

## Fall Forum 2005

# ***School as Center of Community: How Emeryville is transforming its schools and city policies by placing education at the heart of redevelopment***

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The following is a transcript of the Center for Cities & Schools' 2005 Fall Forum. Housed in the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD) at Berkeley and affiliated with the Graduate School of Education (GSE) and the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP), the Center for Cities & Schools is committed to bridging the fields of education and urban policy to create equitable, diverse, and livable cities and schools. Through education, direct service, and research, the Center aims to make visible the connections between cities and schools and to foster a collaborative environment linking the university, public schools, local governments, community leaders, and neighborhood residents toward achieving goals that embrace public policy, urban planning, and educational practice.

The Center for Cities & Schools' Fall 2005 Forum focused on city and school redevelopment in Emeryville, California. Superintendent Tony Smith and City Manager John Flores gave a conversational-like talk, taking turns telling bits of the Emeryville story from each of their perspectives. In this 1.2 square mile city by the bay, the school district, the city, community members, and local businesses are working jointly to craft a redevelopment plan that puts education at the heart. Stakeholders are coming together around a shared vision of a strong city school system with high performing students, readily available community and social services, and the physical redevelopment of the existing school sites and its adjacent property along the city's main north-south street corridor. Such a vision necessitates "out-of-the-box" thinking, overcoming decades of distrust between different groups, and crafting a creative atmosphere that enables diverse stakeholders to come together and envision what could be. As of late 2005, no ground has yet been broken, but the groundwork is being laid for the vision currently called the *Center of Community Life* – a project that will be mixed-use, centrally located, and provide a variety of services and opportunities for children, families, and adults in the City of Emeryville, the Emery Unified School District (EUSD), and adjoining Oakland neighborhoods. Their talk is followed by brief comments by Ingrid Seyer-Ochi, PhD, of the Graduate

School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley and Xenia Simms, a freshman at Berkeley.

**John Flores:**

Thank you. I have the honor of starting us off. And I really want to thank the Center for Cities & Schools for the opportunity to talk about what we have been working on in Emeryville with the city and the schools. And hopefully today we'll both learn from each other – that's sort of how I look at this because I don't think we have the actual answer for any of this, but I think we can start that conversation.

When I was in college, one of the best classes I attended was a social and intellectual history class, which brought together many elements of history so that you can see a bigger and broader slice of life when you learn the history. And that's sort of what we're trying to do in the City of Emeryville with the school district, is trying to bring pieces together that make for change. And any kind of change is very organic, it goes very slowly, especially when you don't know where you're headed exactly, so you take small steps in that direction as you move towards hopefully what your ultimate vision is. And given that, one of the themes that I'm going to talk about today is trying to have institutional change. It's going to be slow, it's going to be gradual, and it's going to be unique to each city and school district

I'm going to start off with a short history of Emeryville; how we got from a small city to where we are now, which is really in a position, I think to help public education and to integrate that into the city. And Tony can talk about the school district a little bit. Then subsequently, I think we would like to have a dialogue going on between us so that if there's questions we can answer them and if not we'll at least put that down and figure out an answer in the future.

So my very short history of Emeryville comes just before Prop. 13. It was an industrial town, if any of you have been around here a long time you know we have a lot of industry within Emeryville, very small population. Prior to Prop. 13, the main source of revenues for cities and school districts were property taxes – easy to collect, easy to raise, and often easy to abuse obviously. But Prop. 13 came along and changed all that, which made a very rich little city very poor and a very rich school district relatively poor also. As a result of that, with the low number of industries in town not yet able to raise revenues to make the city run properly, it became problematic. And one of the things that accentuated that was the fact that during that period of time, industries were leaving the Bay Area. They were leaving because of the high cost of energy, high cost of labor, and high cost of transportation. When I came along in the 1980's, 40 percent of the property in Emeryville was not in use, which was not great for the economy, but it gave us great opportunities in other areas, especially for redevelopment.

