

Buena Vista Mobile Park – The Threat of  
Permanent Closure:  
Adolescent and Young Adult Survey  
**Full Report**

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# Buena Vista Mobile Park – The Threat of Permanent Closure: Adolescent and Young Adult Survey **Full Report**

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## **Part 1: Executive Summary**

### **Background Information**

Residents of the Buena Vista Mobile Park in Palo Alto, California have lived with the threat of possible park closure since the fall of 2012. The majority of the 400 residents are Hispanic and long-term residents of Buena Vista Park, some residing in the park for 20 or more years; about one third of the residents are children under the age of 18 (see Table 1).

If the park closes, many residents would lose geographic proximity to their places of employment since they would no longer be able to afford the cost of housing in Palo Alto or nearby Silicon Valley communities. In addition, school age children would be forced to attend lesser quality schools, and disabled and older residents would lose access to social and health services that are essential to their quality of life. The Buena Vista residents have formed an

association to present a unified front against the park closure and have secured legal counsel to fight the closure or receive fair relocation compensation in the event of closure. The resident's association has made two offers to purchase the park (for \$14 million and \$29 million, respectively) in order to keep it open, both of which have been declined by the park owner.

All of the Buena Vista children and adolescents attend local elementary and secondary schools in the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD). The benefit from a PAUSD education has become one of the most salient issues in the debate over the closure of the park, and one reason among several for why park residents wish to remain in Palo Alto. The Buena Vista children are acutely aware that with closure of the Park they will most likely be forced to move to another school district and lose friends and teachers.

### **Goals of Current Study**

In the conducting the current Buena Vista youth survey, we purposefully began with questions about the support that students felt they received from their families, teachers, school age peers, others in the Buena Vista community and adults in the larger Palo Alto community. We followed a developmental assets approach, which emphasizes that the positive assets available to youth impact their resilience in response to negative events in their lives (see Benson, 2006; 2011). Accordingly, underlying our survey was the question of whether the Buena Vista youth were resilient and if so in what ways this resilience is being demonstrated.

The multi-layered goals of the current survey included the following:

1. Gather information on the teens' perception of the support they receive from their family, school community, and the greater Palo Alto community regarding the closure of the park.

2. Inquire whether the threat of losing their home was affecting them personally, disrupting their plans for the future, or their optimism around education.
3. Assess whether teens' self-esteem and personal agency were negatively affected by the possible loss of their home.
4. Gather information on teens' attitudes toward education, self-reported grades, and educational aspirations for the future.
5. Learn whether the teens were experiencing undue levels of stress or depression at greater levels than other adolescents in the school community.
6. Ask teens about their beliefs on the possible closure of Buena Vista and whether their families had discussed or established plans to move elsewhere.
7. Learn in what ways respondents were coping during this period of uncertainty, and if they had participated or planned to participate in civic activities on behalf of Buena

## **Summary of Findings**

### **School and Community Support – Table 2**

The first goal of the survey was to determine how much social support respondents felt they received from their school, the community, and from their family. Importantly, 90% or higher of male and female respondents across all age categories reported they received a high level of support from their school. The 90% rate of perceiving a favorable school climate among Buena Vista adolescent residents presents a sharp contrast to results from comparable Developmental Assets studies conducted in PAUSD schools, in which only 47% of middle-school students and 41% of high-school students reporting a favorable school climate (Search Institute, 2011a; 2011b).

### **Planning, Optimism, and Stability against Worry – Table 3**

The percentage of females (85%) and males (88%) scoring high on the composite scores for life *planning* and *optimism* suggest that despite the uncertainty facing Buena Vista youth around the loss of their home, school, and community, the majority of young residents remain optimistic about their life and their future and willing to make stable plans. This optimism attests to the resilience that these teens are demonstrating in the face of a direct threat to their home and the possible breakup of their family who may not be able to relocate together as a unit. The *stability against worry* composite score adds evidence to the fact that these adolescents are emotionally secure despite the uncertainty of their families' future prospects of remaining in their mobile homes. The percent of teens responding agree or strongly agree to the questions specifically about being currently worried is relatively high, however, especially for the younger respondents. Nonetheless, it seems these youth remain optimistic and able to look beyond their immediate chaos of the possibility of losing their home.

The differences are sharp when comparing the Buena Vista findings on *planning for the future* with the Developmental Asset findings for Palo Alto more broadly. Whereas the overwhelming majority of Buena Vista adolescents reported that they liked to plan and that it was helpful to set goals for the future, this was less true with Palo Alto middle school (34%) and high school students (36%) (Search Institute). Why this difference emerged between the Buena Vista sample and the larger Palo Alto sample is not clear, but it does attest to the resilience of the Buena Vista sample; despite the uncertainty of whether they will lose their homes, the Buena Vista youth are able to look positively toward the future and make plans.

### **Self-Esteem and Self-Agency – Table 4**

All age groups in our Buena Vista survey showed uniformly high self-esteem, both in composite scores and in individual question responses. Self-esteem was also included on the Developmental Assets study and again we see striking differences between the Buena Vista sample and Palo Alto adolescents. Overall, 52% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Palo Alto reported having a high self-esteem and this percentage declined to 43% among the high school students attending the same high school as the Buena Vista students.

The composite score for questions addressing feelings of self-agency, in contrast, were much lower for the Buena Vista youth. In our sample only 26% of females and 33% of males agreed or strongly agreed to questions pertaining to self-agency. The youngest age group of 12-13 year olds ( $n = 21$ ) was the least likely to agree to the self-agency questions with just 5% in agreement. This finding is not necessarily surprising because this age group (12-13 years), while having entered adolescence, is still dependent on their adult caretakers. In addition, since respondents come primarily from immigrant families, many of them likely experience strong family values around respect for elders and dependency on their parents for decision making.

