

"People who pick you up instead of putting you down"

**Edgewood Village Scholars' Perspectives on their Needs, Assets, and
the Program's Impact on their Educational Success**

Sara T. Stacy, BS; Mitchell Lindstrom;
Hannah Spring, BS; & Ignacio Acevedo-Polakovich, PhD.

Community-AID



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary

- This report documents Edgewood Village Scholars' perspectives on their needs, assets, and the program's impact on their educational success.
- The Scholars shared and organized their perspectives during a group activity process facilitated by Michigan State University's Community-Academic Innovation and Diffusion Laboratory.
- The Scholars organized their perspectives into three broad categories related to *educational success* (learning, accomplishing goals, and people) and four categories related to the *Edgewood Village Scholars Program* (learning, materials, community/people, and feelings).
- Regarding educational success, the Scholars:
 - Have positive goals regarding their education and future careers.
 - See learning as key to their educational success, and feel that the Scholars Program helps them to learn.
 - Feel that social support is a key to their educational success, and obtain this support from staff and mentors in the program, teachers, friends, and family.
 - Need additional practical (e.g. help with challenging subjects), financial (e.g. scholarships), physical (e.g. school supplies), and social (e.g. positive relationships with adults, skills to manage challenging relationships) support in order to be successful in school.
- Regarding, the Edgewood Village Scholars Program, the scholars:
 - Feel that the program and its mentors support their educational success.
 - Believe the program provides them with opportunities to learn and materials to be successful.
 - Report that the program creates positive feelings about their own success, the learning environment, and the community of people involved in the program.
 - Believe that the program could further support their educational success by improving practical support (e.g. homework help), social support (e.g. increased amount of students in the program), enrichment programming (e.g. more fun activities), and engagement within lectures.

Introduction

This report:

1. Introduces an exercise to gather the perspectives of youth involved in the Edgewood Village Scholars Program regarding their needs, assets, and the program's impact on their educational success.
2. Documents the process of, and findings from, this exercise.
3. Provides recommendations for the administrators of the Edgewood Village Scholars Program based on findings from this exercise.

History and Structure of the Report

History. This report was prepared by the Community-Academic Innovation and Diffusion (Community-AID) Laboratory at Michigan State University for the staff and administrators of the Edgewood Village Scholars Program (hereafter referred to as the Scholars Program).

Structure. The report is organized into four sections:

1. **Introduction.** Summarizes the objectives, history, and structure of the report
2. **Context.** Describes and justifies the approach used to gather youth perspectives.
3. **Results.** Describes the findings from the implementation of the approach.
4. **Discussion.** Provides recommendations for the administrators of the Scholars Program.

Context

This exercise to gather youth perspectives arose from a partnership between the administrators of the Scholars Program and the Community-AID Laboratory. Four factors influenced the decision to design and implement this exercise:

- The Scholars Program's desire to capture and highlight the important and unique input of youth enrolled in the program.
- The Scholars Program's desire to use youth perspectives to inform program improvement
- The Scholars Program's desire to provide youth a venue for reflection about the program and about their educational success.
- The Community-AID Laboratory's interest in refining approaches to gather youth perspectives.

Approach

A two-phase approach was used to gather youth perspectives. Each phase was held during the regular meeting time for middle school members of the Scholars Program. The phases were held on separate days, occurring about one month apart. Eight students participated in both phases, and an additional student participated only in phase two.

Phase One: Generating Youth Perspectives. In this phase, the students generated responses to prompts focused on defining needs and assets that (1) impact their educational success and/or (2) are present in the Edgewood Village Scholars Program. These prompts are listed below:

(1) Educational needs and assets prompts

- *What are your educational goals?*
- *What things help you to be successful in school?*
- *What are some things that get in the way of you being successful in school?*
- *What do you think you need to be successful in school that you don't already have?*

(2) Edgewood Village Scholars Program needs and assets prompts

- *Is the Scholars Program helping you to be successful in school? If yes, how? If no, why not?*
- *How has the Scholars Program helped you in ways outside of school?*
- *What are the things that you wish the Scholars Program had to help you be successful in school?*

Students first responded to each prompt individually by writing their responses on post-it notes and then placing their responses on a sheet of flip chart paper on which the prompt was written (see Figure 1). After all individual responses had been placed on all of the sheets that listed the prompts, a facilitator guided a group discussion meant to clarify each of the responses.

