoting well-being, positive adult relationships, and leadership skills. The data to describe these outcomes is drawn from surveys with participants and controls at intake, at one and two-year follow-ups, interviews with youths' parents and other significant adults, and qualitative descriptions by the youth about program and health risk and protective/resilience factors. The evaluation provides training to African American and Latino graduate students as interviewers and focus group co-facilitators.

Results have shown that the program is working and the youth are learning to become resilient, participating more in their community and have a sense of hope for their future. The youth participating in their community does demonstrate their leadership skills and self-efficacy.

We hope that your participation today can help improve the Sweet Potato Project so the program may continue to receive funding to help reduce the mental health disparities surrounding African American youth.

Please be assured that all responses will be kept confidential and no responses provided will not be linked to any other local organization or in any future reports.

1. In your opinion, how has the Sweet Potato Project helped your child improve and grow as a person? (As a student? As a young person in your community? Leadership?)
2. As mentioned earlier, this program was designed to really think about mental health, African American culture together. How do you see African American cultural values as being expressed and taught throughout the program?
3. Has your child changed the way they talk about their future since participating in the program? In what ways?
4. Do you believe the Sweet Potato Project has helped change your community? In what ways?
5. What are some ideas that the program can improve to help your child and their future?
6. Do you have any more comments or anything to say about the program?

Thank you for your participation! We will analyze all the responses provided. This information will be provided in our local evaluation report for year 2 of the data analysis. As mentioned previously, your responses will help improve the program overall and help with funding.

2020 Cohort Sweet Potato Project Participant Focus Group: Interview Guide

Welcome and thank you for participating in the Sweet Potato focus group! We value your feedback and thank you for your time.

Background

My name is _____; I am a research assistant for Central Valley Health Policy Institute at Fresno State. I have been working on the data collection for the evaluation of the Sweet Potato program in which you all have been a part of here at the Center. The evaluation examines if participation in the Sweet Potato project has short-term effects that improve students' well-being and academic performance and longer-term impact in terms of reducing school dropout rates, promoting well-being, positive adult relationships, and leadership skills.

The purpose of the focus group is to get some insight regarding the Sweet Potato Program and those participating in the program. The information provided by you all (the students) will help us examine the program and participant health risks and protective/resilience factors.

There are a total of 8 questions that will be asked. All responses will be kept confidential, meaning all answers provided will not be linked to any other local organization or in any future reports. Your honest opinions are encouraged, as this is an opportunity for us to better understand you and how influential the program has been for you all.

1. Looking back, when you started the program, where did you see your life? Where do you see it now? How has it changed?
2. Who do you feel is your community now? Who did you feel was your community before the pandemic?
3. Do you feel like you are a part of your community? Do you feel like you belong, do you feel like there is a place for you?
4. In one word describe what the past year looked like for you.
5. In one word describe what 2021 and above looks like for you.
6. What are some concerns that have been on your mind in the last year? What are some things that made you worried? How are you doing now? Has the Sweet Potato Program helped you overcome some fears or barriers?
7. What are some fears or hesitations you may have about going back to school? How has the Sweet Potato Program helped prepare you for your return?
8. How would you describe your future after the pandemic is over? Has the Sweet Potato Program helped you during the pandemic?

Thank you for your participation! We will analyze all the responses provided. This information will be provided in our local evaluation report for year 3 of the data analysis.

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in the Sweet Potato staff interview! We value your feedback and thank you for your time.

As part of this evaluation, we are carrying out virtual interviews via Zoom with project staff. Because of your involvement in the project I would like to ask you a few questions that will help us understand from your perspective what impact the project has had on the West Fresno Community and ways in which the program can improve. The information we gather today will be used to help write the evaluation report which will be submitted to the California Department of Reducing Health Disparity. Please be assured that all responses will be kept confidential and no responses provided will not be linked to any other local organization or in any future reports. Therefore, everything you tell me will be treated as confidential. However, should you mention something that leads me to believe that you and/or someone else is at risk of serious physical and /or emotional harm, I will have to pass this information on to my supervisor.

- The interview will take around 30 minutes
- Are you okay to take part in the interview today? You are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to.
- Do you have any questions before we start?
- Just to help me with my notes is it OK to record our conversation

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself?
 - a. Your job title and your role
2. Looking at the Sweet Potato Project from a systemic point of view, how has the Sweet Potato Project contributed to the west Fresno Community?
 - a. How has the project changed youth participants' perception of their community?
3. Have the students changed the way they talk about their future while participating in the program?
 - a. In what ways?
 - b. How has the sweet Potato Project helped transform the youths' view of their future?
4. What are the project components that have been successful and have continued to work for the sweet potato project?
5. What challenges have occurred during the recruitment process ?
 - a. Were there any challenges or barriers that hindered retention rates (i.e. Kids being pulled from the project for other priorities)?
6. How has COVID-19 impacted recruitment and retention rates?
 - a. What changes have you made to the program's curriculum to better facilitate the program?

