

Better to give and receive: Students and neighbors
learn to share resources to benefit their communities.



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Crime - Drugs - Building
Child Abuse - School - Respect

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Pepperdine University's National School Safety Center is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. NSSC's goal is to promote school safety, improve discipline, increase attendance, and suppress drug traffic and abuse in all our nation's schools.

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School Safety

School Safety is published by the National School Safety Center to communicate current trends and effective programs in school safety to educators, law enforcers, lawyers, judges, government officials, business leaders, the media and the public. Publication dates are September (Fall issue), January (Winter issue) and May (Spring issue). Annual subscription: \$9.00.

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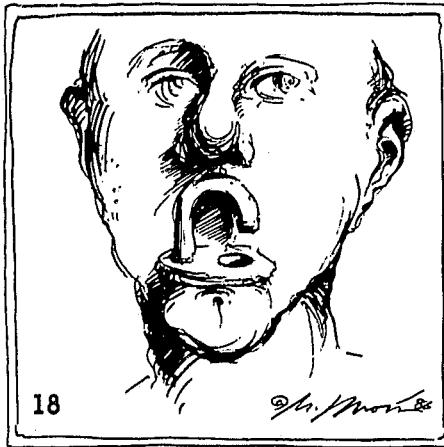
Prepared under Grant No. 85-MU-CX-0003 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education or Pepperdine University.

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About the cover:

Schools are benefiting from a resurgence of community involvement — from private citizens, commercial businesses and public agencies — stimulated both by positive school-public relations and, unfortunately, by a series of crime-related crises. Illustration by Deborah Zemke.
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BY JOYCE STEVENS

Boston's inner-city students are proud and protective of their neighborhoods. Creative history and architecture lessons have helped these kids turn a new corner.

Friendly foundations

In 1981, historic buildings were burning in the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury and arson was on the front pages of the city's newspapers. Concerned that their students might be setting the fires — a fear that later proved to be unjustified — teachers at the James P. Timilty Middle School asked the Historic Neighborhoods Foundation (HNF) to develop a program to help change students' attitudes toward their school's neighborhood and learn to value the local historic architecture.

Although shabby and dilapidated, many old houses in Roxbury — designed in popular 19th century styles, including Greek Revival, French Second Empire and Queen Anne — have survived since the 1800s. The neighborhood also has some of Boston's most picturesque landscape formations, including unusual outcroppings of the local stone — Roxbury puddingstone — and century-old trees and shrubs.

Today, most of the neighborhood's vandalized and abandoned buildings have been restored, and the attitudes of both students and teachers about the area around their school has changed dramatically. When HNF first asked

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students what they found in their school neighborhood, they answered, "Broken glass...dope...trash...garbage."

After our first foray into the streets around the school, located on Roxbury's Eliot Square, students were asked what they had seen. They answered, "Ionic columns...quoins (a zig-zag pattern of stone on the corner of a building)... brackets (a small piece of wood or stone to support the weight of a roof)." One girl had ventured onto the grounds of a local nursing home to discover a "fantasy garden" that wasn't visible to people on the street.

Once students realized that they went to school in a neighborhood of historic and architectural value, the students' self-esteem soared. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the school was named one of the 13 finest middle schools in the country in 1989.

Creating a school program

To develop the HNF program, the neighborhood's history first was researched at local libraries and with the help of historical groups. It was learned that originally Eliot Square and the surrounding neighborhood of Fort Hill had been farmland. In the 1840s, the advent of the railroad had enabled a few wealthy Bostonians to build country estates in Roxbury. In the 19th century, the neighborhood attracted the upper classes because of its proximity to Bos-

ton, the captivating views from Fort Hill, and the picturesque landscape.

In the 1880s and 1890s, many immigrants left the center city for the streetcar suburbs, which included Roxbury. By the 1950s, Roxbury had long been a Jewish neighborhood. But the post-war move to suburban towns and the urban renewal taking place in Boston's South End changed that. Black people began to move out of the South End into Roxbury, filling the gap left by residents who had moved to the suburbs. Today, Roxbury is a middle-class neighborhood where both blacks and whites live. While some students who attend the local schools live in Roxbury, others are bused from Charlestown and Beacon Hill as part of a court desegregation order.

In addition to researching the area's history, HNF took slides of the neighborhood's architecture and landscape, including full views of buildings and close-up shots of architectural details, such as stained glass windows and hand-carved columns.

As HNF presented a slide show that began with photos of the school building itself, students learned the neighborhood's history and discussed what they noticed about the buildings.

A few days later, students went on an architectural treasure hunt in the neighborhood, armed with maps and color photocopies of architectural details. As



HNF takes students on architectural treasure hunts and enlists professional architects to explain the intricacies of blueprints. *Photographs by Jean McCord, left, and Michael Quan, below.*



they searched for the buildings in their pictures, neighborhood residents often came outside to ask why students had gathered to look at their houses. Some residents joined the treasure hunt and learned the terms for such architectural features as bay and dormer windows and Ionic and Doric columns.

Once students tracked down their treasure hunt buildings, they discussed questions listed on the back of their photocopies. For example, they were asked to think about why the house had a bay window, how old the tree in front of the building might be, and whether they could identify the materials used in the building.

The Timilty Middle School program served as a pilot project and lasted for six weeks. Since 1981, under matching grants from the Massachusetts Council of the Arts and Humanities and a growing list of corporation and foundation supporters, HNF has conducted school programs in 17 Boston neighborhoods, helping students from various parts of the city discover shared architectural styles and social settlement patterns across neighborhood boundaries.

