

## **The Intersection of Education and Neighborhood Revitalization: The Importance of Neighborhood Schools in Community Stabilization**

*By Catalina Freixas\**

*This paper presents the B.E.S.T. Approach, a phased intervention strategy for distressed urban areas emphasizing neighborhood-level engagement through local schools. The approach utilizes the elementary school as the venue to apply “Wraparound Theory” to comprehensively address educational and service needs. Over the past thirty years, community schools have emerged as collaborative solutions, integrating resources from the school, residents, and community partners to enhance student, family, and community outcomes. Originating in efforts to address issues in a St. Louis neighborhood plagued by population loss and hyper-vacancy, B.E.S.T. seeks to reshape the traditional public-school model by fostering partnerships among local organizations and leaders to promote sustainability within the neighborhood. The first phase of the proposed intervention focuses on making the area livable through Beautification (B), strengthening Education (E), ensuring Service and Safety (S), and providing Technical Assistance (T) to local organizations. B.E.S.T. employs interdisciplinary methodologies, including spatial and data analysis, and a community-engagement approach. An external evaluator assesses the effectiveness of this approach, with findings indicating that the strategy positively impacts neighborhood stabilization, resident satisfaction, and academic performance. However, it also highlights the need for further research on population dynamics, emphasizing the importance of the community’s role in advancing urban development.*

### **Introduction**

Like many American post-industrial cities, St. Louis, Missouri, confronts ongoing challenges due to its significant population decline and economic deterioration. This situation has been further exacerbated by entrenched racial segregation and structural racism. While the city as a whole and numerous inner-ring suburbs have experienced difficulties over the last generation, the plight in North St. Louis—predominately Black—reveals stark disparities evidenced by expansive swathes of the urban landscape plagued with vacant lots and boarded-up structures.<sup>1</sup>

The ramifications of decline have not gone unnoticed by White nor Black St. Louisans. African American leaders have rightfully called attention to the historical inequities in investment and budget allocations from city administrations, which have fueled the growing geographical divide within St. Louis. Although attempts have been made to address these disparities through initiatives aimed at redressing

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1. A. Malach, *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2018).

these inequities—such as housing developments, economic programs, and infrastructure improvements—these measures have often yielded minimal to no tangible impact, with outcomes often falling short of expectations.

In response to this pervasive lack of success, the St. Louis Association of Community Organizations (SLACO)—a local non-profit dedicated to advocating for neighborhood improvement—has been working on the development of a more effective and inclusive intervention strategy. While SLACO has members from both North and South St. Louis as well as across the metropolitan area, many of the neighborhoods it serves are in the distressed northside. Over the past decade, SLACO has focused on addressing vacancy in many of these communities. Out of these efforts, in 2021, SLACO initiated the KingsVille B.E.S.T. Collective (KBC), a collaborative venture involving community groups (KingsVille Corporation and the Urban League St. Louis) and institutional partners (St. Louis Public Schools, SLPS; Harris-Stowe State University, HSSU, and Washington University in St. Louis), WashU aimed at creating a comprehensive approach to neighborhood stabilization.

Central to this approach is the principle that neighborhood stabilization must precede housing redevelopment and economic revitalization attempts. The overarching goal is to breathe new life into the community by changing the prevailing negative perception of the neighborhood as a desirable place to reside and raise a family. For KBC, this vision encompasses beautifying the physical environment (B), addressing the academic challenges of the local school (E), ensuring the safety and service access of the residents (S), and providing technical support to the community organizations (T).



**Figure 1.** *KingsVille Target Area*, Catalina Freixas 2025

Recognizing the critical role that the elementary school plays in urban planning, KBC chose the KingsVille community (Figure 1) due to the presence of a strong neighborhood school—Hickey Elementary School (HES). KingsVille (KV), a member of SLACO, covers a twenty-block area that spans the underserved

neighborhoods of Kingsway East and The Greater Ville. Given its socioeconomic hurdles and manageable size, KV was an ideal candidate for this pilot study.

With HES and its surrounding community as its starting point, the project was grounded in a school-oriented intervention methodology. KBC sought a theoretical framework to inform and guide its initiative, presenting a constructive pathway forward. Given the professional backgrounds of many of its partners in education, the group gravitated toward Wraparound Theory (WT).<sup>2</sup> This theory, which originates from an educational discourse, underscores the necessity of a comprehensive, coordinated, and community-based approach to fulfill the needs of individuals and families. In short, KBC envisioned the B.E.S.T. Approach as a school-centered intervention utilizing WT at the neighborhood level.

With a firm grasp of the necessity for a strategic framework, KBC developed a comprehensive action plan and established clear evaluation metrics to measure progress. This methodical approach guaranteed that resources and efforts were utilized efficiently, and that meaningful change could be assessed quantitatively and qualitatively.

As a result, the collective devised a scalable, community-engaged approach for highly distressed neighborhoods aimed at enhancing the physical environment, strengthening the quality of the local school, improving community service delivery, ensuring resident safety, and bolstering the organizational capacity of local groups.

The pilot study of the KV B.E.S.T. Approach is guided by several explicit research questions aimed at evaluating the program's effectiveness and potential for community stabilization and revitalization. First, the intellectual framework is predicated on whether the neighborhood school can act as a catalyst for change in a highly distressed community, functioning not merely as an educational institution but also as a critical focus for this intervention strategy. HES was an ideal focus for exploring the role of neighborhoods schools in an intervention strategy due to its central role within the community and its alignment with a school-centered intervention methodology.

Second, this paper examines how the various B.E.S.T. domains contribute to measurable outcomes. Therefore, under beautification, it explores the extent to which beautification efforts—such as property stabilization initiatives, demolitions, vacant-lot maintenance, and improvements to the tree canopy—enhance neighborhood livability and positively affect resident perceptions. Additionally, under education, the research attempts to assess the impact of initiatives—such as attendance supports, after-school programs, literacy enhancements, and tracking of test scores—on improving student outcomes and school enrollment. Furthermore, under safety and service, the research delves into strategies—such as walkability improvements, crime prevention programs, and service referrals—to determine their effectiveness in reducing crime and increasing service delivery. Lastly, under technical assistance, the research explores the role of professional support—such as organizational training, grant support, and memorandums of understanding (MOUs)—in bolstering neighborhood organizational capacity and ensuring project sustainability.