7. In your opinion, how has COVID-19 affected Sweet Potato participants?
 - a. Have you personally seen a difference in attitudes, and participation?
8. What are some future improvements you believe the program can make to better help the youth and their future?

Thank you for your participation! We will analyze all the responses provided. This information will be provided in our local evaluation report for year 3 of the data analysis.

Sweet Potato Project II Presents 2021 Youth Explosion COVID-19 Survey

Please fill out the survey to the best of your ability. All answers are confidential. Each completed survey will be entered into a raffle upon confirmation of contact information.

Email *

What is your name? *

Please provide the best 2 phone numbers. *

What school do you attend?

What zip code do you live in?

How old are you?

- 11-12
- 13-14
- 15 -16
- 17

What is your race/ethnicity?

- African American
- Hispanic
- White, Non-Hispanic
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Other
- What is your gender?
- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other:

During the pandemic, students were attending school at home. Did you have any challenges at home. Check all that applies to you.

- I had problems with technology (Lack of internet access, reliable device, issues with login)
- I had trouble communicating with my parents
- I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do.
- I didn't have a quiet place to complete my work

- I had trouble communicating with my teacher.
- My grades dropped
- My quality of work wasn't up to par.
- School was easy, and the classes were boring.
- My parents and I have decided that I will not be going back to school in person.
- Other:

In what ways will the effects of COVID-19 and the closing of schools, have on the youth once schools re-open? Check all that applies.

- Higher school dropout rates.
- Senior athletes will lose scholarships opportunities.
- More students will participate in school activities.
- Students will have more opportunities.
- Other:

What additional support will be needed to help students. Check all that applies.

- Teen homeless shelters
- Parenting classes
- Job readiness class
- Youth and adult counseling
- More community engagements
- Childcare
- Drug counseling
- Mentoring
- Life skills coaching
- Domestic violence help
- More safe places for youth
- Other:

Since or during the Pandemic: Did your responsibilities at home increase or change. Check all that applies

- It become my responsibility to take care of my siblings
- It became my responsibility to earn money for the family
- It become my responsibility to manage my time, and to keep myself on track
- It became my responsibility to find shelter at night
- It became my responsibility to raise myself
- It became my responsibility to find transportation
- It became my responsibility to go to school
- It became my responsibility to protect my family
- It became my responsibility to prepare meals for my siblings
- Other:

Please describe your ability to spend family time during COVID-19. Check all that applies

- I spend no time or sharing fun positive activities with my family

- I have difficulty spending time and sharing fun positive activities with my family
- I sometimes spend time sharing positive activities with my family
- I often spend time sharing positive experiences with my family
- I live alone. (Homeless)
- Other:

What would you consider to be your family's top [3] needs or priorities.

- Disinfectant/cleaning supplies/hand sanitizer
- Food
- Transportation
- Financial Support
- Diapers/Wipes
- Emotional support
- Educational assistance for children
- Housing
- Internet access
- Other:

Over the past year have you lost a family member, close friend, or neighbor?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following was a reason for you losing a family member, close friend, or neighbor?

- Gang Violence
- COVID-19
- Accident
- Domestic Violence
- Other:

What do you consider to be students top (3) needs at this time.

- More open gyms
- Job internships
- Better and safer parks
- More recreational sports (Battle of the Parks)
- Being around people (More community activities, events, and outreach)
- Job readiness trainings
- After school programs
- Mentors
- New libraries
- Counseling
- Other:

Which of these have you experienced during the pandemic? Check all that applies.

- Depression
- Stressed or worried
- Homelessness
- Domestic Violence
- Abuse (verbal, physical, or mental abuse)
- Hunger
- Prostitution
- Gang bullying
- Cyber bullying
- Teen pregnancy
- Positive family support
- Other:

COVID- 19 will be going in our history books. Surviving through the pandemic, what experiences will you remember the most?

Who gave you the survey or the link to the survey? *

- Send me a copy of my responses.

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Sweet Potato Project 2021 Youth Explosion COVID-19 Survey Results

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the public health mandates, COVID-19 lockdowns, and the inability for youth to attend school, youth in the community were asked to participate in the West Fresno Family Resource Center Survey. Due to the restrictions and public health mandates, West Fresno Family Resource Center wanted to gauge the demographics, youth in the community and their respective families. The Sweet Potato youth paired in groups to administer surveys to local youth in their communities. The youth in the community were asked a series of questions pertaining to challenges during the pandemic, effects of not attending school, and additional support the youth needed during the pandemic. They were also asked about endeavors and responsibilities they had to attend to. The youth were also given questions around top priority needs during COVID-19. Youth participants in the community were given questions on quality family time. While they had time to be present with family members, youth were also given questions on their overall experience during the pandemic. These questions were analyzed by Central Valley Health Policy Institute.