Phase Two: Organizing Youth Perspectives.

Approximately one month after the first phase, students were divided into two smaller groups (of about three to four students, each with a facilitator) to organize the answers they provided in Phase One. Before doing so, each smaller group participated in a brief game that introduced the data organizing process¹.

After this game, each small group used this process to organize the phase one responses to two or three of the prompts. For each prompt, the small group was given large flip chart paper with the student responses posted on it (such as in Figure 1). Working collaboratively, each group organized the responses for each prompt into three to four meaningful themes, placing the responses that belonged to each theme on different colored paper (see Figure 2). The small groups then developed names for each theme. Facilitators intervened in this process only when students were unable to resolve impasses on their own.

After each small group completed the organization of all prompts assigned to them, the students reconvened as a large group. As a large group, they created overall categories for the two different types of prompts: those focused on the Scholars Program and those focused on educational success. The youth worked together as a large group to first define categories that were important for each type of prompt and then cross-check the categories that they created with the themes that had been created by the small groups.

Figure 1. Generating Youth Perspectives

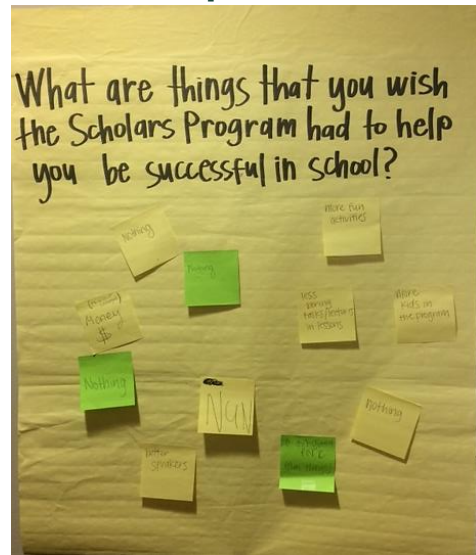
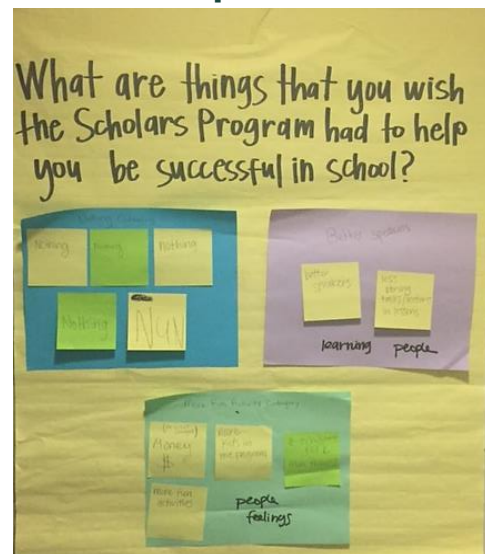


Figure 2. Organizing Youth Perspectives

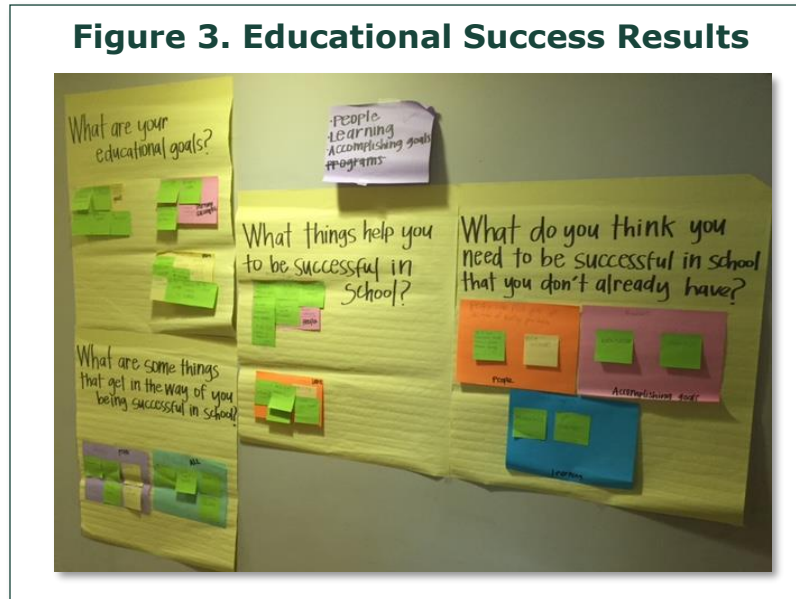


¹ In the data organization game, the students were first asked to imagine that their team owned a candy store in which the inventory needed to be organized. The students were then given 10 pieces of assorted candies, and instructed to sort them into meaningful categories and name the categories. After the small groups had created initial categories, they were asked to reorganize the candy into only two categories and name these categories.