Adolescents were very supportive of standing up for equality (97% females and 88% males), a pattern that is seen across all age categories. A similar question in the Development Assets survey revealed that a lesser percent of general middle school (61%) and high school students (57%) felt as strongly about equality as the Buena Vista adolescents. It may be that adolescents who see disparities on a daily basis—much as the Buena Vista residents do—are more predisposed to stand up and take a position against inequality.

### **Academic Measures – Table 5**

The educational aspirations of Buena Vista youth indicated that most hoped to continue their education beyond high school. Specifically, more than 80% of males and females reported

that they hoped to attend at least 2 years of colleges following high school graduation, with 58% of girls and 75% of boys aspiring to attend 4 or more years of college.

Since attending college is tied directly to academic performance in high school, students were asked to self-report their grades. Overall, 45% of the females answered that their grades were “about half As and Bs or better”, whereas fewer males (30%) self-reported their grades in this range. Also, fewer students in the high school age ranges reported having “half As and Bs or better”, with 10% of 14-15 year olds and 12% of 16-17 year olds reporting as such. These age ranges correspond to students in the 10 through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, where the academic pressure for grades is known to be severe in the PAUSD.

Few respondents reported that they did 3 or more hours of homework each night (males 10% and females 17%). There was a good amount of variability on this question, however, with 40% of the 14-15 years answering affirmatively to the question of 3 hours or more of homework whereas none of the 16-17 and 18-19 year olds reported spending 3 hours or more doing homework. An important point to make about time spent on homework is that it is likely that few of our respondents had the luxury of space in their mobile homes to be able to study with any amount of privacy or time free of distractions from other members of the household. In these respects the Buena Vista teens may be at a major academic disadvantage compared to most PAUSD secondary level students.

Nearly all of the respondents (90-100%) indicated that they were trying their “best in school”. In similar fashion almost all of the respondents (93-95%) stated that they cared about their school. These findings are positive because they demonstrate that while the Buena Vista students are a marginalized population in Palo Alto because of their low-income status, the

adolescents nevertheless have a strong sense of belonging to their school community, which is known to correlate highly with future academic achievement.

### **Depression, Anxiety, and Stress – Table 6**

None of the younger Buena Vista students (12-13, 14-15 year olds) reported feeling sad or depressed in the last month. For the older Buena Vista respondents, overall 12% of the girls and 8% of the boys answered that they had experienced sadness or depression most or all of the time in the past month. This finding is favorable in comparison to response rates from the 2010 Developmental Assets survey among high school students, where 16% of the girls reported feeling sad or depressed most or all of the time in the last month. This favorability changed somewhat for 16-17 year olds, with 38% ( $n = 8$ ) reporting that they felt sad/depressed most or all of the time. For Gunn High School students of similar age, 30% reported being sad or depressed most or all the time.

### **Opinions on Status of Buena Vista Mobile Park – Table 7**

Since most of the survey respondents are attending school, the future of Buena Vista weighs heavily in the minds of nearly half of the teens overall and this worry increases to 71% for the 16-17 years who have expressed concern about not being able to graduate from Gunn High School if the Park closes. These concerns are likely related to the arguments many adults in Buena Vista and their Palo Alto supporters have been making about the scarcity of affordable housing in Silicon Valley. If forced to move because of the closure of the Park most families face the uncertainty of having nowhere to move to in this or surrounding areas.



### **Actions Taken By Teens in Response to Potential Closure – Table 8**

In order to assess the actions taken by Buena Vista adolescents in response to the possible closure of the Park, we asked a series of questions about how the teens have engaged with the community about the Park closure. About half of both males and females reported that they had participated in rallies and meetings to express their support against the closure of the Park. In addition, slightly more (57%) of the adolescents indicated that they had attended Palo Alto City Council meetings when Buena Vista was being discussed. We also asked whether the adolescents had participated with their parents in the actual search of housing should their family have to leave Buena Vista. To this question 55% of the respondents indicated that they had already searched or helped their parents search for housing.

### **Possible Future Actions – Table 9**

A final block of questions in the teen survey asked what activities the respondents were likely to participate in regarding the status of the Buena Vista community going forward. In response to whether they would be interested in participating in discussion groups with same-age peers, the youngest age group (12-13 year olds) expressed the most willingness (48%) to meet with age peers to discuss Buena Vista. To the question of whether they were likely to attend future city council meetings or public rallies to support Buena Vista, 55% of the females stated that they were “likely or very likely” to attend such events; males were slightly less likely (48%) to attend such events. Additionally, 71% of the 12-13 year olds indicated that they were likely to attend such events. In the past these younger teens have usually been seen accompanying their parents to city council meetings and public rallies. Lastly, the teens were asked how likely it would be for them to help their family search for available housing options if necessary. 76% of

the females said that it was “likely or very likely” that they would help, contrasted with 58% of the males. Not surprisingly, the two older groups of respondents (70% - 88%) indicated a greater likelihood of helping in the search for the housing available if forced to leave Buena Vista.

### **Conclusions**

In this study of 58 adolescents and young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 years of age, we found that overall the respondents believed strongly that they were supported by teachers and classmates and that their school encouraged them to do their best. The adolescents also expressed a strong bond with their schools. This finding is important because one of the arguments posed by the Buena Vista parents for wanting to remain in Palo Alto was the quality of the schools that their children attended and their strong connection to those schools.

Another important finding was the strong support adolescents received from their parents, the Buena Vista community generally, and the greater Palo Alto adult community. This finding attests to the positive assets reflected in the adolescents’ lives from family, school, Buena Vista and Palo Alto more broadly. These assets are likely linked to the high self-esteem and personal agency reported by both males and females and across all age groups. Coupled with this pattern is the fact that Buena Vista adolescents and young adults were nearly uniformly in agreement about the value of setting goals and planning for the future and “finding positives, even in the worst of situations”. Keeping with the idea of future planning and remaining optimistic about their future, the adolescents and young adults indicated their desire to attend college and receive 2 or more years of higher education.