In the 1980s the city re-did their General Plan. What they were looking at that time, because of the problems they were facing from 1976 on, was to essentially redevelop the city. For the last fifteen or so years we have really been actively redeveloping the city to do a number of things. First and foremost, I think, at least to the City Council at that time, was to build a dense urban city, but associated with that was a diverse city. Diverse revenue-wise, where rather than having your eggs all in one basket you would put them into different baskets, such as retail, office, commercial – a number of uses that would be able to fund or at least provide revenues for the city in case one of those industries goes

bad. Secondly, they wanted to build the city back up from its industrial past, which left a lot of concrete all over the place. They wanted to have trees, green parks, etc. Then they wanted to have a place where people could go and have lunch or maybe even dinner or go out at night. It was that kind of a small town that really did not have the normal benefits of a city...you had to leave the city to be a part of it. Also they wanted to make sure that they didn't go through the changes that they had experienced prior to that.

I think that, even at that time, what you did not see in the General Plan was much comment regarding the school district. That was pretty typical of city-school relations back then, and probably still now. In that cities consider themselves separate and apart from school districts. I will venture to say the school districts feel that same way about cities.

But in about 2000 there was a turning point, and that was when the school district went into bankruptcy. This brought the attention of the school district to the leaders of the city. There was a lot of discussion at that time of whether the school district really should exist or rather, should we embrace them. A lot of the council members were debating whether they should be a part of the city or whether the school district should be a part of the city's vision for the future. I will suffice it to say that a group got together made up of residents, businesses, and city officials to talk about that. I think what they came up with was the fact that a school district was a part of the city and had to be a part of the city. If it wasn't, then the city is really just half of what it could be and so was the community.

So with that they, the city council, I'll speak for my council, we have the Mayor here from the City of Emeryville, and he and along with other council members really took up the gauntlet to create a vision for the city in which they would involve and create in the school district as a part of the city. It just so happens that we are right now in the process of re-doing our General Plan. So the policies of how you include the school district into the city will be hashed out and have been hashed out in that process. I expect that the General Plan will be different from redeveloping the City of Emeryville. I believe it will be building a community of which the school district will be a major part. It will be difficult, I will say, to do, but it will include all of us in the city to make that be successful, starting with the school district and its parents, teachers, and children, to the business community and to the residents. We have to get to that order of change in order to make it be organic in the city; something that is truly a part of what people feel is the city. I think I'm going to not go on anymore and really let Tony give a little history of the school district so you can get the background before we get into a more detailed discussion of our relationship.

**Tony Smith:**

Thank you. It's important to know that John Flores was a major part in those conversations about how important is a school district. There are many people who will say that John's advocacy for the schools is the primary reason that we still have a district in Emeryville.

I came to Emeryville in 2000 and my first visit I came with Steve Rasmussen, who is president of Key Curriculum Press and a real education advocate. He lives in Berkeley and his children went to Berkeley High. Steve had proposed an idea for a Math, Science, and Technology Demonstration School that he had taken to County Superintendent Shiela Jordan, and they were trying to figure out how to actually create this school. They

came to BayCES, the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools, which is where I worked at the time. I was director of all of the teacher professional development and support for the organization. I became project manager for this idea. Steve said, “You know what, the scale is right in Emeryville – there’s this crisis in Emeryville, maybe Emeryville is the place for this school.”

My first visit in 2000 was in the middle of considerable upset, both within the schools, and in the community – and real fracture a lot of broken trust. There was a history of major division and barriers between the school district and the city and the historical balkanization of “my territory,” “your territory,” and never the two shall meet – we will not cross over. The former superintendent had actually being fairly vocal about that divide. Part of my initial work was as a community organizer – beginning to talk to people about what their vision of education is, what they wanted Emeryville to look and feel like. This is all against the backdrop of the timeline of moving on aggressive redevelopment to beginning to focus more intentionally about community. There have to be conditions for the kinds of things that are happening, and the preconditions were there. Not to say that any of this work was easy, but it was definitely against the backdrop of a history of a lot of people doing work before 2000 to make the work that’s happening now possible.