Results

Educational Success Categories

Figure 3 provides an image of the results of the scholars' organizing of their responses to educational success prompts. For a full description of the prompt responses and themes created for educational success, see Appendix A.



The scholars created three overarching categories to organize the themes; learning, accomplishing goals, and people. This report's authors then classified each of the themes within these categories as either a need or an asset. This classification is summarized in Table 1 and further described in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 1. Needs and Assets that Impact Educational Success

	Learning	Accomplishing Goals	People
Assets that Impact Educational Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning in homework • Learning how to be a leader • The Scholars Program • Educational goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting to be successful • Setting a good example for others • Desire for a good career 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced Teachers • Friends • Supportive Family Members • Edgewood Village Staff
Needs that Impact Educational Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support with difficult subjects in school • School supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewards • Scholarships • Addressing conflict in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who support them • Navigating difficult relationships

Note. All data and categories were generated by participants in the Scholars Program.

Learning

This category consists of themes about the importance of learning in the educational success of the scholars. The assets within this category include scholars' learning and educational goals (e.g., graduating high school, graduating college, attending medical school) and their actions to help them to learn and be successful in school (i.e. involvement in the Scholars Program and completing homework). The needs within this category include a desire for additional support in their learning such as help with difficult subjects and access to school supplies.

Accomplishing Goals

This category is comprised of themes related to setting and achieving goals that motivate school success. The assets within this category include scholars' specific career goals, such as wanting to be successful, set a good example for others, and get a "good career." The category also included needs for practical (e.g., help managing difficult subjects) and financial (e.g., scholarships) support in order to more successfully pursue these goals.

People

This category consists of themes reflecting scholars' perceptions that people and relationships are important for their educational success. The assets within this category included supportive relationships with quality teachers, friends, the Scholars Program staff, and family members. The needs within this category reflected a desire for support in learning to better navigate social conflict (e.g., dealing with bullies, dealing with individuals who adversely impact academic motivation, procuring supportive relationships).

Scholars Program Categories

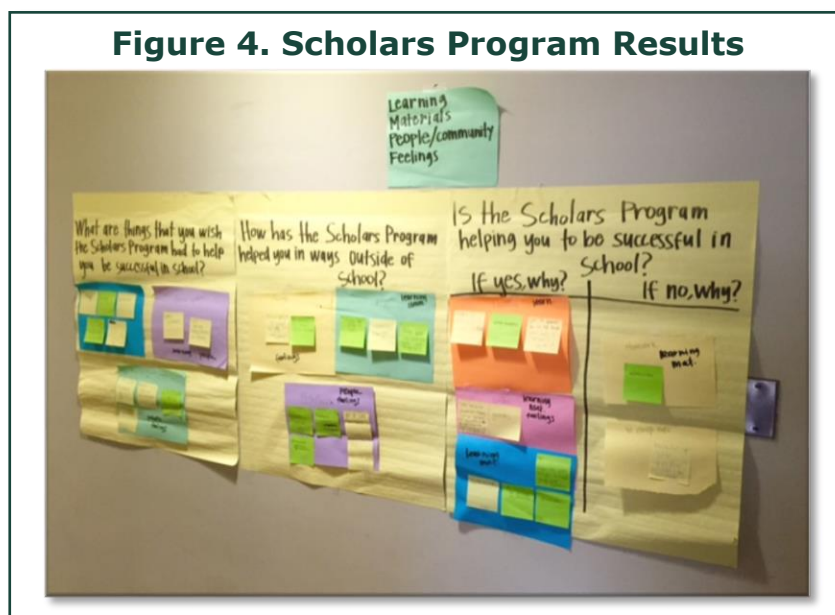


Figure 4 provides an image of the results of the scholars' work examining their responses to the prompts about the Scholars Program. For a full description of the prompt responses and themes created for the Scholars Program, see Appendix B.