On the question of mental health only a small number of adolescents reported feeling sad or depressed during the past month and the overwhelming majority felt that they could handle

their personal problems. These findings are important because they show that despite the enormous pressure that the Buena Vista families have been under for more than three years, the adolescents and young adults have remained resilient to threat of the closure of the Park and the loss of their home, school, friends, and communities. The youth of Buena Vista have assisted their parents in the search for adequate housing if the time comes that they need to relocate. In addition, they have participated in positive civic engagement to protest the closure of the Park and attended and spoken at public hearings. The Buena Vista youth express pride in their family and community and have remained optimistic about their future.

## **Part 2: Buena Vista Adolescent Survey – Full Report**

The loss of one's home can be a major life event that has the potential of creating enormous stress in a person's life. Residents of the Buena Vista Mobile Park in Palo Alto, California have lived with the possible closure of the Park since the fall of 2012 when the owner informed residents that he would begin the formal process mandated by state and local regulations to close the Park. Since then the 400 low-income residents, including approximately 130 children have received widespread publicity locally, nationally and internationally in the media as they fight to remain in their mobile homes in upscale Palo Alto (Dreman, 2012; Passariello, 2015; Neate, 2015). The majority of the residents are Hispanic and long-term residents of Buena Vista, some residing in the park for 20 or more years. Since the owner announced his intention to close the park, residents in their struggle to remain in their homes have received support from many individuals and groups in Palo Alto and surrounding communities.

The Buena Vista residents have engaged in various tactics to remain in their homes including the formation of an association to present a unified front against the park closure. In addition, residents secured legal counsel to fight the closure while also working to ensure that if the park closes they receive fair relocation compensation and fair market value for their mobile homes most of which are no longer mobile even if there was a location to move to. In the ensuring three years, the leadership of the resident's association and many Buena Vista residents has appeared at numerous community events to speak against the closure of the park. The residents and their supporters have offered testimony in public hearings that if the park closes many residents would lose geographic proximity to their places of employment since they would no longer be able to afford the cost of housing in Palo Alto or even in nearby Silicon Valley communities. In addition, school age children would be forced to attend lesser quality schools, and disabled and older residents would lose access to social and health services that are essential to their quality of life.

In addition, the resident's association has on two separate occasions offered to purchase the park from the owner. The first offer of purchase was for \$14 million and was turned down by the owner. In late spring 2015, the City Council of Palo Alto and the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisor each agree to put \$14.5 million earmarked for low income housing into a fund for purchase of the mobile park by a non-profit organization that operates mobile parks in Southern California. Subsequently, a second offer of \$29 million was offered to the owner for purchase of the park, but was again rejected by the owner (Sheyner, 2015). Further, over the course of three years all of the public events regarding the closure of the park have been well attended by the full spectrum of residents of Buena Vista including children and adolescents.

In 2014 Barr & Padilla conducted a census of all children below the age of 18 living in the park. In their study, Barr & Padilla identified all children living in Buena Vista (N=129) and gathered information on all school age children (N = 100), their grade level, and whether the children were enrolled in any special school programs (e.g., ESL, special education, reading, tutoring). All of the Buena Vista children and adolescents attend local elementary and secondary schools in the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD). Palo Alto is well known for the excellence of its public schools and many families move to Palo Alto specifically because of its schools.

The significance of the Barr & Padilla (2014) study was to draw attention to the Buena Vista children who benefitted from education in the PAUSD. This has become one of the salient issues in the debate over the closure of the park and one reason among several for why residents wish to remain in Palo Alto. The Buena Vista children are acutely aware that with closure of the Park they will most likely be forced to move to another school district and lose friends and teachers. Over the course of the more than three years that Buena Vista residents have waited for a decision of whether or not the Park will close, some adult residents with families have expressed the difficulties they have had in explaining to their children why the Buena Vista might close and what the consequences of moving would entail.

In the conducting the present Buena Vista youth survey, we purposefully began with questions about the support that students felt they received from their family, teachers and school age peers, others in the Buena Vista community and the larger Palo Alto community. These questions followed a developmental assets approach advocated by Benson (2006, 2011) who has shown that the more positive assets available to youth the more resilient they are to negative events in their life. In 2010 the PAUSD administered a developmental assets survey to all 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>,

and 9– 12th grade students in the district. Accordingly, underlying our survey was the question of whether the Buena Vista youth were resilient and if so in what ways was this being demonstrated by the youth.

The over-arching goal of our study was to assess whether the threat of the closure of Buena Vista was affecting the lives of Buena Vista youth. Specifically, the goals of the survey were multi-layered and included the following: (1) to gather information on the teens’ perception of the support they receive from their family, school community, and the greater Palo Alto community regarding the closure of the park; (2) to inquire whether the threat of losing their home was affecting them personally by disrupting their plans for the future and optimism around education; (3) to assess whether teens’ self-esteem and personal agency was negatively affected by the possible loss of their home; (4) to gather information on teens’ attitudes toward education, self-reported grades, and educational aspirations for the future; (5) to learn whether the teens were experiencing undue levels of sadness and depression at levels greater than other adolescents in the school community; (6) to ask teens about their beliefs related to Buena Vista and whether they believed closure was inevitable and whether their families had discussed plans to move elsewhere; and (7) to learn in what ways our respondents had participated in civic activities on behalf of Buena Vista. Thus, we hoped to better understand how the youth were coping during this period of uncertainty of not knowing the status of the Buena Vista and what would become of their families if forced to relocate away from Palo Alto.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of the majority of adolescents and young adults ( $N = 58$ , or 85% of eligible participants) residing with a parent or guardian in Buena Vista Mobile Park ( $M$  age = 16.12,  $SD = 3.36$ ; range = 11.55 – 23.82 yrs.). The sample consisted of 34 females and 24 males. See Table 1 for breakdown of participants by age categories and gender. All participants were contacted at their home or outdoors in common areas and informed of the study. For participants under the age of 18 at least one of their parents was informed of the study and provided with an Informed Consent Form for their signature. Respondents 18 or older were provided with an Informed Consent Form for their signature. All participants received a \$10 Jamba Juice gift card at the completion of the survey.

