



CAREER PATHWAY AT CASTLEMONT HIGH SCHOOL

YOUTH-DRIVEN HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth UpRising is a community transformation organization based in East Oakland, California. Located next-door to Castlemont High School, Youth UpRising has played a significant role in the evolution and academic support of the school since 2009. Castlemont High School has a history of challenges and continues to face high dropout rates and low enrollment. East Oakland, and especially the Castlemont Community, has suffered from generations of disinvestment, high crime rates, and poor health outcomes compared to the rest of Oakland and Alameda County. On average, someone living in the flatlands of East Oakland has a life expectancy of 15 years less than someone living just 1.5 miles away in the Oakland Hills. The Castlemont neighborhood is characterized as a food desert, an early childhood education desert, a center of unemployment and concentrated poverty lacking a local economy, and, some might argue, the epicenter of violence. These social, economic, and environmental deficits have dramatic cumulative impacts on health.

This report presents the process, findings, and recommendations from the Youth-Driven Health Impact Assessment (HIA), conducted by Youth Researchers and Adult Allies at Youth UpRising with the support of Human Impact Partners (HIP). This HIA was supported by a grant from the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts with funding from the California Endowment. The HIA took place between May 2013 and January 2014. Over the course of the 9 months, Youth Researchers and Adult Allies moved through the steps of HIA, emphasizing the Youth Researchers' voice, drive, and direction throughout the process. The focus of the HIA was to understand the characteristics and potential health impacts of the addition of a second career academy to Castlemont High School in East Oakland, California. This demonstration project appears to be the first instance of a youth-driven HIA in the field of HIA. In addition to exploring the findings of the HIA, this report explores the unique strengths and challenges of a youth-driven approach to HIA.

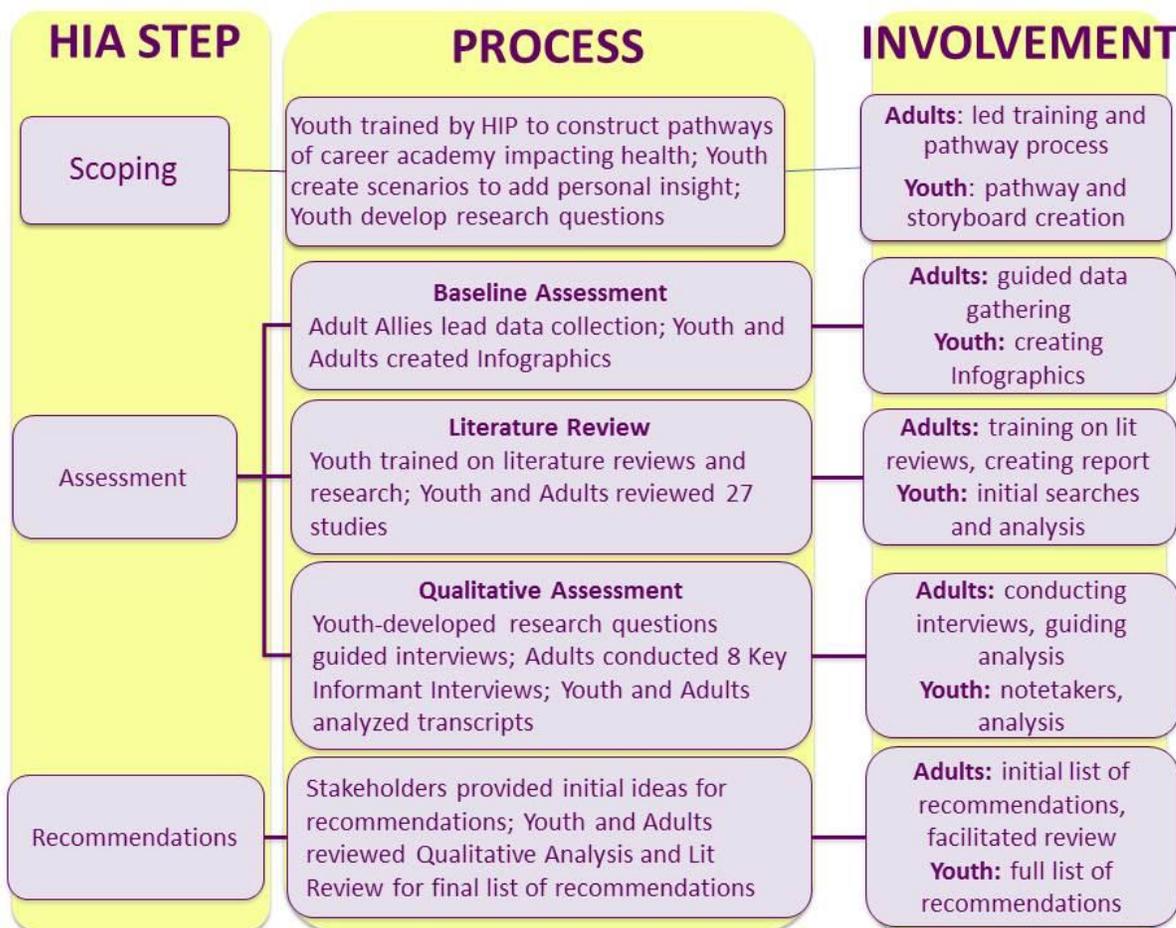
Youth-Driven HIA Approach

Since 2012, Youth UpRising has been supporting youth-driven research using Youth Participatory Action Research (Y-PAR). Y-PAR puts youth in the driver's seat, emphasizing the expertise that youth gain from their day-to-day lives in a given setting, and prioritizing the translation of research into community action and impact.