The students created three overarching categories to organize the themes; learning, materials, community/people, and feelings. This report's authors then classified each of the themes within these categories as either a need or an asset. This classification is summarized in Table 2 and further described in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 2. Needs and Assets within the Scholars Program that Impact Educational Success.

	Learning	Materials	Community/ People	Feelings
Assets within the Scholars Program that Impact Educational Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections to summer camps • Kahn Academy • Grade monitoring • Homework help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade monitoring • Homework help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with neighborhood bullying problem • Mentor/tutor relationships • Close knit scholars program • Meeting people they wouldn't otherwise meet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made learning fun & engaging • Sense of pride and success in themselves • Positive feelings about the program's community & learning environment
Needs within the Scholars Program that Impact Educational Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More engaging and interactive lectures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional homework help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More kids in the program • More activities within the community • Better speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More engagement and fun activities

Note. All data and categories were created by members of the Scholars Program.

Learning

This category consists of themes describing components of the Scholars Program impacting the students' learning and educational success. The assets within this category include practical (e.g., grade monitoring and homework help), instructional (e.g., Kahn Academy), and enrichment (e.g., connection to summer camps) resources. The needs within this category reflected a desire for more engaging and interactive lectures in order to further support their learning

Materials

This category consists of themes reflecting the physical resources that support students' educational success and that are provided through the Scholars Program. Assets within this category include assistance with school work and grade monitoring. Needs within this category include a desire for additional homework help to better support the scholars' educational success.

People/Community

This category captures relationships provided through the Scholars Program that the students' believe impact their educational success. Assets within this category include relationships with staff (e.g., "Tessie and other tutors within the program") and peers, and the power of those relationships to help address challenging issues with other peers (e.g., a neighborhood bullying problem). Needs within this category include a desire for more students and more engaging activities and speakers within the program.

Feelings

This category captures various emotions that the students feel impact their educational success and that are associated with the Scholars program. Assets within this category include positive feelings that the program fosters in students about learning (e.g., making learning fun), themselves (e.g., feelings of success), and the community (e.g., getting to know new people). Needs within this category reflect a desire for more fun and engaging activities.

Discussion

Educational Success

While the scholars tended to have very high standards for their future career and educational success (e.g., becoming a marine biologist and graduating college), they also identified physical (e.g., materials, supplies, and scholarships) and practical (e.g., hard subjects in school, conflict with friends) needs that impact their educational success. The scholars believed that personal relationships were particularly meaningful, and that their influence could be negative or positive. Positive relationships included the Scholars Program coordinator—Jonathan—and the Edgewood Village Network Center director—Awna. Negative influences included some peers, significant others, teachers, and friends.

Scholars Program

Students reported generally positive experience within the Scholars Program, and valued the personal connections and relationships that the program fosters. When discussing their needs for *educational success*, the students described needing “**people who pick you up instead of put you down**,” and believed that the Scholars Program’s staff and mentors do just that. Students also felt supported in their education through the many different resources provided by the Scholars Program: learning opportunities (e.g., Kahn Academy), assistance with school work, grade monitoring, and connections to additional enrichment opportunities (e.g., summer camps). While many students felt that no adjustments needed to be made to this program to better support their educational success, others described areas for improvement including more engaging speakers and lectures, more students, and more fun activities.

Recommendations

Recommendation one: Increased focus on supporting students’ development of relationships with positive peers and adults. While the Scholars Program is already perceived by students to be useful and helpful, they also identified potential improvements to the program. The first of these, increased attention to the development of relationships with peer and adult mentors, aligns closely with research findings establishing the importance of peer and adult relationships on positive behavioral and school outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001), classroom enjoyment and motivation (Pianta et al., 2002), reduction in aggressive behaviors (Meehan et al., 2003), student engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004), positive beliefs about themselves and school (Quint et al., 2005), and academic achievement (Crosnoe et al., 2004). Research-supported strategies that could achieve an increased focus on the development of positive relationships with peers and adults include¹:

¹ While a full discussion of each strategy is beyond the scope of this report, more information can be found in the source materials listed as references