*Table 1.*  
Buena Vista Survey Respondents Demographics (May 2015)

<b>Age Category</b>	<b>Total <i>n</i></b>	<b>Mean Age</b>	<b>SD Age</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b><i>n</i> Female / Male</b>
<i>All ages</i>	58	16.12	3.36	100	34 / 24
12 - 13 years	21	12.65	.83	36.2	13 / 8
14 – 15 years	10	15.19	.63	17.2	7 / 3
16 – 17 years	8	16.84	.40	13.7	1 / 7
18 – 19 years	10	18.78	.56	17.2	7 / 3
20+ years	9	21.64	1.29	15.5	6 / 3

## **Materials**

Participants completed a 122-item survey questionnaire. Demographic information was collected as part of the survey, this included date of birth, name of school, and contact information. The survey included blocks of questions relevant to adolescents and young adults taken from the Hispanic Stress Inventory-Adolescent Version (HSI-A) (Cervantes, Padilla, Napper, & Goldbach, 2013), the Developmental Assets Profile for Adolescents (DAP-A) (Search Institute, 2009), and the Children’s Anxiety Life Interference Scale (CALIS) (Lyneham et al., 2013).

## **Procedure**

The survey was completed using iPad Minis and the *Offline Qualtrics* mobile application to collect responses. The mobile application *Notability* was used for presenting questions and audio-recording verbal responses. The completion of the questionnaire took approximately 20 – 30 minutes.

## **Findings**

### **School and Community Support**

The first goal of the analysis was to determine how much social support respondents felt they received from their school, the community, and from their family. The top portion of Table 2 shows percentages by gender and age categories of respondents indicating support received from the School (Overall), followed by My Teachers Care, School Encourages me, and Teachers push me to do my best. Importantly, 90% or higher of male and female respondents across all age categories reported that they received a high level of support from the school to the three school support questions. Further, this was true across all age categories from the youngest group (12-13 year olds) to the oldest (20+ years).

When the results from the Buena Vista adolescents was compared to the findings from the Developmental Assets study conducted in the district in 2010 with 7<sup>th</sup> grade middle school students at Terman Middle School (Search Institute, 2011a, Feb.) and 9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade students at Gunn High School (Search Institute, Feb. 2011b, Feb.), the two schools attended by our Buena Vista sample, we find that the Buena Vista students report a more favorable caring school climate than that reported by students at the two secondary schools in question. Only 47% of the non-Buena Vista middle school students and 41% of the non-Buena Vista high school students



reported a favorable caring school climate; however, we see that 90% or better of Buena Vista students report a favorable school climate the differences are startling to say the least.

Respondents were not as positive in their appraisal of support received from the community (see Table 2). Community support was broken up into classmates who care, Buena Vista residents who care, Buena Vista residents who listen to youth, Palo Alto residents who care about youth, and Palo Alto residents who listen to youth.

*Table 2.*

Community and family supports, in *percentage* of “agree” or “strongly agree” among survey participants.

Support Asset / Composite	Gender			Age Category (years)				
	Total (N=58)	Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
<i>School Support Composite</i>	92	90	95	90	90	88	100	100
My teachers care	92	90	95	86	90	100	100	100
School encourages me	94	93	95	90	90	100	100	100
Teachers push for my best	92	90	95	90	90	88	100	100
<i>Community Support Comp.</i>	48	56	38	62	50	25	40	44
Classmates care	80	90	67	81	78	63	86	100
Buena Vista cares	64	71	54	71	50	50	60	78
BV Adults listen	52	59	42	57	50	38	50	56
Palo Alto cares	71	74	67	81	90	63	50	56
PA Adults listen	60	62	57	76	40	57	50	56
<i>Family Support Comp.</i>	63	70	54	71	60	75	50	50
My parents check in	77	79	75	76	80	100	60	75
Parents ask about school	78	83	71	90	70	88	57	50
Parents attend school mtgs.	52	55	48	62	40	63	57	0
Parents push for my best	91	91	92	90	80	100	90	100

As shown in Table 2, males (38%) overall indicate lower levels of perceived support than females (56%) across all Community Support questions. Also student in the 16-17 age group

reported the lowest level of overall community support (25%), especially among classmates care (63%) and surprisingly they showed less support received from Buena Vista adults for caring and listening (50% and 38%) than from Palo Alto adults (63% and 57%). An inspection of Table 2 for community support, however, does show that overall Buena Vista teens do feel supported in their spheres of contact with adults in both the Buena Vista community and in the broader Palo Alto community.

As for Family Support respondents across gender and age groups were in agreement that parents supported them in their school related efforts by asking about school, attending school meetings, and pushing them to do their best (80% - 100% across gender and age categories).

### **Planning, Optimism, and Stability against Worrying**

The next set of questions asked respondents to rate their level of *planning* for the future, their *optimism*, and whether they *worry and get upset*. The percentages of respondents “agreeing/strongly agreeing” to this block of question are shown in Table 3. The percent of females (85%) and males (88%) scoring high on the composite score for “planning” is interesting because it points to the fact that these adolescents and young adults “like to make plans for the future,” “know what I want out of life,” and “set goals for the near future”. Very similar scores were obtained on the composite score for “Optimism”. The questions comprising the composite were “I can usually find a bright side,” and “I find positives, even in the worst”. This shows that despite the enormous uncertainty facing Buena Visit youth over the past three years regarding the possible closure of the park and the loss of their home, school, and community this has not broken their spirit and they remain optimistic about their life and their future. This attests to the resilience that these teens are demonstrating in the face of a direct threat to their home and the possible breakup of their family who may not be able to relocate together as a family unit.