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2. K. Soon, J.C. Suter, O. Linkous, C.A. Davis, and E.J. Bruns, Adapting Community-Based Wraparound for Use as an Intensive Intervention in School. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 0(0) (2025).

Finally, the research aims to determine whether the approach has the potential of being replicable and sustainable. By establishing benchmarks and through an analysis of pilot outcomes, the Principal Investigator (PI) intends to evaluate the likelihood that the B.E.S.T. Approach could be adapted to comparable neighborhoods in St. Louis and other American cities. Additional inquiries focus on what data or conditions are necessary to support such replication and what policy levers at the district or municipal level are essential for institutionalizing and scaling the B.E.S.T. Approach. The overarching goal of this comprehensive assessment framework is to lay the foundation for policy changes at the district or municipal level, necessary to institutionalize and scale the B.E.S.T. Approach.

## Intellectual Framework

### Historical Overview of American Neighborhood Planning

Neighborhood planning in the United States has evolved over a century and a half, with various approaches. The B.E.S.T. Approach is a contemporary framework that draws inspiration from this legacy but is not itself a historic model. In the first half of the nineteenth century, American planning primarily revolved around establishing new towns and providing essential infrastructure such as water, sanitation, and green common space within existing urban areas. However, as industrialization and urbanization surged in the latter half of the century, planners began to confront the emergent challenges in residential areas, acknowledging the existence and intricacies of neighborhoods within the emerging streetcar city. In this early neighborhood planning, early reforms, such as the New York tenement laws of the 1880s and 1890s, were among the initial attempts by urban officials to address housing needs.<sup>3</sup>

Although most of the practitioners of the emerging field of urban planning at the beginning of the twentieth century focused on instilling order in the American city by creating master plans or comprehensive plans for the entire metropolis, some recognized the necessity of formulating strategies at the neighborhood scale. Notable figures like Henry Wright, in the 1907 St. Louis Civic League Plan, advocated for the establishment of community centers to address the pressing needs of St. Louis's growing immigrant population by providing essential amenities—such as community baths—emphasizing a holistic approach to urban living.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Although Daniel Burnham is widely recognized for his ambitious vision for public space in Chicago's 1909 Comprehensive Plan, he also proposed extensive improvements that ultimately

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3. C. Silver, "Neighborhood Planning in a Historical Perspective," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 51, no. 2 (1985): 161-174.

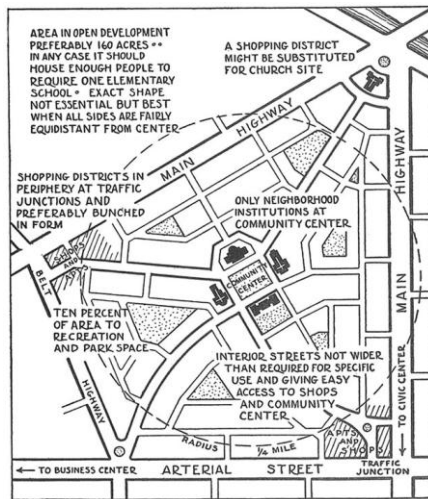
4. M. Abbott, "The Master Plan: Life and Death of Ideas" (Lafayette: Master Thesis, Purdue University, 1985).

5. M. Abbott, "Déjà vu All Over Again? St. Louis Master Plan and the Dream of the Democratic Community," *Gateway Heritage* (1999): 4-19.

6. M. Abbott, "A Document that Changed America: The 1907 A City Plan for St. Louis," in *St. Louis Plans: The Ideal and The Real St. Louis* (ed.) M. Tranel (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 2007), 17-54.

were not included in the final document due to reservations by the Commercial Club.<sup>7</sup>

The true foundation for American neighborhood planning was laid in the 1920s by Robert Park and his colleagues at the University of Chicago. By examining indicators such as growth trends, demographic shifts, and living conditions, members of the Chicago School established the groundwork for Neighborhood Studies.<sup>8</sup> This new wave of sociologists inspired urban planners like Clarence Perry<sup>9</sup> (Figure 2) and Clarence Stein<sup>10</sup> to reimagine urban life from the neighborhood perspective during the late 1920s. Even Harland Bartholomew—best known for his work on zoning and comprehensive planning, urban renewal, and early planning for the American interstate system—was instrumental in suggesting ways urban planners could shape existing urban neighborhoods in the 1930s. Like many contemporary neighborhood planners, Bartholomew advocated for urban neighborhoods' enhancements through tools like building codes, historic preservation, and infill demolition/development aimed at safeguarding the character of neighborhoods.<sup>11,12</sup>



**Figure 2.** *The Basic Components of Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit, Perry 1929*

However, Bartholomew and most American planners in the 1940s and 1950s took a different approach, prompted by concerning signs of stagnation in urban growth, declining residential conditions, and the necessity of accommodating the automobile. This shift led post-war urban planners to push for large-scale urban clearance, with the assumption that neighborhoods built a century earlier could not be updated to meet modern amenities—such as indoor plumbing, central heating,

7. D. Burnham, *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: Great Books Foundation, 2009).

8. R. Park, E. Burgess and R. McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1925).

9. C. Perry, *Neighborhood and Community Planning: Comprising Three Monographs: The Neighborhood Unit* (New York: Arno Press, 1929).

10. C. Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (New York: Reinhold, 1959).

11. M. Abbott, "Who Knew? Harland Bartholomew as Neighborhood Conservationist" (Presentation, 57th Annual Missouri Conference on History, St. Louis, MO, March 11-13, 2015).