Methodology

The Research Analysts cleaned the data in excel. However, in order to analyze the multiple option questions in IBM SPSS Statistics the evaluation team needed the assistance of their Statistician. Thus, the Statistician used the search and find an option in Excel to replace all commas that separated responses with a different special character, such as a dollar sign. Then, the Statistician separated response options into unique cells. She took these steps to identify any "other" responses. Then the data was entered into SAS and searched for strings to identify each response option. Variables for the "other" option were also created. The Statistician then grouped the multiple option question answers into categories that either identified challenges, effects, support responsibilities, family, priorities, loss, needs, and experiences. The value of 1 was coded in place of a response if the respondent selected options for each question and zero if respondents did not select an option. The Research Analyst then recorded demographics and then analyzed the survey in SPSS.

Demographics

Table 1.

<i>What School do you attend?</i>	SUM of Frequency	SUM of Percent
Acceleration academy	1	0.1
Alta Sierra Intermediate School	2	0.1
Ann Leavenworth Elementary School	1	0.1
Ayer Elementary School	52	2.6
Barid Middle School	1	0.1
Bethune Charter Academy	1	0.1
Bright Star Secondary Charter Academy	1	0.1
Buchanan High School	5	0.3
Bullard High School	9	0.5
Caruthers High School	1	0.1
Cedarwood Elementary School	6	0.3
Centennial Elementary School	3	0.2
Central East High School	40	2
Central High School	38	1.9
Central West High School	49	2.5
Clark Intermediate School	23	1.2
Clovis High School	22	1.1
Clovis West High School	3	0.2
Cole Elementary School	1	0.1
Columbia Elementary School	3	0.2
Computech Middle School	68	3.4
Cooper Middle School	2	0.1
Crescent View West High	2	0.1
Cutler-Orosi	2	0.1
Democracy Prep Academy	2	0.1

Drycreek Elementary School	1	0.1
Duncan Polytechnical High School	4	0.2
Edison Bethune Charter School	1	0.1
Edison Computech Middle School	5	0.3
Edison High School	305	15.3
Edwing Elementary School	1	0.1
Elementary School	2	0.1
Firebaugh Middle School	4	0.2
Floyd Elementary School	3	0.2
Franklin Elementary School	1	0.1
Fresno City College	1	0.1
Fresno EOC School of Unlimited Learning	1	0.1
Fresno High School	7	0.4
Fresno State College	2	0.1
Fresno Unified	5	0.3
Gaston Middle School	15	0.8
Glacier Point Middle School	1	0.1
Hamilton Elementary School	2	0.1
High School	2	0.1
Holland Middle School	1	0.1
Hoover High School	4	0.2
I don't attend school	17	0.9
Independent study	1	0.1
Jefferson Middle School	2	0.1
John Burroughs School	1	0.1
Kerman Floyd Elementary School	2	0.1
Kerman High School	1	0.1
Kerman Middle School	3	0.2
Kings Canyon High School	3	0.2
Kings Canyon Middle School	67	3.4
Kirk Elementary School	1	0.1
Kratt Elementary School	1	0.1
Lane Elementary School	5	0.3
Lawless Elementary School	1	0.1

Lincoln Elementary School	3	0.2
Lonestar Elementary School	3	0.2
Mccabe Elementary School	2	0.1
Mclane High School	4	0.2
Mendota Elementary School	1	0.1
Mendota High School	3	0.2
Mickey Cox Elementary School	3	0.2
Middle School	1	0.1
Mt. Pleasant High School	1	0.1
Pacific Union Elementary School	3	0.2
Perching Elementary School	1	0.1
Polk Elementary School	2	0.1
Roosevelt Elementary School	1	0.1
Roosevelt High School	5	0.3
San Joaquin Elementary School	4	0.2
San Joaquin Memorial High School	17	0.9
Sequoia Middle School	4	0.2
Spring Valley High School	1	0.1
Sunnyside High School	10	0.5
Susan B Anthony Elementary School	5	0.3
Teague Elementary School	1	0.1
Tenaya Middle School	1	0.1
Terronez Middle School	3	0.2
Thousand Oaks High School	1	0.1
Tioga Middle School	1	0.1
Tranquillity High School	2	0.1
University of Phoenix	1	0.1
Vinland Elementary School	1	0.1
W. E. B. DuBois Public Charter School	1	0.1
Washington Elementary School	1	0.1
Washington Union High School	29	1.5
Weldon Elementary School	18	0.9
Weldon High School	1	0.1
West Central High School	2	0.1
Western High School	2	0.1

Winchell Elementary School	1	0.1
Yokomi Elementary School	1	0.1
Grand Total	952	50.9

Among the 1,069 youth participants, 952 identified the school they currently attend. Table 1. showcases the distribution of youth among the schools listed. According to Table 1. a large number of students (15.3%) attend Edison High School in West Fresno. Many of the schools attended by youth participants are located in the West and southeast area of Fresno, California.