Finally, the composite score to the following questions “I don’t usually get worried”, and “I don’t easily get upset,” add evidence to the fact that these adolescents are emotionally secure despite the uncertainty of their families’ future prospects of remaining in their mobile homes. Interestingly, the percent of teens responding agree or strongly agree to the questions about “get worried” are relatively high especially for the younger respondents, nonetheless, these youth remain optimistic and able to look beyond the immediate possibility of losing their home.

**Table 3.**  
Persistence and optimism, in *percentage* of “agree” or “strongly agree” among survey participants.

Planning, Optimism, and Stability Composite Values	Gender			Age Category (years)				
	Total (N=58)	Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
<i>“Planning” Composite</i>	86	85	88	90	70	88	100	78
I like to make plans for the future	91	91	92	100	80	86	100	78
I know what I want out of life	93	91	96	90	80	100	100	100
It’s helpful to set goals for the near future	98	97	100	100	90	100	100	100
<i>“Optimism” Composite</i>	86	88	83	90	80	63	100	89
I can usually find a bright side	90	91	88	95	90	63	100	89
I find positives, even in the worst situations	95	97	92	95	80	100	100	100
<i>“Stability against Worry” Comp.</i>	45	38	54	57	50	63	10	33
I don't usually get worried	52	41	67	67	50	63	30	33
I don't easily get upset	60	59	63	76	70	63	30	44

In comparing the Buena Vista findings on planning for the future with the larger Developmental Asset findings again the differences are revealing. Whereas the overwhelming majority of Buena Vista adolescents reported that they liked to plan and that it was helpful to set goals for the future, this was less true with Palo Alto middle school (34%) and high school

students (36%) (Search Institute Survey: Terman Middle School, 2011; Search Institute Survey; Gunn High School, 2011). Why this difference emerged between the Buena Vista sample and the larger Palo Alto sample is not clear, but it does attest to the resilience of the Buena Vista sample that despite the uncertainty of whether they will lose their homes they are able to look positively toward the future and make plans.

### **Self-esteem and self-agency**

Table 4 presents information on respondent's self-esteem and feeling of personal agency (sense of control). On the composite score for self-esteem there is little difference between females (68% vs. 71%) reporting agree or strongly agree to the four self-esteem questions: "All in all, I like myself", "I have much to be proud of", "All in all, I am glad I am me", and "I have much control over things in my life." Examining the percent agree across age categories, we see that all age groups show high self-esteem. Although the Ns are small within each age category the older adolescents were somewhat more likely to report less positive self-esteem than younger students. Students in the 16-17 age group (N=8) scored the lowest compared to the other age categories. One question in this set that did show a gender difference was "I have much to be proud of" with males less likely to endorse this item (58%) than their female (76%) counterparts.

Self-esteem was also included on the Developmental Assets study and again we see striking differences between the Buena Vista sample and Palo Alto adolescents. Overall, 52% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Palo Alto reported having a high self-esteem and this declined to 43% among the high school students attending the same high school as the Buena Vista students.

Similar to what was found in regard to Planning, three quarters of the males and females endorsed the question "I will have a good life when I am older". This future oriented positive thinking can be seen across ages, with between 50% and 90% agreeing to this statement.

Two questions assessed the adolescents feeling of Self-Agency. These questions were: “I don’t give up when things get hard,” and “I have much control over things in my life.”

*Table 4.*  
Self-esteem and agency, in *percentage* of “agree” or “strongly agree” among participants.

Self-Concept and Other Measures	Total (N=58)	Gender		Age Category (years)				
		Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
<i>“Self-Esteem” Composite</i>	69	68	71	86	80	50	50	56
All in all, I like myself	84	85	83	90	90	63	80	89
I have much to be proud of	69	76	58	76	70	50	70	67
All in all, I am glad I am me	93	91	96	100	90	75	90	100
I have a strong sense of life goals	86	88	83	86	90	75	80	100
<i>“Self-Agency” Composite</i>	29	26	33	19	30	38	40	33
I don’t give up when things get hard	66	56	79	71	60	75	60	56
I have much control over things in my life	31	26	38	5	30	50	60	44
<i>Positive View of Future</i>								
I will have a good life when I am older	72	71	75	71	90	50	80	67
<i>Equality</i>								
Standing up for equality is important to me	93	97	88	95	100	75	100	89
<i>Responsibility</i>								
I do my best, even with work I don’t like	78	85	67	76	80	88	80	67

The composite score for these two items were 26% agree/strongly agree for females and 33% for males. Males were more adamant about not giving up when things got hard (79%) than their female counterparts at the mobile park (56%). And not surprisingly, the youngest age group of 12-13 year olds (N=21) was the least likely to agree to the self-agency questions with just 5% in agreement. This should not be a surprise because this age group (12-13 years) while having

entered adolescence is still very dependent on their adult caretakers. In addition, since respondents come primarily from immigrant families most likely experience strong family values around respect for elders and dependency on their parents for decision making.

Also shown on Table 4 is the percent agreement to the question of “Standing up for equality is important to me”. Adolescents were very supportive of standing up for equality (97% females and 88% males) and this can be seen across all age categories. A similar question in the Development Assets survey revealed that a lesser percent of middle school (61%) and high school students (57%) felt as strongly about equality as the Buena Vista adolescents. Obviously, adolescents, who see disparities as the Buena Vista students must see on a daily basis, are more predisposed to stand up and take a position against inequality than are students who enjoy a higher socioeconomic status.

Also shown in Table 4 are percent agree responses to the question “I do my best, even with work I don’t like.” The adolescents agreed that doing their best even when the work was not to their liking (overall 85% females and 67% males) was important to them and a reflection of their embracing of responsibility. We believe that the high rate of agreeing to this item across gender and age categories reflects the value of hard work learned from their parents most of whom are immigrants.