Emery has a unique history – it has gone bankrupt twice. In the mid 1980s and now, just coming out of State Administration, we now have a trustee. I am now in my second year in the superintendency there. The reason for the quick recovery occurred because the community made a commitment to the schools. A parcel tax was passed with nearly 80 percent support. What’s interesting and compelling about that is that the business community did not spend a single dime against the parcel tax, which is extraordinarily uncommon. Not only did they not try to stop the parcel tax, they supported it. Unanimously the Chamber of Commerce voted to support the parcel tax. The business community in Emeryville bears about 75 percent of the economic burden of that parcel tax. So there is an extraordinary commitment from the business community, the residential community, and the city government. I think the reason for that is not just because people thought that “Oh, it’s too bad that we weren’t in good relationship.” But it’s because people started talking about a vision and believing in something very different. People were tired of business as usual. This is a 1.2 square mile city that is divided by railroad tracks, a major freeway, by Powell Street, which is kind of north/south Emeryville, and San Pablo Avenue, so there are lots of sections due to the built environment. But the lived relationships are also that fractured, and the disconnects between race, class, life experience, lifestyle...there are sections in this 1.2 square mile city that are extraordinarily disconnected.

We began talking about the linkage between children and families and the schools, and a healthy city and a vibrant sustainable city – that city and community services and schools are not to be disconnected. As schools, we have the kids for about six hours a day, so we have a very major responsibility in raising young people. But what we do doesn’t just end at the end of the day. They go across the street – what kind of city services are there to support them? The city government and residents began talking about the kind of schools we’d like to see in Emeryville. We started talking about schools as the center of community. This idea is gaining more and more popularity across the country. It really grew organically. People were talking about, “I would like to be able to go there during the day.” “I’d like to come take a class there,” I would like to be able to just see what’s

going on,” “I’d like to just feel like I belong in the school,” “I’d like the school to be open really late at night if I wanted to go hang out there.” How could schools become the centerpiece in this community that’s been so fractured and kind of become the center of gravity? It’s not just about creating a building that does that, it’s about building the relationships necessary so that people from many different walks of life feel welcome and connected in that place.

So we started having what were some very hard conversations about some people’s feelings and beliefs about the historical wrongs that had been done by the city or the school district. A lot of healing that had to happen. I’m not suggesting that it’s all healed, but we’re in a very different place because of those kinds of conversations. We also fundamentally talked about the fact that as an institution, schools are perhaps the most reproductive institution in our society – reproducing the inequities, the class-based inequities and the differences in terms of achievement by different race groups. How do you actually have that conversation in a city-wide context? Well, scale matters, so it’s important to talk about the size of Emeryville. We have just under 10,000 residents, right John?

**John Flores:**

That’s right, and we’re growing.

**Tony Smith:**

So the scale for these kinds of conversations is there. But again, people care about schools. So if you start talking about these schools possibly going away, people come out. The community really rallied; the community created a group called Save Our Schools (S.O.S.) and advocated for getting the state to bail out the district. Then, I think, in one of the very significant transitions, Save Our Schools transitioned to Support Our Schools, and then became B.E.S.T. It continued the evolution, B.E.S.T. is “Better Emeryville Schools Today,” which is now the parcel tax committee. People in the community – the residents, the business community – have continued to organize and envision themselves as agents of a very different kind of change. Now the level of work we’re talking about – the Center for Community Life – is not just about a joint-use agreement, it’s not just about joint powers. It’s about fundamentally, what are the set of relationships, practices, and policies that have to be in place to support the city to become more just and equitable? Those are hard, hard conversations. It takes a lot of truth-telling, it takes building a lot of alliances across race and class, it takes getting your feelings hurt and getting upset, going away and coming back to the table. We have explored our intentions, our commitment....I certainly have. John and I have not always agreed about things, and we’ve wrestled and worked out stuff.

I think that the idea here, and John mentioned it a little bit, is that we’re not just trying to do first-order change work, which is to do things better in the existing system. We’re really talking about second-order change work, which is to do things fundamentally different. The kind of commitment that takes – commitment to learning, commitment to getting things wrong but staying in the work together, to mis-stepping across very difficult lines of race and gender and being willing to engage and stay there – is really what undergirds this work. For any of you who have spent time in schools, schools don’t like to change very much, they’re very resilient. We have had, over the last five years, one of the most extraordinary teaching staffs, and the parent and family community continues to get more involved.