12. H. Bartholomew, "Neighborhood Rehabilitation and the Taxpayer," *American City* 53 (February 1938), 57.

and electricity. Consequently, existing neighborhoods were replaced with whole-sale large-scale public housing complexes. The high-profile case of Pruitt-Igoe exemplifies the catastrophic results of this mindset. By the early 1960s, a backlash against this model began to coalesce.<sup>13</sup>

Amid these debates, some urban theorists, including Reginald Issacs, contended that urban planners should abandon the concept of neighborhoods, claiming they only entrenched racial, social, and economic segregation.<sup>14</sup> However, a prominent discourse emphasizing the importance of preserving the historic role of neighborhoods emerged as well. Jane Jacobs became a powerful voice against urban renewal and the need to retain the historic fabric in her influential book, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*.<sup>15</sup> Jacobs argued that neighborhoods were essential for understanding how cities function and criticized urban renewal for dismantling the heterogenic interactions at the neighborhood level. While acknowledging the existence of slums in mid-twentieth-century American cities, she argued that the process of “unslumming” should proceed cautiously to preserve the vital workings of the existing neighborhood.

Due to the influence of Jane Jacobs and her followers, a mass movement of young professionals flocked to American inner cities in search of what they perceived as “authentic” urban living. Moving into what had become, in many cases, severely distressed neighborhoods, these urban pioneers settled in neighborhoods that, in many cases, had fallen into severe distress. Their intent was to transform these downtrodden communities into spaces that embodied “Jacobs” ideals of a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood. However, this revitalization often resulted in the gentrification of these areas, changing them into middle-class, white neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup> Many city planners supported this process by helping these newcomers establish historic preservation districts and legislating favorable tax and zoning initiatives that facilitated development.<sup>17</sup>

In response to the gentrification of lower-income neighborhoods—many predominantly Black—a new generation of planners emerged in the late 1960s. They viewed their role as protectors of vulnerable communities, advocating for residents at risk of displacement with no viable alternatives. This cohort of planners—sympathetic to the plight of the communities—worked closely with these marginalized neighborhoods, assisting residents in creating the tools necessary for self-driven revitalization. Key initiatives included forming community development corporations (CDC), establishing neighborhood association collectives, and offering various forms of technical assistance.<sup>18</sup>

However, by the 1980s and 1990s, many planners became disheartened by their inability to effect meaningful change in distressed neighborhoods. As a result, they

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13. J.C.C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America*, (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

14. R. Isaacs, “The ‘Neighborhood Unit’ is an Instrument for Segregation,” *Journal of Housing*, no. 5 (1948): 215-218.

15. J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

16. S. Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

17. H. Gillette, “The Evolution of Neighborhood Planning from the Progressive Era to the 1949 Housing Act,” *Howard Journal of Urban History* 9, no. 4 (1983): 421-444.

18. P. Moskowitz, *How to Kill a City* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2015).

shifted their focus to remaking the American downtown. One of their many goals was to repurpose commercial spaces—no longer needed with the emergence of suburban shopping malls—into apartments and condominiums. In short, planners aimed to recreate downtown neighborhoods characterized by a mix of shops, theaters, restaurants, and other amenities reminiscent of historic urban areas.<sup>19</sup>

This renewed emphasis on the revitalization of downtown and its abutting neighborhoods contributed to a stagnation in the field of neighborhood planning throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and even into the twenty-first century within American urban planning practice. While many cities concentrated on stimulating downtown revitalization and enhancing gentrified inner-city neighborhoods through new sports arenas, light rail/rapid bus transit systems, and research campuses, they drastically reduced or even eliminated their neighborhood planning departments and programs. Although a subset of urban planners worked outside traditional municipal planning agencies with CDCs and other non-profit community organizations, the overall lack of sustained efforts to address the deterioration of most neighborhoods exacerbated the phenomenon of the “Divided City.” As a result, many American cities evolved into two starkly contrasting urban realities: one marked by rich and thriving downtowns adorned with new skyscrapers and magnificent urban parks adjacent to up-and-coming residential areas, and the other poor and struggling plagued by increasing urban decay and abandonment.<sup>20</sup>

Over the last quarter-century, the neighborhood has begun to receive renewed attention as part of a broader effort to revitalized areas marked by urban decay. This shift stems from an increasing recognition that the devastation of the “Divided City” results not solely from the de-industrialization and other economic upheavals since the 1960s is also deeply rooted in systemic issues of structural racism. Urban planners have started to embrace the challenge of reclaiming all neighborhoods, including those that are highly distressed.<sup>21</sup> Recent scholarship underscores the importance of viewing neighborhoods as dynamic entities shaped by both social and physical factors. For instance, Emily Talen’s research highlights the necessity of understanding the everyday experiences of residents and the significance of promoting walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. This perspective aligns with the notion that vibrant neighborhoods are not merely clusters of buildings but rather vital environments that nurture social connections and community identity.<sup>22</sup>

While planners have long acknowledged the importance of community involvement in neighborhood planning, often paying lip service to this principle for over fifty years,<sup>23</sup> recent insights reveal that facilitating authentic engagement is far more complex than it may appear. On one hand, empowering residents to voice their

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19. J. C. C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America*, (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

20. A. Mallach, *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2018).

21. A. Brumfield, *Rethinking the ways cities can invest in vital neighborhoods* (American City County, May 13, 2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.americancityandcounty.com/economy-finance/rethinking-the-ways-cities-can-invest-in-vital-neighborhoods>. [Accessed December 2024].

22. E. Talen, *Neighborhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

23. S. Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of The American Institute of Planners* 35, no.4 (1969): 216-244.

opinions in neighborhood development decisions can lead to challenges, as vested interests may result in the rejection of necessary initiatives aimed at promoting equitable growth.<sup>24</sup> Past planning efforts are often leveraged to obstruct racially equitable development that could benefit the broader community.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, unfettered civic engagement may lead to displacement in these distressed neighborhoods, as gentrification efforts can emerge, pricing-out long-term residents.<sup>26</sup> Thus, neighborhood planners face the intricate task of balancing the needs of the most marginalized groups in the city, while simultaneously fostering economic growth.<sup>27</sup> This balance is crucial in shaping a future where all community members feel valued and included in the revitalization process. This is why the B.E.S.T. Approach places such a heavy emphasis on community engagement and creating an active role for the residents in the planning process.