### **Academic-related Measures**

Respondents were asked a set of question pertaining to their educational aspirations, grades and homework, whether they participated in any after-school programs, and response to “try my best in school” and “care about my school”. Table 5 presents the percentage of participants responding to each question. The educational aspirations of Buena Vista youth indicated that most hoped to continue their education beyond high school. Specifically, more

than 80% of males and females reported that they hoped to attend at least 2 of colleges following high school graduation, and with 58% of girls and 75% of boys aspiring to attend 4 or more years of college.

Since attending college is tied directly to academic performance in high school, students were asked to self-report their grades by indicating whether their grades were about “half As and Bs or better”. Overall, 45% of the females answered in the affirmative regarding A and B grades whereas fewer males (30%) self-reported their grades in this range. Also with students in the age ranges of 14-15 and 16-17 only 10% and 12% respectively reported about half “As” and “Bs” for their grades. This corresponds to students in the 10 through 12<sup>th</sup> grades where the academic pressure for grades is known to be severe in the PAUSD.

Also a greater number of females reported participation in some form of after-school academic program compared to the male respondents (68% vs. 42%). Surprisingly, very few respondents reported that they did 3 or more hours of homework each night (males 10% and females 17%). There was a good amount of variability on this question with 40% of the 14-15 years answering affirmatively to the question of 3 hours or more of homework whereas none of the 16-17 and 18-19 year olds reported spending 3 hours or more doing homework. Interestingly, 25% of the 20+ year old respondents replied that they did at least 3 hours of homework which we assume means that these respondents were attending college. A very important point to make about time spent on homework is that it is very likely that very few of our respondents had the luxury of space in their cramped mobile homes to be able to study with any amount of privacy or time free of distractions from other members of the household. In this respect the Buena Vista teens are at a major academic disadvantage compared to most PAUSD secondary level students who come from middle class homes where most probably have their

own designated private study areas equipped with an Internet connection and a computer. Few of the homes in Buena Vista have an Internet connection much less a computer. These students must rely on computers at school for completing required homework assignments.

*Table 5.*  
Academic Measures. Values reported in *percentage* of participants for each question.

Academic-Related Measures	Gender			Age Category (years)				
	Total (N=58)	Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
Currently in school or occupation	97	97	96	100	100	100	80	100
Hope to attend 2 or more years of college	82	82	83	80	70	87	90	87
Hope to attend 4 or more years of college	65	58	75	57	60	87	50	87
Grades are "Half As and Bs" or above	39	45	30	65	10	12	40	37
Participate in an after-school program (e.g., DreamCatchers)	57	68	42	57	90	50	60	22
Do 3 or more hours of homework per night	14	17	10	10	40	0	0	25
<i>Achievement Motivation</i>								
"I try my best in school" (% agree/strongly agree)	96	100	90	90	100	100	100	100
<i>Bonding to School</i>								
"I care about my school" (% agree/strongly agree)	94	93	95	100	90	88	86	100

What was uniformly true as can be seen in Table 5 is that nearly all (90-100%) of the respondents indicated that they were trying their “best in school”. This question on the Developmental Assets questionnaire recognizes commitment to learning and achievement motivation. Of the Palo Alto 7<sup>th</sup> grade students who completed the Developmental Assets questionnaire 88% indicated support for this item; and of the high school students 81% were in agreement that they tried hard to do their best in school. In similar fashion almost all of the respondents (93-95%) stated that they cared about their school. This “bonding to school”



compares exceedingly well with Palo Alto 7<sup>th</sup> grade students of whom 86% endorsed this item and 75% of Palo Alto high school students who similarly agreed that they cared about school. These findings are very positive because they demonstrate that while the Buena Vista students are a very marginalized population in Palo Alto because of their low-income status, the adolescents' nonetheless have a strong sense of belonging to their school community which is known to correlate highly with academic achievement.

### **Depression, Anxiety, and Stress**

To assess the psychological well-being of Buena Vista adolescents, we included a question that asked "I have felt sad or depressed during the last month." Students responded "All of the time," "Most of the time," "Some of the time," "Once in a while," and "Not at all". None of the younger Buena Vista students (12-13; 14-15 year olds) reported feeling sad or depressed recently. When examining responses from Terman Middle School 7<sup>th</sup> graders who answered the same question as part of the 2010 Developmental Assets survey in the school district 6% of the students reported that they felt sad all or most of the time. For the older Buena Vista respondents, overall 12% of the girls and 8% of the boys answered that they had experienced sadness or depression most or all of the time in the past month. This compared favorably similar response rates from Gunn High School students to the 2010 Developmental Assets survey where 16% of the girls reported feeling sad or depressed most or all of the time in the last month. This changed somewhat with 38% (N=8) of the Buena Vista 16-17 year olds reporting that they felt sad/depressed most or all of the time. For Gunn High School students of similar age 30% reported being sad or depressed most or all the time. This was followed by 10% and 22% for the two oldest age groups of Buena Vista respondents.

This question was followed by “Fears and worries upset and distress me”. To this question 65% of the girls, but only 33% of the boys stated that this was true for them “often” or “all the time”. Across the age categories only the older groups reported experiencing fears and worries (30% and 22%, respectively). Also shown in Table 6 in this block of questions was “Fears and worries are interfering with multiple aspects of my life (school, family, friends” and both males and females had nearly identical responses, 25% and 21%, to whether their life was being disrupted by fears and worries. A similar response pattern was found across age groups, except for the oldest group (20+ years; N=9) of whom 33% indicated that fears and worries were causing possible difficulties in their life.

A final set of questions here asked about concerns with personal stress. (See Table 6) The first question read, “I feel like I can’t handle my personal problems.” Very few students answered affirmatively to this question with only a single adolescent reporting difficulty managing with personal problems. This was followed by “I feel unable to control important things in my life.” Twenty-two percent of the adolescents reported that this was true for them “often” or “all the time” with a greater percent of females (30%) than males (13%) reporting feeling overwhelmed and unable to control things in their life.