We're at this interesting point where the question of do we want to just have better schools, because already we've been the most improved school district in the county each of the last two years, we're one of the top improving districts in the state. There's a dialogue right now – is that good enough? Can we expect more from these kids? We have about almost 75% free and reduced lunch, nearly 75% African American, about 15% Latino/Hispanic, about 8% Punjabi and Southeast Asian. And a few white students. But one of the more important statistics which isn't often talked about is that 20% of our school population does not live with either parent. They live with grandparents, great aunts, uncles, or other guardians. There is in some ways a missing middle generation for a lot of our young people. So we have become a network. We've got teachers wrestling with "I'm not a counselor, I'm not a nurse, I'm not a, I'm not a...a long list of I'm nots." In order to educate and connect with these young people, we've got to be many of those things. You can't answer all of those questions in a single individual, or in a single institution. What we've decided and the way we're working is that this is a community issue. We believe that the only way we will see a different kind of Emeryville and better schools is to be in different institutional relationships, different personal relationships around a common vision.

I have been blessed to be a part of the work and to be sitting as the superintendent now for the last two years. But it really is the strength of the community. I think that's the reason for all of the transformation. There's a very clear vision for a different kind of Emeryville. I think that, will we achieve all of what we desire and are talking about – where the homeless community feels as welcome and connected in the new built environment as the middle class residents. I don't know yet how we will do that, but I do know that unless we wrestle with those ideas and think about them from a design perspective and a relationship perspective, that we won't get any closer. There's been a commitment and the City Council has been extraordinary and I think, no offense, I think I have one of the best school boards ever. Just the commitment and clarity and their diligence around the vision in trying to create a district that doesn't just do school, but that does school very differently is uncommon.

That's the background...we came from the crisis of failure and the chance to recover and do school again, or do something different. The school board and the community chose to do something different. That's what has us sitting here and trying to figure out where we go next.

**John Flores:**

What we have – and you see we are the Center of Community Life – we sort of have the structure. But it's beyond that, that's kind of the bricks and mortar part. That's not easy, but it's easier than having an institutional change. In order to do that – from a city perspective anyhow – I had to think about with our staff, how does it interact with the school district? To me that's a critical part. Before, they would be very cordial, and as Tony mentioned there was a lack of trust on both sides of the city and the schools. There are some great stories that I could tell, but this is probably not the place to do that. But what has to happen within a city organization is to have individuals truly believe that they can help the school district.

The school district is really another part of the city that is struggling and we're all trying to improve. A part of that was our normal community services where we have your

typical recreation department, senior and child development in our case, maybe not all that unique. I reorganized this structure and put these under one individual who is now the director of our community services, that works very closely with the school district. In the afternoon at the very least, when the kids are out of school, the recreation department is open and available to have those children come and to continue their education in some cases, socialization in other cases. They also provide the same services on the weekend and in the summertime. It's not unique, but it's really a second-order of change. It's really believing that the school district is a part of the city rather than they are the enemy. They're the ones that take care of kids for six hours and then don't give a hoot about them. That's not the case. Teachers do care, school districts do care, boards of education do care. That's what we have really going for us now I think. We have the big picture of caring dug into the policies and practices to make better realities when people don't look at a school child and say they're just there to create problems. That's not the case for my Police Department. They should be there to talk to them, to help them, to be models for them. It really does feel good to have a police officer's organization come in and do tutoring in the schools. It's important that they do that. You have to have it or you can't make that change. Otherwise, it'll be superficial; it'll be the icing on the cake.

The Center of Community Life is a vision that may not come about. It's very difficult to put all the pieces together as any city and school person out there knows. But it will exist from my point of view because the changes will occur internally. Superficially they may still be separate a little bit and not be coordinated in one location. We certainly hope that occurs and are working very hard to make that occur. But it does involve the commitment on the part of both – all of the members of the city's community, and that includes the city staff and the school district and their staff.