### *The Role of the Elementary School in Neighborhood Planning*

A pivotal component in achieving this balance in neighborhood stabilization is the neighborhood school, a concept first advocated by Clarence Perry. While Perry has often faced criticism for framing the relationship between schools and neighborhoods primarily in physical terms, his work reveals a keen interest in the social and economic potential schools hold within their communities in nurturing neighborhood life.<sup>28</sup> Unlike other tools for revitalization, the neighborhood school is inherently connected to the residents it serves.

As neighborhood planners increasingly recognized, schools can serve not only as educational institutions but also as vital centers for social services and community engagement. They can act as focal points around which neighborhood residents can gather, self-organize and collaborate, instilling a sense of community and belonging among families. In essence, the school can play a critical role in shaping neighborhood identity, thereby, transforming the even the most distressed areas into a community.

While Perry championed the school's potential in shaping neighborhood life, urban theorists and planners also began to expand this view in the early 1950s to encompass a broader, non-educational context. Influential thinkers like Nathan Glazer,<sup>29</sup> observed that schools were instrumental not only in integrating the education of Black and White students but also stabilizing neighborhoods experiencing racial transitions, particularly in the wake of landmark court cases such as, *Shelley v. Kramer*<sup>30</sup> and *Brown*

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24. J. Demas, *The Truth of NIMBYs* (The Atlantic, January 7, 2025). Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/podcasts/archive/2025/01/why-people-are-nimbys/681225/>. [Accessed December 2024].

25. R. Dubicki, *Neighborhood Plans are High Minded Gatekeeping*, (The Urbanist, February 25, 2022). Retrieved from: <https://www.theurbanist.org/2022/02/25/neighborhood-plans-are-high-minded-gatekeeping/>. [Accessed December 2024].

26. T. Grevstad-Nordbrock and I. Vojnovic, "Heritage-fueled Gentrification: A Cautionary Tale from Chicago," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 38 (2019): 261-270.

27. R. Silverman, H. Taylor Jr., and C. Crawford, "The role of citizen participation and action research principles in Main Street revitalization," *Action Research* 6 no.1, (2019): 69-91.

28. H. Gillette, "The Evolution of Neighborhood Planning from the Progressive Era to the 1949 Housing Act," *Howard Journal of Urban History* 9, no. 4 (1983): 421-444.

29. N. Glazer, "The School as an Instrument in Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 25, no. 4 (1959): 191-199.

30. *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

*v. Board of Topeka*,<sup>31</sup> fostering integration and social cohesion amid changing demographics. Principally, they became venues for community engagement and involvement, allowing residents to collaborate on maintaining their neighborhoods' stability and safety. In this turbulent period, the local elementary school acted as a bridge between differing racial and cultural groups, facilitating dialogue and understanding.

As the Urban Crisis intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, educators across the United States sought to address the multifaceted challenges faced by the families of their students. This led to the emergence of the Community School movement, beginning in 1970s and 1980s, which expanded the role of institutions to serve as a community hubs, providing various medical and social services. By opening their doors in this manner, schools had the potential to become catalysts for positive change, strengthening the social fabric of their neighborhoods and facilitating a more comprehensive approach to community revitalization. In summary, the role of the elementary school extended far beyond education; it became integral to the health and vitality of neighborhoods, serving as a cornerstone for community engagement, social support, and identity formation, ultimately, fostering resilient and thriving communities.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the declining enrollment in public schools and shrinking budgets that prompted many major city school districts to reduce or eliminate community schools in the 1990s and early 2000s, neighborhood planners began envisioning the neighborhood school as a foundation for revitalization in severely distressed areas. Leading this transformative approach was the firm of McCormick, Baron, and Salazar. As Moore and Glassman<sup>33</sup> of Urban Strategies, the firm non-profit affiliate, have argued, schools play a pivotal role in attracting families to neighborhoods, which in turns stimulates residential investment and economic growth. For them, their work with the HOPE VI program nationwide illustrates how residents and other stakeholders in struggling communities have started to see schools are more than just educational institutions; they now recognize their potential as catalysts for spearheading local revitalization. In their minds, by investing in school infrastructure and programming, neighborhoods position themselves for broader economic advancement, ultimately enhancing property values and strengthening community stability.

Alongside this development, a new planning strategy known as School-Oriented Development (SOD) has emerged, aimed at linking the neighborhood school with community revitalization efforts. This innovative strategy focuses on fostering neighborhood growth that aligns not only with educational needs and infrastructure of local schools but also on creating walkable, vibrant communities. In this framework, schools serve as stimulants for informed planning and development decisions. By integrating educational facilities into the broader vision of neighborhood design, planners can ensure that schools remain central to community dynamics, fostering

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31. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

32. J. Quinn and M. Blank, "Twenty Years, Ten Lessons: Community Schools as an Equitable School Improvement Strategy," *Voices in Urban Education* 49, no. 2 (2020): 44-53.

33. S. Moore and S. Glassman, *The Neighborhood and Its School in Community Revitalization: Tools for Developers of Mixed-Income Housing Communities* (St. Louis: Urban Strategies Inc., 2007).

environments conducive to both learning and living (Figure 3).<sup>34</sup> Consequently, the neighborhood school provides the optimal venue for the implementation of the B.E.S.T. Approach.