A companion question asked, “I feel like things are not going my way.” Overall, 9% of females and 4% of males reported feeling this way. Another question in this set asked, “Difficulties are piling up, I can’t overcome them.” Slightly more students overall (14%) reported feeling this way often or all the time. Again more females (18%) than males (8%) report difficulty with things piling on them, and only in the 18-19 year old category (N=10) do 40% of the students report difficulty with things piling up on them.

*Table 6.*

Depression, anxiety, and stress questions, measured in percentage of “Often” or “All of the Time” among responses.

Depression, anxiety, and stress-related questions	Total (N=58)	Gender		Age Category (years)				
		Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
I have felt sad or depressed during the last month	10	12	8	0	0	38	10	22
Fears and worries upset and distress me	17	65	33	10	10	25	30	22
Fears and worries interfere with multiple aspects of my life (school, family, friends)	22	21	25	24	20	20	10	33
<i>Perceived Stress Scale</i>	10	15	4	5	0	13	20	22
In the last month...								
I feel like I can't handle my personal problems	2	0	4	0	0	13	0	0
I feel unable to control important things in life	22	30	13	29	10	13	22	33
I feel like things are not going my way	7	9	4	10	0	13	0	11
Difficulties are piling up, I can't overcome them	14	18	8	0	20	13	40	11
<i>Sought Counseling</i>								
Sought school, religious, or other counseling	17	15	21	29	0	25	10	11

A final item asked adolescents whether they had sought counseling at their school or church or from any other agency that provides counseling services in the community. Only 15% of females and 21% of males indicated that they had sought some form of counseling.

Interestingly, among the youngest group of respondents (12-13 year olds) 29% reported seeking some form of counseling and this was followed by the 16-17 year olds of whom 25% reported having sought counseling.

### **Opinions and Perspectives on Status of Buena Vista Mobile Park**

This next block of questions was specific to Buena Vista Mobile Park and adolescents' opinions and beliefs about what was going to happen with the Park. To start we were interested in learning how long the adolescents had lived in Buena Vista. Overall, 79% of the teens indicated that they had lived in Buena Vista for 5 or more years; with more girls (91%) answering that they had lived in Buena Vista for 5 or more years compared to boys (63%). Similar percentages can be seen in Table 7 for the duration of residence at Buena Vista across all age categories. Although we cannot say for certain, it is likely that most of the teens that participated in the survey had lived in Buena Vista for the majority of their life. In addition, nearly half the girls (44%) and boys (54%) in the survey said, "Most or all of my friends live in Buena Vista."

To the question "I think Buena Vista Park will likely close", 48% of the girls and 38% of the boys believe that ultimately the Park faces closure. In addition as can be seen in Table 7 overall about a third of the adolescents indicate that they "have been stressed because of the possible park closure" with girls reporting a larger impact on them (41%) than was true for boys (17%). The possible Park closure for nearly half of the adolescents (45%) means that they will likely have to attend a different school; also nearly half of the respondents (45%) indicate that the possible park closure has impacted their decisions for the future. Since most of the survey respondents are attending school the future of Buena Vista weighs heavily on nearly half of the teens and this increases to 71% for the 16-17 years who have expressed concern about not being able to graduate from Gunn High School if the Park closes.

Also shown in Table 7 are 3 questions pertaining to how the families of the adolescents are communicating to their children about the possible closure of Buena Vista. Overall, 76% of the respondents indicated that their parents have talked to them about the closure of the park with

more girls (88%) than boys (58%) saying parents had discussed the Park closure with them.

Across age categories all the respondents were fairly uniform in their agreement about their parents discussing the closure of the Park with them. Following up on this, 57% of the

*Table 7.*

Opinions and perspectives related to Buena Vista Mobile Park, in percentage of “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” among responses.

Opinions specific to Buena Vista Park and possible closure	Total (N=58)	Gender		Age Category (years)				
		Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
"I think Buena Vista Park will likely close"	44	48	38	14	78	50	40	78
"I have been stressed b/c of possible park closure"	31	41	17	14	40	25	50	44
"I have lived in BV for 5 or more years"	79	91	63	76	90	63	80	89
"Most or all of my friends live in BV"	48	44	54	67	30	63	40	22
"I don't think will stay at my same school"	45	47	42	38	40	71	50	40
"BV closure has impacted decisions on future"	45	50	38	48	50	63	30	33
"My parents have talked to me about closure"	76	88	58	71	80	88	70	78
"My family has discussed plan if moving"	57	65	46	71	60	63	50	22
"My family knows where we would move"	20	24	13	24	20	25	20	0

respondents said that their parents had discussed a plan to move in the eventuality of closure.

When examining this question across the age groupings we see that 71% of the youngest respondents (12-13 year olds) reported that their parents had discussed a plan if they had to move, but this dropped to just 22% for the oldest group (20+ years). Most likely the older group

were making their own plans to relocate if necessary. Importantly, when asked the question “My family knows where we would move” only 20% of the respondents answered affirmatively. This supports the contention that many adults in Buena Vista and their Palo Alto supporters have been making about the scarcity of affordable housing in Silicon Valley. If forced to move because of the closure of the Park most families face the uncertainty of having nowhere to move to in Silicon Valley

### **Actions Taken By Teens in Response to Buena Vista Closure**

In order to assess the actions taken by Buena Vista adolescents in response to the possible closure of the Park, we asked a series of questions about how the teens have engaged with the community about the Park closure. As shown in Table 8, 50% of both males and females reported that they had participated in rallies and meetings to express their support against the closure of the Park. In addition, slightly more (57%) of the adolescents indicated that they had attended Palo Alto City Council meetings when Buena Vista was being discussed. Adolescents were also asked whether they had spoken to others outside of Buena Vista about the Park closure and overall 45% said that they had spoken to non-park residents about the possible closure of Buena Vista. Also more adolescents (52%) stated that they had “spoken to same-age peers about closure of the park”. Interestingly, 81% of the youngest age group (12-13 year olds) said they had talked to peers. Although we cannot ascertain to whom these youngsters were talking to about Buena Vista, it is likely that much of this discussion could have been with school peers since Buena Vista has become a hotly discussed topic in the media, among Palo Alto residents, and with school administrators and teachers.