**Tony Smith:**

One of the things we've been able to do is joint professional development between the recreation staff and our teaching staff. What is standards-based instruction? If somebody says "Oh, I'm teaching the standards" as teacher, well what kind of preparation do they have, and this is what was happening. A teacher would say, this is what I'm teaching to and then the recreation department staff would talk to that teacher about how they can support this. We have been talking about our own professional development – getting it more coordinated and organized. Now, we have created linkages between the recreational department staff and our staff so that what's being reinforced after school and before school is actually more helpful to kids and preparing them to be successful. We've been really blessed with an extraordinary amount of technological donations to the school district. Now we have almost three student per computer, and those computers are being used, too. We created a computer lab at the Recreation Department. My Director of Technology is supporting the software and technological infrastructure, the City is hosting the internet connection, the staff, they're the personnel to keep that lab open. There are older residents are using it, and elementary kids are using it before school and after school. These are some examples of where the policies and practices are beginning to shift. It's getting close to being the Center of Community Life where life-long learning is at the heart of the city. How do you build a physical structure that holds this as it's *raison d'être* – as it's reason for being – and the entire community can be connected? Regardless of your trajectory in, you can be connected and take advantage of something while you're there. We're talking about this potential 20 acre complex: relocation of another facility to create this joint facility – that would have our learning centers, education-based retail, housing, open space, and community-gathering space.

How do you plan densely? How do you plan for the urban core? It's not about just a sprawl idea. You have a recreation department over here, a community theatre over here, a school building over here. As we started this – and one of my primary learnings in this work – has been that I was using a suburban model in an urban setting. It's only over time and with wonderful people and guidance and giving me feedback, such as “it doesn't sound like what you're talking about” or Roy Miller, who's an extraordinary architect who had been helpful in my thinking, saying, “It doesn't sound like that gets at what you're talking about, it sounds like your building into the built environment the same distinctions.” How do you put those things together, how do you think different? Green isn't necessarily re-using existing buildings, but can be about creating an entirely new complex. How far are we willing to go with this thing? I think that, fortunately, we have continued to push and we've talked about going to the edge.

Unless you put the vision as far out there as you can, and be open to the kinds of changes and the organic nature of it, you get caught pretty fast in old relationships and old behaviors. Fortunately we have a pretty touchstone for this vision that we can come back to and recalibrate around. I think that many of the people, particularly in our district, are stuck on the idea of school – the box that is school limits their thinking and imagination about what our teaching and learning can be like. So it's not that we're not thinking that there will be schools, but we're really talking about learning places and spaces as we talk about this future of design. Not to say that there won't be school, but to help people free-up their imaginations about the design that will facilitate learning. We're designing for the next fifty years – not for the last fifty years, but for the affordances of new kinds of space and ways you can be in relationship with kids. At the core of all this is the human relationship and the connectedness. There are ways in which school buildings break up those human connections. We put kids in boxes for a little while and move them around and they feel a lack of connection. So how do you think different about the built environment to create more connectivity and a deeper sense of learning and health in an entire community?

It's those ideas that undergird our discussions. There are a lot of policies that have to change. It's not just you have conversations and decide that things are going to be different. The political changes and the commitment of our elected officials continues to be a big part of this work. But the community also plays a role. What kind of community education and community involvement has to be in place so that it doesn't become the Center for Community Life for the new incoming white middle class and Asian people that are moving into Emeryville – such that it's a dislocation strategy for the long-standing eastside African American community. Come on, we all get that. How do you actually have that dialogue in public and in closed meetings and keep that idea alive and living so that you can be intentional about making sure that doesn't happen. If you dismiss it or just say, “That's not what we're trying to do,” then what happens is it does happen? Where's the credibility, where's the trust? You have to be continually facing the challenge to get to this new outcome.