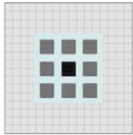
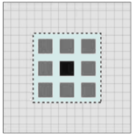
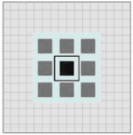
	NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER	FAMILY SCHOOL	CULTURAL HUB
<b>Description</b>	 Community uses are integrated on the school site, so that the school serves community interests while additional facilities augment the services that the school can provide to students. Serves as, or contributes to, the central civic space for a community.	 Includes uses on site that cater to the students as well as their families, providing before and after school options for students, their siblings, and parents. Has support services for families only, and is not open to the general public.	 Partnerships with nearby cultural facilities like museums and theaters provide active learning experiences which are built into students' curriculum. Can be based on co-location with one institution or proximity to several institutions
<b>Community-School Relationship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no-way</li> <li>• unrestricted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• two-way</li> <li>• restricted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one-way</li> <li>• unrestricted</li> </ul>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides the basis for a complete community</li> <li>• is the most inclusive SOD type, in terms of catering to the full range of community stakeholders</li> <li>• can be adapted to large or small scales</li> <li>• co-located uses must be sensitive to age of students that attend the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can supplement social services for underserved populations including low-income and immigrant families</li> <li>• exclusivity can benefit high-crime or high-intensity urban areas by providing a safe haven for children and families</li> <li>• may be most appropriate for elementary and middle schools, since younger students are more dependent on parental involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will tend to locate in city centers where cultural institutions cluster</li> <li>• can serve as opportunity for magnet school that focuses on arts or sciences particularly (depending on institutional partnerships)</li> <li>• may be most appropriate for smaller scale if curriculum is specialized</li> </ul>
<b>Private Frontages</b>	Front Plaza Front Steps Overhang Entrance	Vestibule Private Courtyard	Front Steps Overhang Entrance
<b>Outdoor Space Elements</b>	Outdoor Classroom Community Garden	Outdoor Classroom Student Learning Garden	Outdoor Classroom Student Learning Garden
<b>Examples</b>	Inderkum High School (Sacramento, CA) City Heights K-16 Educational Collaborative (San Diego, CA) Neptune Community School (Neptune, NJ)	Tenderoin Community School (San Francisco, CA) PS 5, The Ellen Lurie School (New York, NY)	Moore Square Museums Magnet Middle School (Raleigh, NC) School of Environmental Studies (Minneapolis, MN) Henry Ford Academy (Dearborn, MI)

Figure 3. Types of School Oriented Development, Reid 2011

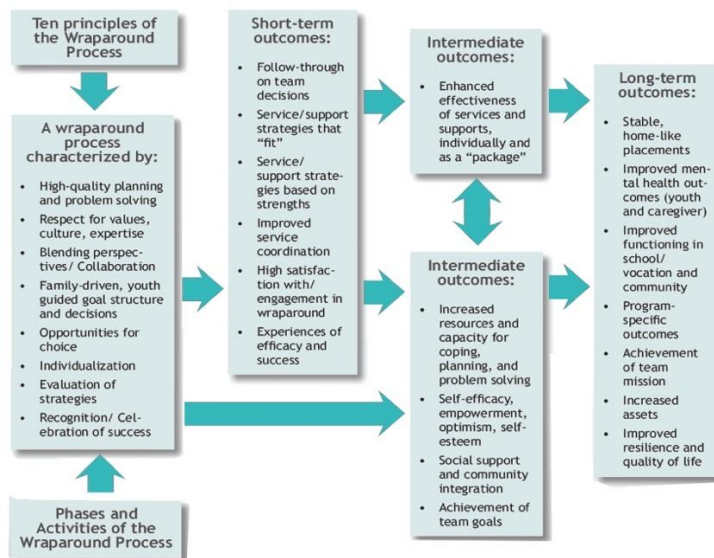
### Application of Wraparound Theory at the Neighborhood Level

The neighborhood school serves not only as the ideal cornerstone for the implementation of the B.E.S.T. Approach but also plays a vital role in defining its theoretical framework. Educators and social workers alike have long recognized that interventions targeting specific issues, such as academic deficiencies or substance abuse, must be approached in a holistic manner. For example, students facing academic challenges frequently contend with underlying family issues. When a family grapples with economic, social, or medical obstacles, students are less likely to overcome their educational struggles without addressing these interconnected problems.

This comprehensive method of tackling challenges is commonly referred to as “Wraparound Theory” (WT) (Figure 4). According to the National Wraparound Initiative, WT is a comprehensive approach designed to support individuals and families through community-based services. By integrating various support systems and recognizing the multifaceted nature of student needs, WT emphasizes the importance of a coordinated response that nurtures both the individual and their

34. C. Reid, “School-Oriented Development: A New Paradigm for Neighborhood Planning” (Tempe: Master Thesis, Arizona State University, 2011).

broader community context.<sup>35</sup> The B.E.S.T. Approach aims to apply WT at the neighborhood level.



**Figure 4.** *A Theory of Change for Wraparound: Overview, Walker 2008*

A significant aspect of WT as a theoretical framework for neighborhood planning, particularly in highly at-risk communities, is that it is based on foundational principles familiar to contemporary urban planners. Like most urban planning practices, WT assumes that intervention occurs in loops or stages. One must complete the prerequisites steps before moving forward with subsequent phases of a plan. This iterative methodology allows for ongoing assessment and refinement of strategies. But more importantly, as with any planning endeavor, a plan grounded in WT starts with a thorough assessment of all of the factors impacting the problem at hand. Consequently, a neighborhood plan informed by WT begins with a comprehensive evaluation of the multifaceted community challenges.

Additionally, like most urban planning practices, WT-based neighborhood planning processes are data-driven. In this case, the evidence-based decision-making ensures that neighborhood initiatives align with community priorities and effectively address them. Finally, neighborhood planning shaped by WT is inherently community-driven. As with any planning project, stakeholder engagement is essential. Only through active community participation in both the planning and implementation phases of the plan will a sense of ownership and accountability toward the intervention be achieved.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the B.E.S.T. Approach embodies a collaborative partnership between neighborhood planners and community stakeholders. The core assumption is that through collaboration and a commitment to holistic solutions, even the most

35. T. Donnelly, K. Coviello, K. Estep, and J. Walker, *The Wraparound Process User's Guide: A Handbook for Families* (Portland: National Wraparound State Initiative Portland State University, 2024).