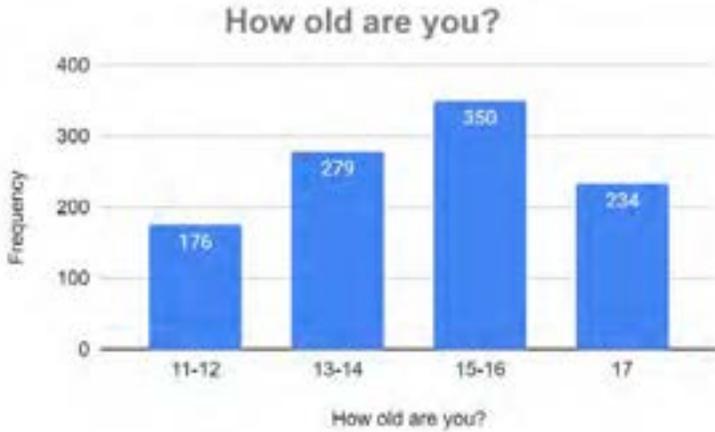
Table 2.

<i>Zip Code</i>	SUM of Frequency	SUM of Percent
89032	2	0.1
89119	1	0.1
90018	1	0.1
93230	2	0.1
93270	1	0.1
93606	9	0.5
93609	1	0.1
93610	1	0.1
93611	22	1.1
93612	60	3
93613	3	0.2
93615	2	0.1
93622	4	0.2
93630	7	0.4
93636	1	0.1
93638	2	0.1
93640	7	0.4
93650	2	0.1
93660	4	0.2
93701	14	0.7
93702	90	4.5
93703	17	0.9
93704	11	0.6

93705	13	0.7
93706	294	14.7
93710	12	0.6
93711	9	0.5
93720	1	0.1
93721	3	0.2
93722	135	6.8
93723	15	0.8
93725	4	0.2
93726	15	0.8
93727	109	5.5
93728	10	0.5
93737	6	0.3
95121	1	0.1
95348	1	0.1
95838	1	0.1
97311	2	0.1
97322	1	0.1
97725	1	0.1
Grand Total	897	46.1

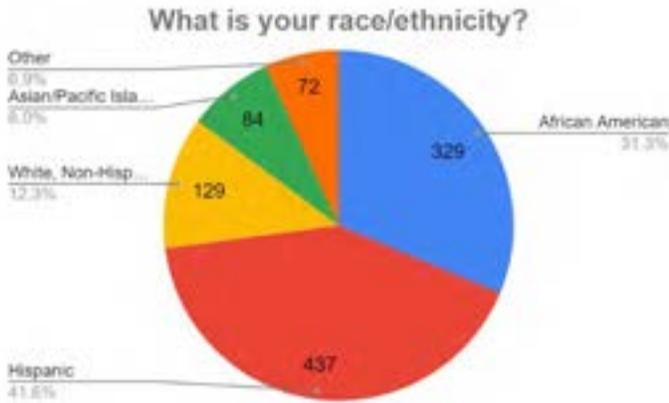
Among the 1,069 youth participants 46.1% identified the zip code where they currently live. Table 2. showcases the distribution of youth among the zip codes listed. According to Table 2. Majority of the youth participants live in the West and Southeast area of Fresno, California.

Table 3.



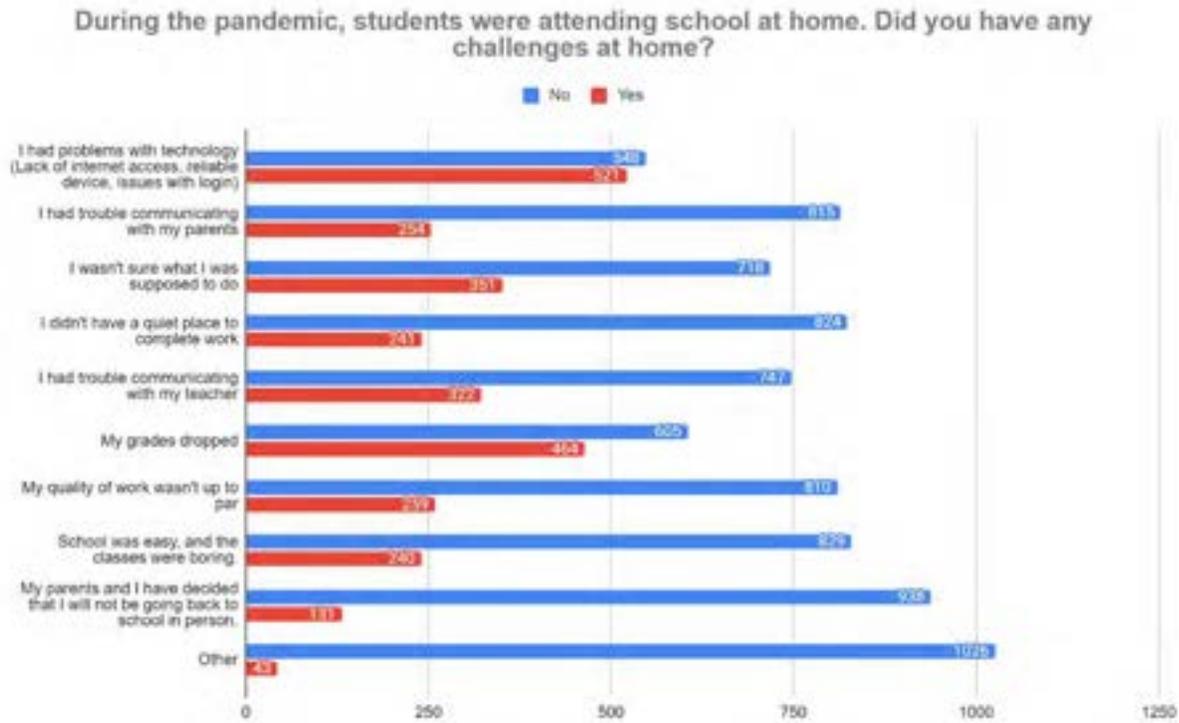
According to the Sweet Potato Youth COVID-19 Survey 1,069 youth participated. Of the 1,069 youth 958 (48%) belonged to either of the 4 age ranges shown above in the table. Approximately 18.3% of the youth fall in the 11-12 age range, 29.1% fall into the 13-14 age range, 36.5% fall in the 15-17 age range, and 24.4% are 17 years of age.