- Creating opportunities for adults and students to share personal aspects of their lives (Battistich et al., 1997) and discuss success and struggles (Doll et al., 2011);
- Eating meals together (Battistich et al., 1997)
- Communicating with parents about the students (Battistich et al., 1997)
- Using active listening when communicating with students (Doll et al., 2011)
- Playing games with students to introduce fun activities (Doll et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2016)
- Celebrating students' strengths and interests (Doll et al., 2011)
- Planning activities that help build a sense of community (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2016)
- Maintaining low student-mentor ratios (Quint et al., 2005)

Recommendation two: Continue developing engaging, interactive activities to support the students' learning. The second area for program improvement identified by the Scholars, incorporating engaging activities to support learning, is also consistent with the findings of existing research. Engaging and interactive learning environments positively affect student outcomes such as grades (Van Voorhis, 2003), academic achievement (Voelkl, 1995), and persistence (Connell et al., 1995). Research-supported strategies that foster engagement include:

- Providing activities that encourage student interaction, such as small group work or discussions (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002)
- Allowing students to pick topics of personal interest (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) or collaborating with them on instructional decisions (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004)
- Including exciting demonstrations or innovative materials within programming (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002)
- Discussing with students the components they find to be most exciting or meaningful after implementing different instructional techniques (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002)
- Using real world examples or relate concepts to tangible aspects within their lives (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004)
- Creating a natural context for learning that is both relevant and useful to their everyday lives (Guthrie et al., 1999).

References

- Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1997). Caring school communities. *Educational psychologist*, 32(3), 137-151.
- Cleary, T. J., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2004). Self-regulation empowerment program: A school-based program to enhance self-regulated and self-motivated cycles of student learning. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(5), 537-550.
- Connell, J. P., Halpem-Felsher, B. L., Clifford, E., Crichlow, W., & Usinger, P. (1995). Hanging in there: Behavioral, psychological, and contextual factors affecting whether African American adolescents stay in high school. *Journal of adolescent research*, 10(1), 41-63.
- Crosnoe, R., Johnson, M. K., & Elder, G. H. (2004). Intergenerational bonding in school: The behavioral and contextual correlates of student-teacher relationships. *Sociology of education*, 77(1), 60-81.
- Doll, B., Brehm, K., & Zucker, S. (2014). *Resilient classrooms: Creating healthy environments for learning*. Guilford Publications.
- Guthrie, J. T., Anderson, E., Alao, S., & Rinehart, J. (1999). Influences of concept-oriented reading instruction on strategy use and conceptual learning from text. *The Elementary School Journal*, 343-366.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child development*, 72(2), 625-638.
- Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of school health*, 74(7), 262-273.
- Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P. R. (2002). Motivation as an enabler for academic success. *School Psychology Review*, 31(3), 313.
- Meehan, B., Hughes, J., & Cavell, T. (2003). Teacher-Student Relationships as Compensatory Resources for Aggressive Children. *Child Development*, 74(4), 1145-1157.
- Pianta, R. C., Stuhlman, M. W., & Hamre, B. K. (2002). How schools can do better: Fostering stronger connections between teachers and students. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2002(93), 91-107.
- Quint, J., Bloom, H. S., Black, A. R., Stephens, L., & Akey, T. M. (2005). The Challenge of Scaling Up Educational Reform. Findings and Lessons from First Things First. Final Report. MDRC.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S., & Sandilos, L. (2011). Improving students' relationships with teachers to provide essential supports for learning. *Teacher's Modules*.
- Voelkl, K. E. (1995). School warmth, student participation, and achievement. *The journal of experimental education*, 63(2), 127-138.
- Van Voorhis, F. L. (2003). Interactive homework in middle school: Effects on family involvement and science achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96(6), 323-338.

Appendix A

Educational Success Themes

The themes that scholars identified in their responses to each of the educational success prompts are described here.

Prompt 1: What are your educational goals?

- The theme *Becoming Successful* captured responses broadly describing desirable behavior or outcomes (e.g., “Be a good example,” “Achieving your dreams,” “Be successful.”)
- The theme *Career* included specific (e.g., “Become a Judge,” “Become a Marine Biologist,”) and general (e.g., “Get a good career”) professional goals achieved through education.
- Most responses categorized into the theme, *School*, represented academic milestones (e.g., “graduate high school”, “go to college, “[attend] medical school,” “graduate college.”). One response represented desirable behavior in an academic setting (i.e., “Go to college and be a good example”).