36. *Ibid.*

challenging neighborhoods can experience transformative growth, paving the way for a brighter future (Figure 5).

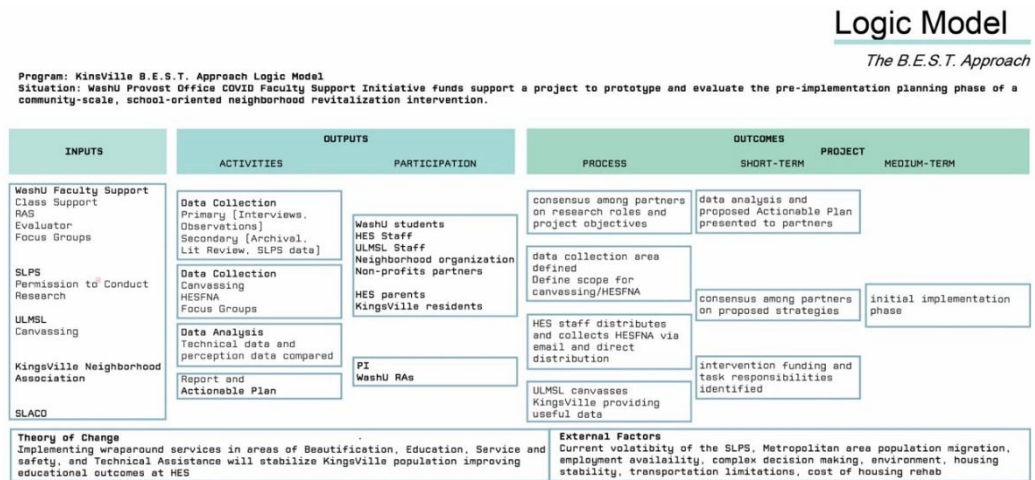
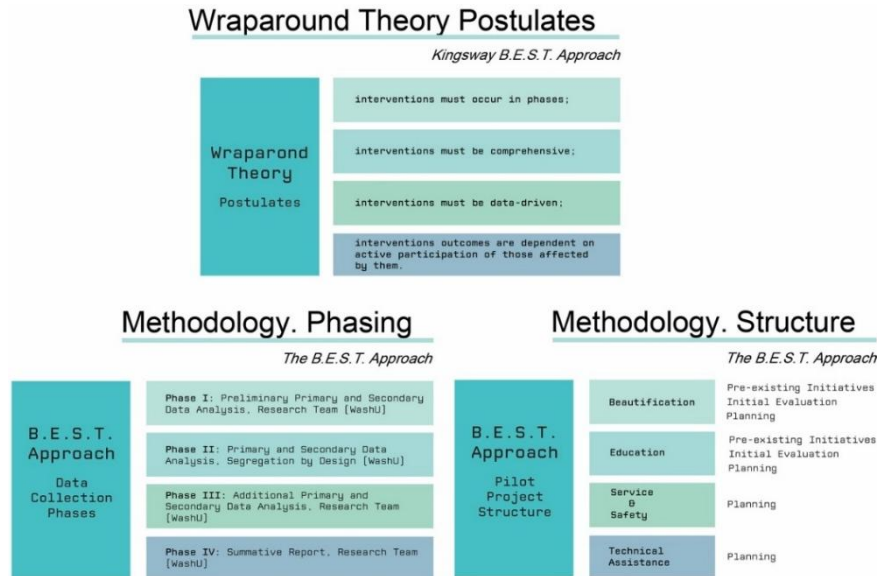


Figure 5. External Evaluator Logic Model, Tranel 2025

### Methodology

Given that the B.E.S.T. Approach centers around an existing school where real-time interventions were attempted amid complex social and political dynamics, the pilot required a flexible assessment methodology where data was collected in phases as the pilot unfolded. This flexibility was essential to accommodate the concurrent planning and implementation stages, as well as their respective feedback loops. Therefore, the PI and KBC agreed to test the B.E.S.T. Approach through a mixed-methods, phased case-study design aligned with the B.E.S.T. logic model and WT postulates.

The four postulates of WT shaped the phasing and structure of the project (Figure 6). Hence, the data collection process, the actions undertaken, and those proposed to address the four targeted domains occurred in loops that were comprehensive in scope as additional needs of the stakeholders were identified through primary and secondary sources.



**Figure 6.** *Wraparound Theory Application in the B.E.S.T. Approach, Freixas 2025*

Assuming that enhancing livability is the first priority of a highly distressed neighborhood, KBC initiated actions to beautify the area, strengthen the local school, address the residents’ safety and service needs, and provide essential professional or technical assistance for measuring the pilot’s success.

As the project progressed, KBC collected data on current conditions and established metrics for actions underway. In the planning phase, KBC developed alternative action sets, defined criteria for short-term and long-term success, and identified potential partnerships and programs to support these initiatives.

**Data Collection Phases**

The data for the B.E.S.T. Approach was gathered in four different phases (Figure 7).