Table 4.



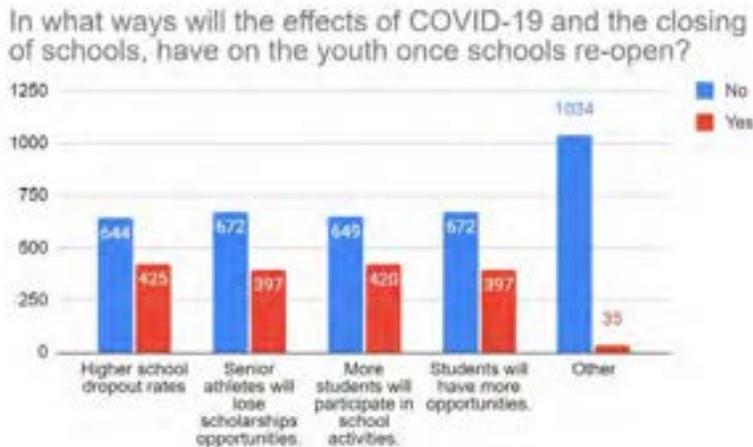
According to the Sweet Potato Youth COVID-19 Survey 1,069 youth participated. Of the 1,069 youth 946 (47.4%) identified as either African American (31.3%), Hispanic (41.6%), White, Non-Hispanic (12.3%), Asian/Pacific Islander (8%), and other (6.9%).

Table 5.



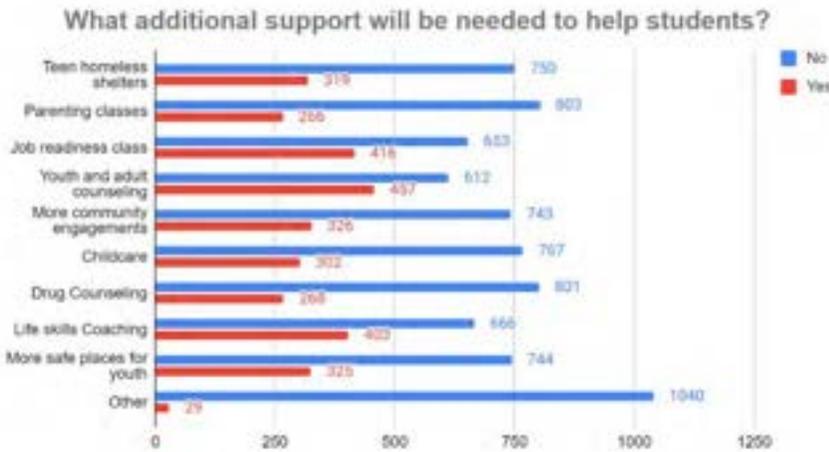
The Sweet Potato youth and the members in their community responded to this survey administered during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the significant challenges was technological infrastructure. Technological barriers posed as a challenge for youth during the pandemic. Youth in the community live in rural areas, and had lack of access to reliable technology.

Table 6.