**John Flores:**

Tony is talking about planning for the next fifty years and quite frankly we're very fortunately to be undergoing a review of our general plan for at least the next fifteen or twenty years, maybe not fifty. But at least looking forward where we can implement and put in place policies and practices that will be the direction for the future of the city to

include the school district in what they're doing. They will be – from my point of view – a main component of the future and vision of the city. If any of you have been a participant of general plan review, there are just a number of meetings where you try to get input from all of the community members but at the same time educate them about the possibilities that are outside the normal box. This has been going on within the City of Emeryville. Tony and I actually made a presentation to the steering committee for the General Plan, similar to this one, where we were trying to let them know (and probably not as clear as we'd like), what we see and what we feel should be included and how the school district should be included and seen as a part of the city. We're fortunate in part because, one, the size of the city, and two, because we have a large group of volunteers that make up our EYSAC, which is the Education and Youth Service Advisory Committee, a group of about seventy-five residents, businesses, parents, teachers, city staff and school staff that really are working on the programs that we could have together, on the facilities that we need to jointly use, and the financing of how to get those in place. Just having that group of seventy-five or so people is a tremendous step. It provides a lot of input but also a lot of output into the community.

In Emeryville – and I'm sure that in some of your cities it's even greater than ourselves – we have a serious increase in housing and a lot of new residents over the last few years. I wouldn't hesitate to say at least 3,000 housing units in a small city like Emeryville is a lot of housing units to be built, which brings in a number of new residents. You know they're not bringing any negative baggage, but they are there and don't understand the city. It is our role – and obviously it's a joint role – to go out to them, to educate them, to provide them with what our vision is – this is your community, and it includes the school district. As a part of that, we want you and your children to come to our schools, to be a part of our schools. I can tell you that in most urban areas if you have a choice of not sending your children to public schools, you definitely don't send them there.

This reality hurts public education, and I'll get back on my one or two soap boxes that I have. To me, this whole country was built on democracy, which has as its primary component public education. If you don't educate everyone, you're not going to have a democracy that you're going to be very proud of. To me it's quite important to do that, and the responsibility comes down to the grassroots, which in this case is the City of Emeryville and the Emery Unified School District. That's what motivates me when I think about that, and probably my wife also who is a school teacher. She keeps pushing me in that direction, which helps also with understanding what schools do and how they can help build the community that I'm the city manager of.

**Tony Smith:**

I'll just say one thing and then open it up for questions and responses. I honestly believe that too often the demographics that describe our district are understood as causal factors. Such as, "our kids are 99% students of color, so of course you have failure." "Most of your kids are free and reduced lunch, so." I don't believe that, and I think watching what's happened – the clearer we get with the support structures, the wrap-around services – that there are still extraordinary gaps in what our kids know. But what's happening is that those gaps are closing very quickly. We talk about raising overall achievement and closing the gap. By our test scores we've done that, now they're not the measure of everything. The way that parents and families feel connected, the way that kids feel connected...we're struggling a bit at the secondary school right now with this increased level of expectation and kids are kind of pushing back. Now we're putting

institutional supports in place, such as the after-school reading, the math, but the conversation is around “Do we believe that because our students are of color, they can’t be successful? Do we believe that because they’re poor or come from families without economic resources, they can’t be successful?” Every time we have those kinds of staff conversations the answer is no, absolutely not, absolutely not. So what are we going to do? How are we going to respond to that? How are we going to think about this as a community issue, not just “we have to fix this in the school.”

I honestly believe that the resources to improve our achievement don’t exist entirely within the school building. You have to be in better relationship not only with parents and families, but with the entire community. John talked about the democracy...I think the fabric of the community...if you have students failing, over time it will unweave the fabric very quickly. The violence, the lack of hope, the hopelessness that can become embedded in sections of our urban core – that’s what we’re combating. I believe deeply that the ideas like the Center of Community Life – schools as the center of community – are about re-infusing hope and building the kinds of relationships necessary to see us into a new time and that’s really what I believe we’re trying to do in Emeryville. Thank you.

## **Discussants**

### **Ingrid Seyer-Ochi, Assistant Professor of Education, UC Berkeley:**

I want to thank John and Tony for being here and for the work they do. I want to identify just a few things that I find most powerful about the work in Emeryville and then end with a few reflections and questions. I’m going to focus on the comments around their work together because that’s the focus of the Center for Community life and the Center for Cities & Schools here at Berkeley.