Time Period	Description	Key Activities	Outcomes
<b>Phase I</b>			
Summer 2022	Preliminary Primary and Secondary Data Analysis: PI (WashU) - Involved a funded research proposal	- Conducted systematic observations of physical conditions. - Collected archival demographic data. - Initiated conversations with neighborhood groups and stakeholders.	Baseline neighborhood conditions and community profile established.
<b>Phase II</b>			
Fall 2022	Primary and Secondary Data Analysis: Segregation by Design (SBD, WashU)	- Conducted historical analysis and additional field observations. - Collected secondary archival data.	A course book which synthesized background findings and mitigation

Time Period	Description	Key Activities	Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involved research from the seminar SBD offered by the WashU architecture program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Performed 2 rapid literature reviews.</li> <li>- Created informative maps.</li> <li>- Undertook a Sidewalk Survey with HES 5th-graders.</li> <li>- Led semi structured stakeholder interviews.</li> <li>- Analyzed historical/current policies.</li> <li>- Developed graphics for various indicators.</li> </ul>	<p>recommendations was produced.</p>
<b>Phase III</b>			
Fall 2022 - 2023	<p>Additional Primary and Secondary Data Analysis: PI (WashU).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involved external evaluator assistance in developing an assessment for scalability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaged external evaluator in developing the theory of change.</li> <li>- Continued baseline data analysis.</li> <li>- Performed additional data collection on the 4 domains of B.E.S.T.</li> <li>- Conducted door-to-door canvassing and focus groups.</li> <li>- Petitioned SLPS for data retrieval.</li> <li>- Designed the HESFNA survey.</li> </ul>	<p>Student course book was refined and expanded by WashU faculty.</p>
<b>Phase IV</b>			
2024	<p>Implementation Strategy: PI (WashU).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involved the evaluation of data analysis and the creation of an action plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summarized data analysis.</li> <li>- Proposed potential implementation tactics.</li> <li>- Disseminated Summative Report among KBC partners.</li> <li>- Developed an evaluation plan to assess the potential for project scalability.</li> </ul>	<p>Summative Report to be used by partners as a roadmap for implementing the B.E.S.T. Approach.</p>

**Figure 7.** Data Collection Phases, Freixas 2025

## Pilot Project Structure

The pilot project was organized around the four targeted domains shaped by the B.E.S.T. Approach: Beautification, Education, Safety & Services, and Technical Assistance. The specific actionable strategies were prioritized based on ongoing initiatives and community concerns (Figure 8).

On-going Community Initiatives	Initial Annual Target Measures	Planning Tactics
<b>Beautification</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving LRA properties through the Prop NS program.</li> <li>- Recommending the demolition of derelict properties beyond repair.</li> <li>- Promoting home-improvement through available home-repair programs.</li> <li>- Lobbying for city services.</li> <li>- Beautifying streetscapes through community cleanup events.</li> <li>- Enhancing local community gardens and streetscape.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nomination and approval of 5 properties for stabilization.</li> <li>- Demolition of 5 derelict properties.</li> <li>- Submission of 20 Citizen's Service Bureau (CSB) requests.</li> <li>- Allocation of home improvement funding to 10 properties.</li> <li>- Organization of 2 community cleanup campaigns.</li> <li>- Establishment of 1 new community garden.</li> <li>- Planting 10 trees on HES premises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conducting a thorough survey of KV buildings.</li> <li>- Creating a prioritized list of properties recommended for demolition.</li> <li>- Compiling a repository of available home improvement programs.</li> <li>- Engaging the NIS in advocating for essential city services.</li> <li>- Expanding beautification efforts to cover additional community cleanups and maintenance of vacant lots.</li> <li>- Developing an urban agriculture program to promote local food production.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving school attendance.</li> <li>- Providing student academic support.</li> <li>- Fostering a dialogue with HES administration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attainment of SLPS district goal of 90% daily attendance by 90% of students</li> <li>- Median achievement on basic state standardized tests.</li> <li>- Monthly meetings with HES principal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Addressing the state-mandated transportation gap for students within 1-mile radius of the neighborhood school.</li> <li>- Conducting a comprehensive Assessment of the educational quality at HES.</li> <li>- Recruiting college students for mentoring/tutoring before and after school.</li> <li>- Establishing a MOU between KBC and HES, SLPS, and other partners.</li> <li>- Securing SLPS approval for conducting research using confidential data.</li> </ul>

<b>On-going Community Initiatives</b>	<b>Initial Annual Target Measures</b>	<b>Planning Tactics</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhancing student literacy by expanding the HES library collection to feature works by non-white authors and characters.</li> <li>- Installing a Little Library on HES premises to promote community literacy.</li> <li>- Improving cradle-to-career outcomes by identifying regional resources to better prepare pre-K students for elementary school and beyond.</li> <li>- Enhancing parental perception of HES.</li> <li>- Formalizing a community partnership agreement with SLPS.</li> </ul>
<b>Safety and Services</b>		
None.	None.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conducting an initial assessment of community conditions and needs through canvassing, /HEFNA, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups</li> <li>- Implementing a walkability strategy that encompasses street calming measures and necessary infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>- Developing a crime prevention program in collaboration with SLMPD to online effective crime prevention strategies.</li> <li>- Identifying potential nonprofit service providers to support these efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>Technical Assistance</b>		
Participation of the neighborhood organization in the SLACO Advocacy Committee, which was	None.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing training to the local neighborhood organization to build capacity (board development, membership</li> </ul>

On-going Community Initiatives	Initial Annual Target Measures	Planning Tactics
in the process of developing an intervention strategy for neighborhoods like KV.		recruitment, best practices, grant writing, fundraising). - Creating a neighborhood strategic plan (community assets/resources, challenges, goals/objectives, partners, success measures). - Forming partnerships with local educational institutions, nonprofits, governmental agencies, private firms for professional expertise (legal, medical, design, accounting).

**Figure 8.** Pilot Project Structure, Freixas 2025

### Evaluation Methodology

The Principal Investigator attempted to assess the effectiveness of the B.E.S.T. Approach by measuring short- to mid-term outcomes across the four B.E.S.T. domains. Data streams included SLPS and St. Louis City records, field systematic observations, structured surveys (HESFNA), semi-structured interviews/focus groups, and external evaluator review. Phases I–IV provided baseline and follow-up measurement points (Figure 9).