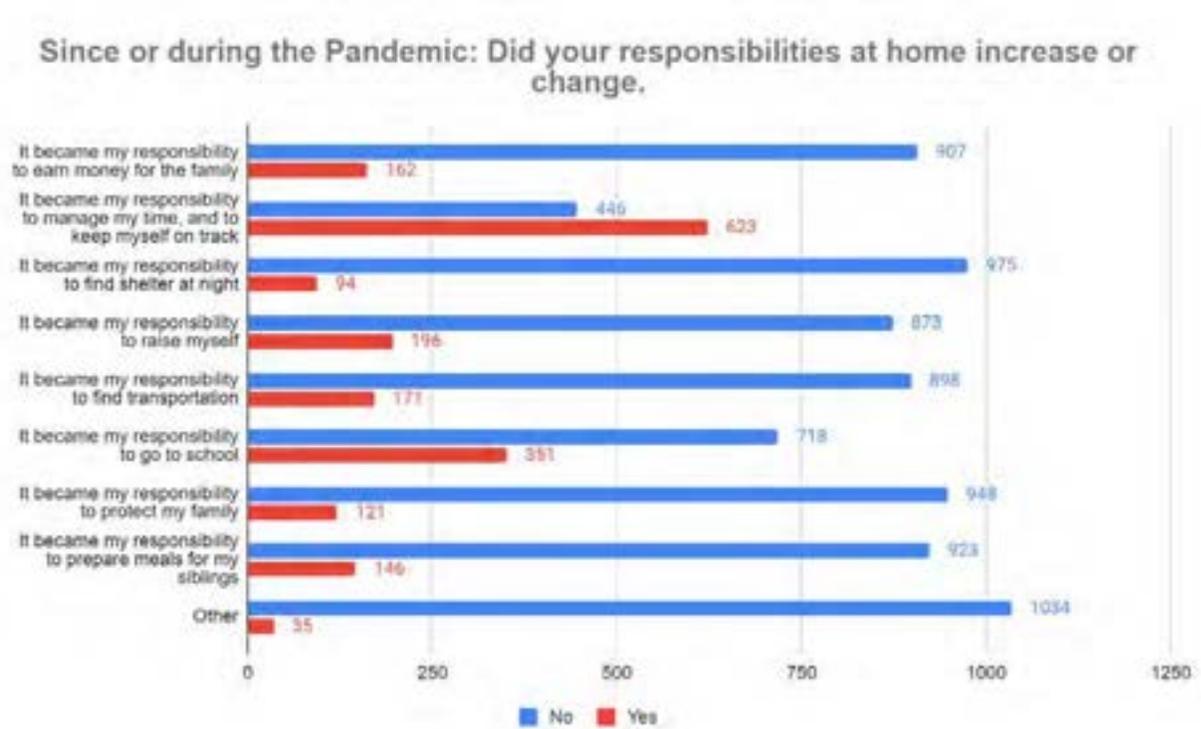
The youth in the community did not believe closing schools would have an impact on schools once reopened. High school dropout rates (39.8%), and Senior athletes losing scholarship opportunities (37.1%) were effects that could potentially impact youth. Although not significant, the youth also believed more students will participate in school activities because of the pandemic lockdown (39.3%).

Table 7.



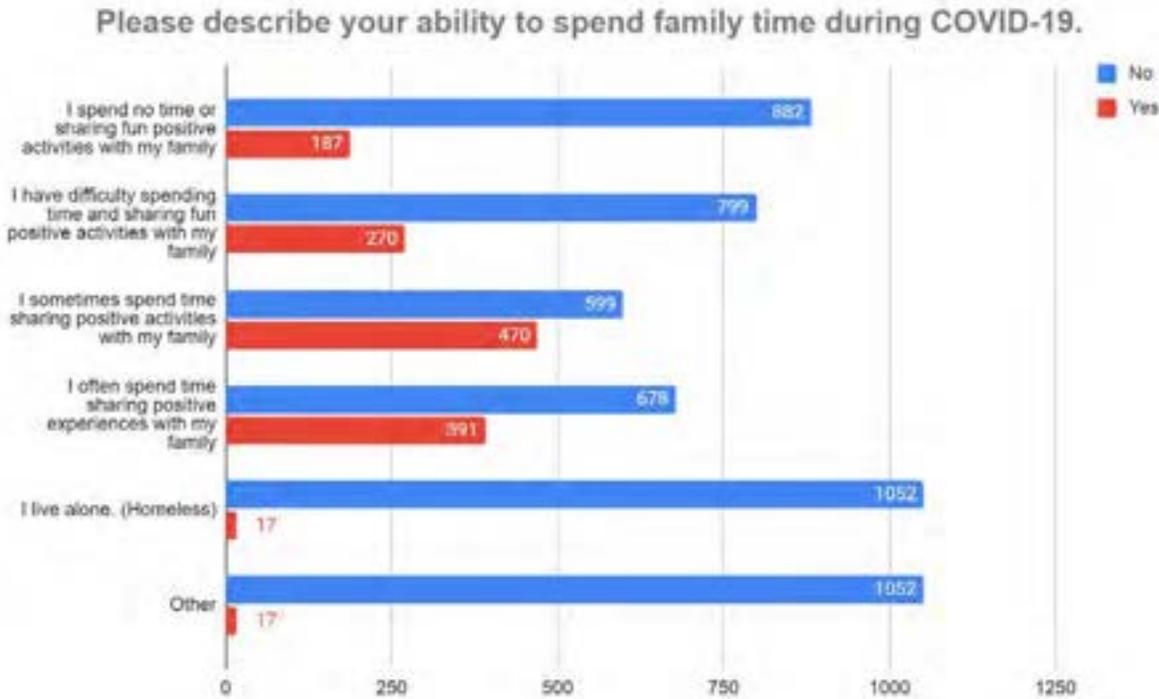
Many of the youth did not indicate additional support. The highest yield of support needed were areas with youth and adult counseling (42.8%), job readiness class (38.9%) , and life skills coaching (37.7%).