One of the key themes I heard was the importance of collaboration and partnership across institutions, and the acknowledgement that this takes time and flexibility. It takes thinking openly, and it takes sticking with it and being open to change and open to problems. This important work in Emeryville is breaking down boundaries and silos.

It’s important that they acknowledge that learning does not just take place in schools. Learning is something that happens throughout one’s life and in all sorts of contexts. And the only way we’re really going to be educating people equitably and life-long is to really acknowledge that and to think about the contexts and the spaces that all people are learning in and how to make those more equitable. In order for this work to be possible it certainly required that we have people who are trained in thinking like this. And I think that’s why it’s really important that we’re doing this at a place like Berkeley because of disciplinary training, breaking down those boundaries, thinking about education and planning and public policy differently so that we are training people who can have those kind of conversations.

We really need pushing on what education is – that it’s not just about schools, but it’s about all sorts of places. First, we need to break down our ideas of who’s responsible for what...Tony, I think you used the phrase that you had to push people from that idea that “I’m not a this. I’m a teacher, I’m not a social worker, I’m not a nurse.” Really pushing on who’s responsible for what. Second, we need to break down our ideas of space and place. The idea of a community center – the Center for Community life – is really trying to re-think space so that we don’t just have schools and hospitals and health centers but

we have places where a lot of different things are happening and we're challenging the boundaries of how we think about what spaces are used for and how we build them. When I think of Emeryville it's impossible not to think about the permeable boundaries between what we think of as cities. Emeryville is bounded by a variety of other cities and has an extremely complex history and relationship with those other places – you can't really understand Emeryville unless you also understand Oakland, especially West Oakland. What's necessary is looking at those relationships and thinking about spaces and places more broadly than just Emeryville. You have to acknowledge and think about this as a regional issue. Given the way that policies are set up, the way cities are organized, it's very hard to do that.

It is also important to think very critically about power and access to resources. I liked the comments about the importance of continuing these conversations. And to the extent to which these conversations can continue to keep race and inequity at the center of the conversation, we will see successes. We rarely ask questions like, "Do we believe Chiron and Home Depot have a responsibility to be responsible for the schools in this area?" Do we believe that? We need to ask those questions as well.

Thinking about the importance of leadership and vision is critical. It's very hard to think about leadership and vision without thinking about individuals. I think it is key that the two men at this table have a lot of vision and have a lot of leadership, and I really want to acknowledge that. But they've both also talked about their efforts to really build a community vision and build community leadership. Both having leaders who are committed and well trained but also who are committed to sustaining that leadership to a broader array of people, is critical. In order to extend leadership opportunities you need to extend power and change relationships. It's really clear that that's something that's happening here.

I'd like to end with a few questions that I have. One thing I think about is the nature of community. What is community? Can you create a community within a center? Can you build the kind of spaces that will nurture community given how organic community is? Will some communities be privileged over others depending on how you build those spaces? We need to think about how we're going to think about that space so that it doesn't privilege (in the ways so often we know this happens) particular communities over others.

I continue to wonder about the whole idea of centers. While part of me is a very strong supporter of locating lots of services in one place, I have big fears and questions around what happens to other critical anchoring institutions in such communities. Communities are diverse, spread out, kind of ever-changing organisms that have lots of different institutions and people move amongst those. And one of my favorite inspirations is from Jane Jacob's *Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs writes about the importance of movement and having mixed institutions. She wrote about reclaiming streets and I'm thinking that even if we have a very vibrant community at this space what would be happening to the streets outside of that? And what's going to happen in terms of weakening community institutions and anchoring institutions in other areas at the expense of the community that we're fostering there? I think that's a very critical thing to think about, particularly in considering how organic and important these anchoring institutions are. And to get back to some of those other points about developing

leadership, developing power, and empowering community members – those happen in very often localized institutions.