A change in students' attitudes

The results have been gratifying. Students have learned that Roxbury has its own landmark tower on Fort Hill, just as Beacon Hill is crowned with a Bulfinch-designed beacon and Charlestown with the Bunker Hill Monument. One student who studied neighborhood doorways noticed that the Doric column by his own front door needed repair and helped his father to fix it. Another student persuaded his parents to peel asphalt tiles off his house to expose wooden shingle patterns.

The change in student attitudes was especially dramatic considering Bostonians' strong sense of turf, which often keeps people from venturing into unfamiliar neighborhoods. For example, one black student said that before she left on a trip to a different area of the city, her mother had cautioned her, "Be on the alert, just be on the alert." And when sixth-graders from Roxbury first visited Charlestown on the HNF program, they tasted the water from a public fountain and were surprised to find that it didn't taste like Roxbury's water. However, some students found that they

actually *liked* exploring unknown territory. In fact, a student who lived in the Italian neighborhood of East Boston visited Roxbury on one of the programs and later decided to attend the Timilty School.

The renewed enthusiasm for the neighborhoods has had an effect on residents as well. For example, local activists cleared empty lots of debris and planted community gardens, and residents have become more actively involved in decisions about neighborhood construction.

Involvement for all grade levels

During the past seven years, HNF has expanded its involvement in local schools, developing different programs for grade levels from first grade through high school.

For example, first-graders discover Boston's neighborhood of Beacon Hill through a HNF program based on the children's book *Make Way for Ducklings*. As they trace the route of Mr. and Mrs. Mallard — quacking like the ducks in the book — they walk through Boston Common, look at the Civil War Mem-

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orial honoring the country's first black regiment, clean their shoes on boot scrapers, and touch the bricks of town-houses on the way to the Swan Boats in Boston's Public Garden. This program uses a beloved children's story to dramatize positive aspects of a city neighborhood. City children develop a sense of pride in where they live, and suburban children, many of whom see only negative stereotypes of cities in the media, learn the value of urban living.

Two programs are geared toward third- and fifth-graders: "In Search of Grandmother's House" and "That's My Neighborhood!" "In Search of Grandmother's House" begins with students seeing a 1930s Crosley radio and listening to a radio commercial for Pepsi ("12 big ounces, that's a lot; and all for a nickel, nickel, nickel..."). Students compare maps and historic photographs of the school neighborhood in the 1930s with those of today.

Then grandmothers who grew up in the school's neighborhood are brought into the classroom — and something magical happens. As the grandmothers describe the places that were important to them while they were growing up, the children feel transported into a slower, more comfortably paced world. They hear about making lemon sherbet at home on Sunday afternoons, try on hats that were stylish in the 1930s, and examine objects that the grandmothers bring in, such as soap savers, bureau scarves, and antique irons and toys.

Because 80 percent of Boston's students are from minority backgrounds, many of them immigrants, it's important for them to hear that life also was a struggle for these grandmothers and that they too were once immigrants to the neighborhood. By the time the program concludes with a grandmother-guided tour of the school's neighborhood, the past has become real to the children.

As part of "That's My Neighborhood!", third- and fifth-grade students read *Maria's House*, a story about a child who is ashamed to draw a picture of her home for a museum art class.

The child lives in an urban ethnic neighborhood, rather than in the suburbs like the other children in the class. After discussing the book, students see slides of buildings around their schools and homes, paint a mural of their school neighborhood, and visit a Boston museum where a curator takes them on a tour. Students on these programs have been served ginger ale from silver trays at the Boston Athenaeum, have seen prints of cityscapes at the Museum of Fine Arts, and have enjoyed Spanish art at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Middle school students go on architectural treasure hunts — called "Just Around the Corner" — that initiated HNF's involvement in schools. Many students make connections with their neighborhood's assets for the first time. "I've walked up and down this street every day and never noticed it before" is the kind of comment often heard after a neighborhood exploration. In Mattapan, for example, many students had never noticed the old fruit trees, left over from a bygone era of orchards and farms, or the Palladian windows — status symbols in American architecture since before 1800 — on the street next to the school.

They paint pictures that compare the development of architectural styles in the neighborhood around their homes and around their schools. Their paintings have been displayed at city hall, the state house and a downtown bank; several students even have sold their work.

Focusing on careers

Recently, HNF has started a new three-month program for high school students called "City/Build." The goal of this program, funded by the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services, is to show students the job opportunities generated by the city's construction boom.

Students learn to read site plans, floor plans, elevations and sections. Architects and developers visit classrooms and students go to construction sites where they meet engineers and

construction managers. Before taking part in this program, many students had never been inside a downtown tower, much less to the 27th floor. The elevator scared them and it wasn't until they struck up a conversation with window washers perched outside that they ventured near the windows.

After having talked with the people responsible for these projects, students learn what preparation is required to get construction jobs. They also see successful people from their own racial and ethnic backgrounds who have decided not to move to the suburbs, but to stay in their city neighborhoods and invest in their neighborhood's future.

This year the National Endowment for the Arts has made it possible for HNF to work in two rural schools, where it was found that, no matter where students live, they want to understand how their town came to look the way it does.

Students who participate in HNF's programs learn that the city belongs to them. They make personal connections with the places they see every day and begin to take pride in themselves as city residents. In turn, community people who take part in the programs learn about neighborhood places that are important to students. One architect wrote: "I probably learned more about the neighborhoods of Boston from the children of these neighborhoods than I was able to teach. It's personally satisfying to think that, although I probably will never feel like a member of more than one of Boston's neighborhoods, I will know the buildings and the roads of other neighborhoods, and I will understand enough to participate in their evolution."

Given the opportunity to make connections with students through well-structured programs, community people can renew their faith in schools and today's youth. Just as importantly, they can give students a sense of pride in their neighborhood and a knowledge of the history and architectural beauty that surround them. □