Table 8.



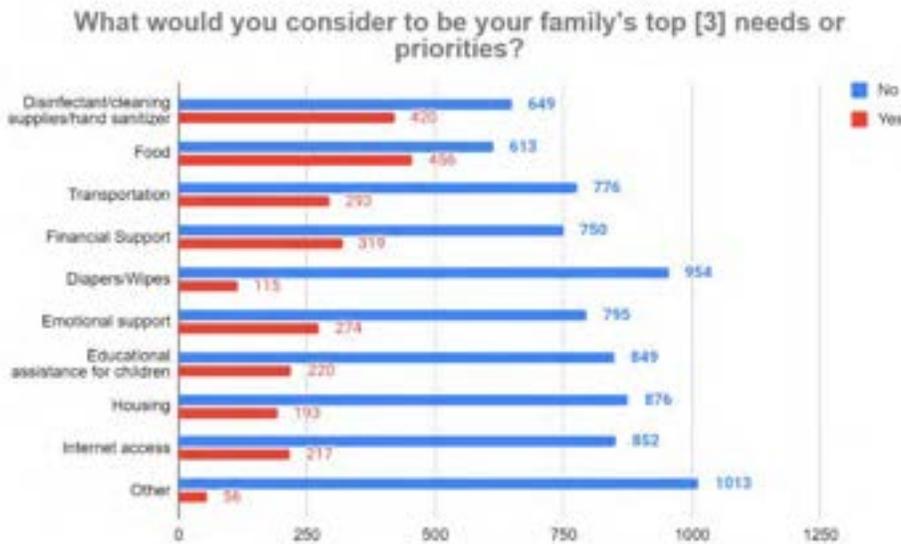
Many of the youth did not see an increase or change in their responsibilities during the pandemic. However, due to the pandemic youth transitioned from school settings to home settings to complete their education. Continuing their education from home meant less structure. As a result, 58.3% of the youth who responded to this question identified that “it became their responsibility to manage their time, and to keep themselves on track.

Table 9.



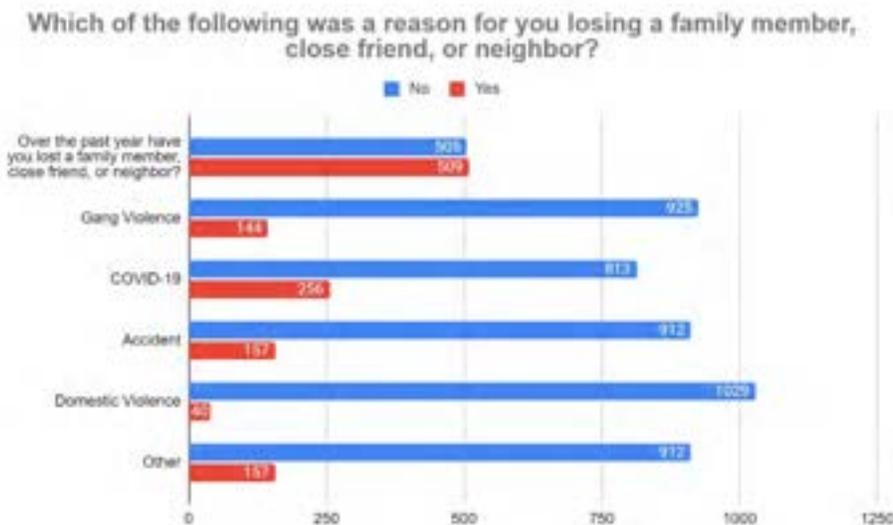
Many of the youth had an increase in quality time spent with their family during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Majority of the youth had a strong family support system at home and were able to engage with family members and had positive experiences. Youth did not live alone (98.4%), so because of stable housing, they were able to share positive activities with their families (82.5%).

Table 10.