Prompt 2: What things help you to be successful in school?

- The theme, *People*, included responses describing people that had supported scholars’ school success such as family members (e.g., “My mom”), “friends,” the Scholars Program staff (e.g., “Jonathan and my tutor,” and “Awna”) and teachers.
- *Learning* captured descriptions of actions that students undertake to be successful in school (e.g., “Turning in your homework,” “By being the best you can be,” “Learning,” and “[participating in] the Scholars Program.”)

Prompt 3: What are some things that get in the way of you being successful in school?

- *People* captured individuals or groups of people that the scholars perceived as preventing their school success including “Teachers,” “Boyfriend/girlfriend,” “Bullies,” and “Fake people.”
- *Obstacles* grouped responses describing conditions that prevented school success (e.g., “Hard subjects in school,” “drama [difficulties with their peers]”).

Prompt 4: What do you think you need to be successful in school that you don’t already have?

- *People who pick you up instead of putting you down* captured responses about the type of support that scholars needed to be successful in school (e.g., “If I had teachers that know what they’re doing,” “Nice friends”).
- *Rewards* contained responses about resources needed for school success (e.g., “Knowledge,” “Scholarships”)
- *School supplies* referred to equipment needed for school work (e.g., “Materials,” “Pencils”).

Appendix B

Scholars Program Themes

The themes that scholars identified in their responses to each of the prompts about the Scholars Program are described here.

Prompt 1: Is the Scholars Program helping you to be successful in school?

If yes, why?

- *Learning* captured the ways in which the Scholars Program's activities help the students learn (e.g., "It helped me with my math, still hate it but now I can do it" or "Totally helps me learn") or access learning resources (e.g., "Khan Academy," an online learning tool).
- *Grades* referred to the support provided by the program staff to maintain good grades in school (i.e. "Yes because Jonathan makes sure our grades are good and if not then he gives us tutors to get our grades up").
- *Homework* captured the practical assistance with scholars' school work provided by the program (i.e. "Helps me with things I need help on," and "homework").

If no, why?

- *Homework* referred to a need for more practical assistance to be provided by the program.
- *Not enough people* indicated a need for additional peer support within the Scholars Program in order to be successful in school (e.g., "Not enough people/more friends").

Prompt 2: How has the Scholars Program helped you in ways outside of school?

- *Feelings* captured the positive emotions experienced through scholars' involvement in the program (e.g., "It makes me feel very successful" and "It helped me have more fun- [especially through] Kahn Academy").
- *Programs* contained responses about the program's connection to additional enrichment opportunities (e.g., "Helps you in camps and other programs" and "Seeing how college is like").
- *Relationships* referred to the positive social connections made through their involvement in the program (e.g., "Tessie, [a mentor in the program]," "Get to know new people" and support for "neighborhood bullying and problems").

Prompt 3: What are the things that you wish the Scholars Program had to help you be successful in school?

- *Nothing* grouped responses indicating that no further improvements could be made to the program in order better support the scholars' school success.
- *Better speakers* included responses describing improvements to the content of the program's sessions (e.g., Better speakers," "Less boring talks/lectures in lessons")
- *More fun* captured responses describing improvements to make program participation more enjoyable (e.g., "Money- to visit colleges," "More fun activities," "More kids in the program").

Recommended Citation

Stacy, S.T., Lindstrom, M., Spring, H. Acevedo-Polakovich, I.D. (2016). *People who Pick You Up Instead of Putting You Down: Edgewood Village Scholars' Perspectives on their Needs, Assets, and the Program's Impact on their Educational Success*. East Lansing, MI: Community-Academic Innovation and Diffusion Laboratory at Michigan State University.



Michigan State University has been advancing the common good with uncommon will for more than 150 years. One of the top research universities in the world, MSU pushes the boundaries of discovery and forges enduring partnerships to solve the most pressing global challenges while providing life-changing opportunities to a diverse and inclusive academic community through more than 200 programs of study in 17 degree-granting colleges.

www.msu.edu



The Community-AID Laboratory at Michigan State University partners with youth-serving organizations to develop, implement and evaluate innovative programs that:

- Respond to the Needs of Diverse Communities;
- Are Designed for Sustainability;
- Develop all the Talents of all Involved.

www.community-aid.org