Finally, John's comments on how the previous few decades of redevelopment have not thought much about the role of school is so interesting – and what that means for today's work in creating the Center of Community Life. There are a lot of ways that Emeryville has been fractured and redeveloped historically. But what is happening now is the pushing of the conversation and talking about the hard issues. The conversations are extremely important and involve much needed work, but I do not believe that conversations themselves are enough. Just as I said resources matter, the material bases matter too, and the conversations are important in terms of the relationships, and then the next step is pushing the relationships to also push for the transformation of power dynamics and to push for the distribution of resources. I will end on that thought, and I want to thank you both again for all of your work. I greatly appreciate it.

**Xenia Simms, Freshman, UC Berkeley:**

I wanted to speak about my experience in high school, coming from a school a lot like Emery's. I went to McClymonds high school in West Oakland, which is also a very small community in itself. Even though it is Oakland, it's often seen as separate from Oakland: it's its own entity. McClymonds was a low-performing school, we only had about 70 percent attendance, somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of students who went there didn't have health insurance. There was a lot of violence, drugs, things like that in the community. A lot of students had family issues and it was just really hard for them to focus on anything other than things that were going on in their life. The performance was low, test scores were low, and it was really, really hard for us. The community was one of just poverty and, it was really hard. But I think that a lot of things that helped were students having programs like the Center for Cities & Schools' Y-PLAN – I was in that for three years. We actually worked in our community, trying to rebuild areas that were distressed. Also, programs like YELL where we would work with problems within the school.

I think that as far as school dealing with students, it's really important to reach out to all students and to see the possibility in young people and not just look at the over-achievers and under-achievers and know that there's a large population that falls right in the middle. Every individual is their own individual – unique and creative. When we think about community and we think about schools, we need to remember that it is about the young people. We are going to grow up to be the doctors and the lawyers and city planners and superintendents one day. In order to build successful relationships with students sometimes, especially as an authority figure, you have to understand that a lot of times we come from different places but that doesn't mean that we can't have relationships that are of quality and where we treat each other as equals and have respect for one another.

Connecting schoolwork to fun, engaging activities – like community planning brainstorming – is important. Nobody is “whoo-hoo!” about going to school. Definitely we know that it's important, but if you can make things enriching but also fun, and just connect things back to community because a lot of times I think the people lose sight of how important it is...it takes a village to raise a child. We're all connected in some way or another, even people in communities that don't have children. Make sure that it's important to give back, especially when you do make it through high school and you go on to college and to come back into communities and just know that there are young people who are struggling also and that need your helping hand. I understand that as a McClymonds alum myself. Thank you for your time.

## **Conclusion**

Emeryville is actively pursuing important questions about schools and revitalization, and bridging the “cities and schools disconnect” by building coalitions to find solutions. The school district, the city, businesses, and residents agree: to improve both the schools and the city, they must all work together to create a place that serves as the community’s thriving center. Education – lifelong education – must be at the center of that vision. As Emeryville school board member Josh Simon puts it, “We don’t want to just build the Center of Community Life. We want to be the center of community life and then build a building around what we are.” To do so, he states, “involves an interaction between programs and design...and a great deal of ongoing conversation.” In Emeryville, the city and the school district are looking at their schools as essential aspects of community infrastructure to create vibrant, healthy communities that benefit children, families, neighborhoods, and the whole city. This framework exemplifies the national “schools as centers of community” movement, supported by such groups as the BEST (Building Educational Success Together) Initiative at the 21st Century School Fund and the American Architectural Foundation’s Great Schools by Design Initiative.

“The Center for Cities & Schools sees the Emeryville Center of Community Life as proof-positive for innovative, collaborative policy making,” says Deborah McKoy, the Center’s director. “The city and the school district are actively working to bridge the longstanding disconnect between public education and urban environments that is pervasive in so many locales.” Rarely do cities and schools systematically coordinate and plan together for community land use and service needs. As a result, many see this as a great missed opportunity. Together, the city and the school district are looking to transform the traditional narrow notion of school into an opportunity learning space for all ages – one that is intergenerational and flexible to meet the community and city’s needs now and in the future. As the schools as centers of community movement gains momentum across the country, Emeryville is proving to be a ground-breaking exemplar.