*Table 8.*

Actions taken related to Buena Vista Park closure, reported in percentages of participant responses.

Action taken in response to possible closure of Buena Vista Park	Gender			Age Category (years)				
	Total (N=58)	Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
Participated in park meetings / rallies	52	53	50	67	50	50	10	67
Attended city council meetings	57	62	50	62	70	50	40	56
Searched or help parents search for housing	55	53	58	57	40	63	50	67
Filled out housing waitlist forms	17	26	4	19	30	0	10	22
Spoken to others outside BV about park closure	45	47	42	52	30	38	40	56
Spoken to same-age peers about closure	52	56	46	81	40	30	20	44

We also asked whether the adolescents had participated with their parents in the actual search of housing should their family have to leave Buena Vista. To this question 55% of the respondents indicated that they had “searched or helped their parents search for housing. This was true for both males and females and across age groups with more of the oldest respondents (67%) indicating that they had actively engaged in helping their parents search for other housing alternatives. However, only 17% overall said that they had assisted their parents in filling out waitlist forms for low-income housing alternatives. This is not surprising since it likely that very few families have actually applied for low-income housing.

### **Possible Future Actions in Response to Potential Park Closure**

A final block of questions in the teen survey asked what activities the respondents were “Likely” or “Very Likely” to participate in regarding the status of the Buena Vista community going forward given the uncertain status of the Park. The first question asked whether the respondents would be interested in participating in discussion groups with same-age peers to

enlightening peers on the status of Buena Vista. 39% of both males and females indicated that they were likely (or very likely) to participate in peer group discussions regarding the status of their home in Buena Vista. The youngest age group (12-13 years old) expressed the most willingness (48%) to meet with age peers to discuss Buena Vista.

*Table 9*  
Interest in potential future park action, reported in percentage of “Likely” or “Very Likely” among participant responses.

Interest in future park action or related events	Total (N=58)	Gender		Age Category (years)				
		Female (N=34)	Male (N=24)	12-13 (N=21)	14-15 (N=10)	16-17 (N=8)	18-19 (N=10)	20+ (N=9)
Interested in discussion group with other same-age peers about park events	39	39	39	48	30	43	30	38
Likely to attend future park meetings for support or questions	34	30	39	43	10	43	30	38
Likely to attend future city council meetings or rallies	52	55	48	71	50	43	30	38
Likely to help family search for best housing available	68	76	58	62	50	88	70	88

Another question asked the likelihood of attending future park meetings to express their support of Buena Vista. To this question only about a third or 34% of the teens responded that they would attend Park meetings to express their support for the community. This is not surprising since the residents association meets regularly with their attorneys who represent them in their struggle to keep the Park open. However, these meeting are typically held for the adult residents who are members of the residents’ association, and not for the teens although adolescents are not excluded from attending these community meetings. To the question of whether they were likely to attend future city council meetings or public rallies to support Buena



Vista, 55% of the females stated that they were “likely or very likely” to attend such events. Males were slightly less likely (48%) to attend such events. Also 71% of the 12-13 year olds indicated that they were “likely” to attend such events. In the past these younger teens have usually been seen accompanying their parents to city council meetings and public rallies. As shown in Table 9 the older teens were less likely to attend such events and we can speculate that this is due to busier schedules with after school activities including homework, sports programs, or work.

Lastly the teens were asked how likely it would be for them to help their family search for available housing options if necessary. 76% of the females said that it was “likely or very likely” that they would help and this contrasted with 58% of the males. Not surprisingly, the two older groups of respondents (70% - 88%) indicated a greater likelihood of helping in the search for the housing available if forced to leave Buena Vista.

### **Conclusions**

In this study of 58 adolescents and young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 years of age, we found that overall the respondents believed strongly that they were supported by teachers and classmates and that the school encouraged them to do their best. The adolescents also expressed a strongly bond (90%) with their school. This finding is important because one of the arguments posed by the Buena Vista parents for wanting to remain in Palo Alto was the quality of the schools that their children attended.

Another important finding was the strong support that adolescents received from their parents, the Buena Vista community generally, and the greater Palo Alto adult community. This attests to the positive assets reflected in the adolescents’ lives from family, school, Buena Vista and the broader Palo Alto community. These assets are likely linked to the high self-esteem and

personal agency reported by both males and females and across all age groups. Coupled with this too is the fact that Buena Vista adolescents and young adults were nearly uniformly in agreement about the value of setting goals and planning for the future and finding “positives, even in the worst of situations”. Keeping with the idea of future planning and remaining optimistic about their future the adolescents and young adults indicated their desire to attend college and receive 2 or more years of higher education.

On the question of mental health only a small number of females (12%) and males (8%) reported feeling sad or depressed during the past month and the overwhelming majority felt that they could handle their personal problems. These findings are important because they show that despite the enormous pressure that the Buena Vista families have been under for more than three years, the adolescents and young adults have not succumbed and have remained resilient to threat of the closure of the Park and the loss of their home, school, friends and community.

The youth of Buena Vista although living with the chronic stress of the Park closure have assisted their parents in the search for adequate housing if the time comes that they need to relocate. In addition, they have participated in positive civic engagement to protest the closure of the Park and attended and spoken at public hearings. The Buena Vista youth have remained optimistic about their future and express pride in their family and community.

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