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George E. Harris Elementary

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George E. Harris Elementary

“ ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH! ”

By Nikita Wilde

Social Issue Research



POVERTY

- Harris Elementary is in a part of Vegas that is riddled with poverty and social disorganization.
- Poverty rate in Las Vegas continues to increase faster than the nationwide average.
- 22% of children living in Las Vegas are below the poverty level. (NV)
- 83.3% of students receive free/reduced lunch.
- 79% of Harris students are from low-income households.
- The stress of living in poverty affects student’s academic achievement.
 - **“One factor is that the stress of living in poverty can impair children’s brain development...There is a significant correlation between student achievement and the rate of poverty in the United States.” (Wages, p.47)**
- Living in poverty increases the chance of students dropping out of school prematurely.
 - **“Nationally, over seven thousand students a day (1.2 million a year) get so fed up, they drop out...Imagine the changes in this data one teacher can make.” (Wages, p. 48)**
- Students below the poverty level can’t see the importance behind education.
 - **“Educational systems, both at the micro and macro-level, have an important role in supporting social upward mobility.” (Mihai et al, p.857)**
- Students currently living in poverty have parents that likely grew up in poverty.
- Low-income parents have a lesser chance of being involved in their child’s education.
 - **“The hypothesis in relation to poverty is that we would expect those who are poor to engage in ‘good’ parenting practices less frequently because they lack the material resources to do so.” (Dermott et al, p.130)**

What is Harris doing to combat poverty’s effect on education?

- Fundraisers.
- Improving equity.
- Encourage parental involvement with parent-student-teacher activities.
- Welcome volunteers into their school.
- Try to envision a positive world without poverty and set goals to achieve that image.



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Introduction

Harris Elementary is located in the southeast part of Las Vegas and currently has around 700 enrolled students, 83.3% of which are on the free or reduced lunch program. This school is Title 1 and receives assistance from the district due to the high number of low-income students that attend.



Purpose of the Site

Based off of the school’s motto “Only the best is good enough,” the schools purpose is providing all of its students with the best education possible and leaving them with the best chance at life. Harris wants each and every student that walks through their hallways to leave with a full mind, full heart and full stomach.

Due to the part of town that the school is in, Harris struggles with high numbers of low-income students. Along with providing academically, the faculty of Harris wants students to feel safe and cared for while at school, and find ways to make sure no student leaves or arrives hungry.

Community Service Paradigm

“Change, from this perspective, comes about when otherwise ordinary people find ways to bring their values, their actions and their world into closer alignment with each other” -Keith Morton, *The Irony of Service*

-Social change is “the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, social organizations, or value systems.” (Form et al.)

Schools in general all fit into the social change category, since they are working toward long term goals and change within the educational system, community and the lives of their students.

Service Learning Experience

First Visit: Built Penny Wars boxes for each classroom. Helped teach 1st graders how to recycle during lunch time. Helped fifth grade teacher give spelling tests and classwork.

Second Visit: Helped in the library. Found reading level of new books and attached a corresponding colored dot onto the spine before putting them away on the shelves alphabetically.

Third Visit: Back in the library. I put dots on books and put them away like last time, but this time I was taught how the check in-check out system works. I assisted students in checking out new books, and reminding them of ones that were overdue.



Making a Difference

Before this semester, I had never taken part in a service learning activity in which I attended an organization that I wasn’t familiar with. I had never really seen the importance of service learning and felt that it was a waste of my time amidst the hustle and bustle of my everyday life. My experience at Harris changed my perspective on service learning entirely, and I now see the influence that is has on my education, personal life, and attitude toward social change.

Volunteering:

- Allowed for one-on-one experience in something related to my future career.
- Opened my eyes to how severe of an issue poverty is, especially to children.
- Encouraged me to make a bigger difference in my community and ask others to do so too.
- Alleviated stress from teachers and faculty at Harris, as I took care of a few of the duties on their endless task list.
- Gave the students an opportunity to ask me questions about college.
- Taught me a ton on both a personal and professional level.
- Gave me experience within a school to put on my resume.

Did I make an impact to the site, social issue and community?

While it may only have been a small impact, I made a difference to the school by simply being there as an extra set of hands. The activities that I took part in reflected the overall goal of reducing poverty’s effects on students education as well as the community.