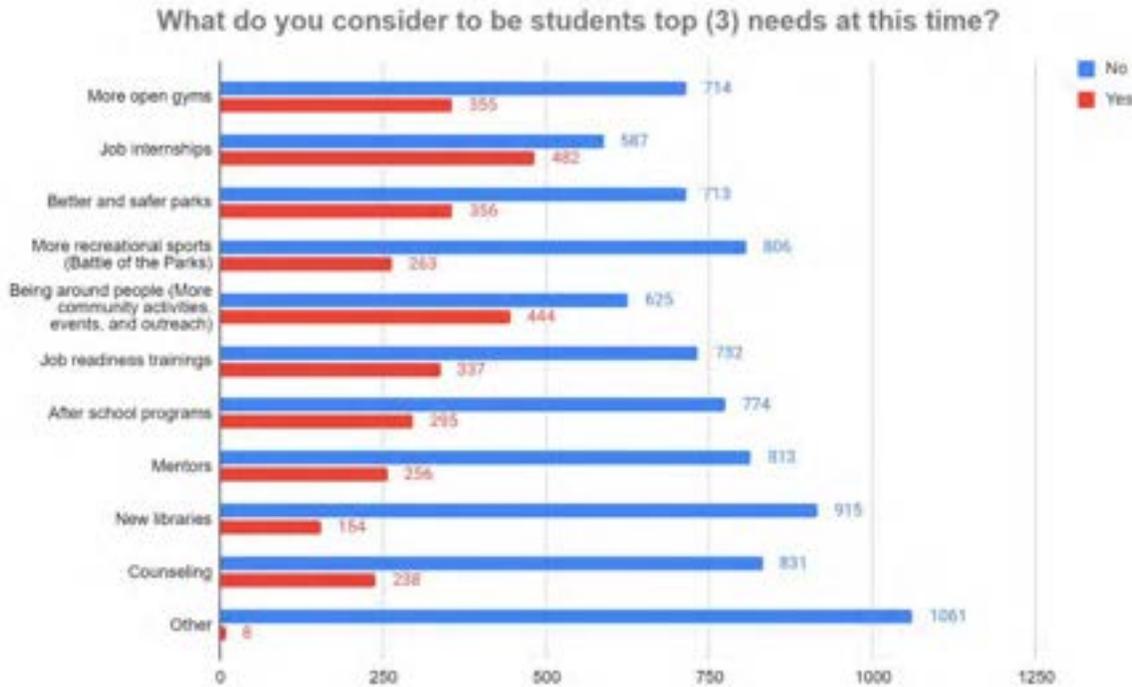
Many of the youth did not indicate priorities were needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The youth had stable housing and supportive families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disinfectant/cleaning supplies/hand sanitizer showed the priority need (39.3%), and food (42.7%). The last priority was financial support (29.8%).

Table 11.



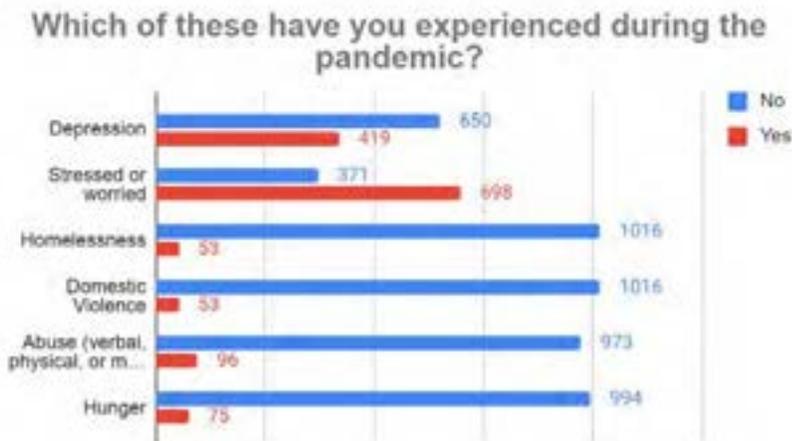
The youth were asked if they had lost a family member, close friend, or neighbor in the past year, or the 1,069 participants 509 (50.2%) did experience a loss. Approximately twenty four percent of the youth identified that they have lost loved ones due to COVID-19. In addition, 14.7% of the youth identified that they have also lost loved ones due to an “accident” and/or “other”.

Table 12.



Youth in the community did not show an increase in top needs. As indicated in Table 9., the youth were in stable housing, and no businesses were open because of the public health mandates. Although there were no student needs, job internships (45.1%), the need to be around people and engage in youth activities (41.5%); Lastly, better and safer parks is a need in those surrounding zip codes (33.3%).

Table 13.



Youth in the community experienced a significant increase of stress or were worried during the COVID-19 pandemic (65.3%). Although

factors of stress were not reported, stress and worrisome were relevant because of working families, and the worry of family members contracting COVID-19.

Appendix B: Stakeholder, parent focus group, and Staff Interview Themes Table

This table describes the frequency of specified themes that were addressed in year 1-3 focus groups and interviews among Sweet Potato stakeholders.

Themes	Year 1: Stakeholders	Year 2: Parent Focus Group	Year 3: Staff and Board Members Interview
Community	15	8	5
Connectedness/ belonging	15		1
Self-Efficacy/ Self-esteem	17	2	1
Mentorship	17	6	
Leadership	14	1	1
Hope for the Future	12	2	
Higher Education	6	3	2
Entrepreneurship	14	5	
Team Building	7	4	
Communication			1

Respect		2	
Cultural Significance		2	
Commitment		1	
Resilience	6		2