Following the steps of HIA, per North American Practice Standards version 2, and supported by Human Impact Partners and a consultant, the process entailed routine guidance from and dialogue with the Youth Researchers. Adult Allies relied on the Youth Researchers' analysis and understanding at every step. The Youth Researchers and Adult Allies were simultaneously learning from and teaching each other throughout the project, adjusting the process to fit the reality of the project.

Screening occurred as the project proposal was submitted and accepted. While the youth did not support screening, they were otherwise partners in the HIA (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1: YOUTH-DRIVEN HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS



Assessment Findings

The Community Baseline Assessment emphasized the challenges facing the Castlemont community— de-investment, poverty, unemployment, violence, fear, and distrust. Castlemont High School, navigating these realities, has fought hard to strengthen the academic performance and school experience of its students. Having experimented with smaller schools and a unified school with a single career academy, Castlemont High School could in fact benefit from new strategies.

The Literature Review findings illuminated the potential positive impact of a career academy on issues facing Castlemont High School and the Castlemont community— namely, social support within the school environment, graduation rates, and preparedness for the job market. Although the literature does not directly explore the potential health impacts of learning academies, the associations between the career academy environment and the three prioritized mediating factors supported our belief that a well-developed career academy could in fact benefit the Castlemont community. However, the specific combination of career academy characteristics that would best fit Castlemont High School and the extent to which positive intermediate effects may be experienced in Castlemont are difficult to gauge from the literature.

The Key Informant Interviews with local experts in the Health and Education Fields contextualized the literature-derived perspective on career academies in the Oakland and Castlemont contexts. Reflections on the characteristics of a good career academy, the challenges and barriers to career academies, and the interaction of community, student, teacher, and parent in creating and sustaining a career academy provided more targeted ideas for a new career academy.

TABLE 1: THEMES FROM KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

What makes a good learning environment/learning academy? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrated curriculum & relevant coursework• Strong connection to industry & community• Exposure to college, careers, work experience, & activities• Caring atmosphere & dedicated, qualified teachers
Social Support <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers supporting teachers• Teachers supporting students• Schools and teachers supporting and being supported by parents/caring adults• Communities supporting schools
Barriers & Challenges Relating to Learning Academies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of student engagement in learning academy focus• Developing & maintaining learning academy• Teacher quality• Lack of industry availability and connection• Overcoming stigma of history of “tracking”
Relationship between community and schools/students <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community and school two-way partnerships• Community supporting schools/students• School/students giving back to community• Community environment and realities can negatively affect students
Relationship between students and learning academies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students can positively shape a learning academy• Connected classes affect student learning engagement• Learning academies can prepare students for successful futures• Teacher turnover can affect social support for students

Recommendations & Dissemination

Over the course of this HIA, the policy landscape and subsequently our decision point evolved. The conversation about learning academies, advanced by both the HIA and activities of other partners in the district, set a new agenda for the School Board and schools themselves. Thus we came to studying the best design for academies, and in particular the design of a second academy at Castlemont under a new charter.

Recommendations addressed the design of an academy within Castlemont. Under a new organization which will run the schools (CCTS), a linked learning model will be fully implemented at both the High School and middle school level. Due to Youth UpRising’s pivotal role in creating the charters, the HIA and recommendations will be directly incorporated into the charter school applications. Therefore, we narrowed our dissemination approach, presenting the full narrative of the Youth Researchers’ work to the Stakeholder Work Group and the Youth UpRising Staff Community.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY	Address teacher training, evaluation, quality and turnover, as well as hiring policies and tax credit for participating businesses. Partners include Castlemont High, OUSD, and the City of Oakland.	COMMUNITY OUTREACH	Teachers, parents, community organizations and business partners connect, work together and address local issues with direct community benefit
DESIGN	Include more participatory design processes, integrated curriculum, internship opportunities, college prep, consideration of the labor market, and ensuring balance of limited class sizes and avoiding a boutique program. Implementation partners here include Castlemont High, OUSD, business partners and post-secondary institutions.	SUPPORT STRUCTURE	Include creating space for curriculum workshops, youth councils, industry mentorship, and additional counseling and trust-building activities between teachers and students. Partners include Castlemont High, OUSD and business partners.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The HIA appeared to have contributed to the multiple project objectives, supporting youth development, offering lessons for a “counter-narrative” to the normally adult-led process, and advancing the conversation and decision-making regarding academies. Over the course of 9 months, youth reported progressing on their personal goals including public speaking, teamwork, and critical thinking. While a standardized survey of internal assets was not revealing, post-project interviews with youth corroborated their growth and spurred ideas about how adults could improve as well. To that end, myriad suggestions ranging from changing training content and delivery to how meetings are conducted are detailed in the report. Finally, this HIA was synched with momentum towards academies in OUSD, which came with a new superintendent. Still, it provided new relationships and evidence that seems to have bolstered YU’s effort to save their local school.