Time Period	Key Indicators	Primary Data Sources
<b>Beautification</b>		
Baseline (Phase I–II); Follow-up (Phase III–IV); Monitoring (Ongoing).	Prop NS nominations; demolitions; CSB requests; home-repair completions; community cleanups; community gardens; tree canopy projects.	Prop NS, city permit records, LRA/ULSTL reports, CSB data, SLACO program logs, Forest ReLeaf reports, field observations, HESFNA.
<b>Education</b>		
Baseline (Phase II); Follow-up (Phase III–IV); Monitoring (Ongoing).	Enrollment; daily attendance (90-by-90 target); STAR growth; state test cohort change; after-school participation; library holdings; parental satisfaction; change in SLPS transportation policy; community partnerships formed.	SLPS aggregated administrative data (demographics, STAR benchmarks), program rosters, MOUs, HESFNA.

Time Period	Key Indicators	Primary Data Sources
<b>Safety &amp; Services</b>		
Baseline (Phase IV); Follow-up (Ongoing).	Crime counts/hotspots; traffic accidents; Neighborhood Watch events; city service requests/responses; service providers identified.	SLMPD neighborhood statistics, City service request logs, KBC event records, surveys, observations, HESFNA.
<b>Technical Assistance</b>		
Baseline (Phase I-II); follow-up (Phase III-IV); Monitoring (Ongoing).	Trainings delivered; grants secured; MOUs signed; organizational capacity assessment results.	SLACO records, training logs, organizational self-assessments, MOUs, grant award notices, SBD course book, SBD research book, Summative Report, HESFNA.

**Figure 9.** Pilot Project Evaluation Overview, Freixas 2025

### External Evaluator Framework

This pilot involved repeated measures and multiple data streams. The pilot analyzed four spatial scales: KV target area, HES service area, Kingsway East & Greater Ville neighborhoods, and the City of St. Louis. The external evaluator recommended adding matched comparison neighborhoods or pre- and post-longitudinal baselines for scalability testing. To date, formal control neighborhoods have not been identified.

In addition, the external evaluator suggested using an alternative measure of community needs since the door-to-door canvassing was suspended. The collection of neighborhood wide primary data remains a challenge. Other data gaps include full SLPS confidential student records beyond aggregated STAR/demographics,

### Ethics, Approvals, and Data Governance

The research project underwent WashU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and subsequently received grant approval. Additionally, for work conducted at the HES, the study adhered to St. Louis Public Schools' (SLPS) "Requirements to Conduct Research to Obtain Confidential Data." All activities conducted at the school involving students and families complied with SLPS protocols, and no additional consent was required.

### Results

While it is still too early to discern definitive progress with regards to reducing vacancy and population loss, the impact of the B.E.S.T. Approach on neighborhood livability is evident. The cleanliness of alleys has improved, and vacant lots are now regularly maintained. Landscape improvements have been designed. The after-school program has seen a significant expansion, Community safety and service

needs have been identified and prioritized. New partnerships have been established. Programs have been identified. Grant proposals have been submitted. In summary, KBC has completed the preliminary work for an action plan, establishing a clear pathway toward sustainable stabilization with outlined next steps and measurable outcomes.

Below see findings from the initial assessment of the initiatives in place as well as those determined at the planning phase (Figure 10).

Goal	Initial Objective (annually) (before Fall 2021)	Revised Objective (annually) (Fall 2021-Fall 2024)	Outcomes
<b>Beautification</b>			
Stabilization of abandoned properties	Nominate and approve 5 properties for stabilization	Nominate and approve 5 properties for stabilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- KBC nominated 18 properties for funding under Prop NS. While not all nominated properties have received funding, ten have been recommended for it.<sup>37</sup></li> <li>- Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church, through its Housing Corp., secured \$700K for rental unit rehabilitation in Kingsway East.<sup>38</sup></li> </ul>
Demolition of unsalvageable properties	Demolish 5 recommended properties to the city	Demolish 5 recommended properties to the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Out of the 3,353 permits from 2019 to 2024, 395 were in the Greater Ville or Kingsway East, accounting for over 10% of the total citywide permits.<sup>39</sup></li> <li>- ULSTL was responsible for 7 more demolitions in Kingsway East as part of its Operation Clean Sweep campaign.<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>

37. City of St. Louis, *Prop NS Program* (City of St. Louis, 2023). Retrieved from: <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/sldc/real-estate/prop-ns/index.cfm>. [Accessed December 2024].

38. City of St. Louis, *City of St. Louis Community Development Administration Housing Production Awards* (City of St. Louis, 2023). Retrieved from: <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/community-development/documents/upload/CDA-NTG-HUD-HP-NOFA-2023-Funding-Awards-w-Map.pdf>. [Accessed December 2024].

39. City of St. Louis, *Demolition Permits by Neighborhood* (City of St. Louis, n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/data/dashboards/demolition-permits/neighborhoods.cfm>. [Accessed December 2024].

40. J. O'Dea, 'Rebuilding a city: Demolition activity up one year after Krewson outlined vacancy plan,' (St. Louis Dispatch, July 8, 2023). Retrieved from: [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/rebuilding-a-city-demolition-activity-in-st-louis-up-one/article\\_52a99fa3-bba5-5c19-9b79-17e7b1e73cd6.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/rebuilding-a-city-demolition-activity-in-st-louis-up-one/article_52a99fa3-bba5-5c19-9b79-17e7b1e73cd6.html). [Accessed December 2024].

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Initial Objective (annually) (before Fall 2021)</b>	<b>Revised Objective (annually) (Fall 2021-Fall 2024)</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Renovation of low-income units	Receive funding to renovate 10 properties	Receive funding to renovate 10 properties	SLACO made 25-30 yearly referrals for home improvement renovations to various local programs. <sup>41</sup>
Improvement of Citizen Service Bureau (CSB) response rate	Submit 20 community service bureau complaints	Submit 20 community service complaints by NISs	The two NISs assigned to KV submitted 168 requests for City services between 2019-2023. <sup>42</sup>
Enhancement of neighborhood alleys and vacant lots	Complete 2 community cleanup campaigns	Complete 2 community cleanup campaigns and undertake maintenance of vacant lots	-SLACO undertook two neighborhood-wide cleanup campaigns as part of its initial Keeping It Clean (KIC) program. -SLACO received a Neighborhood Transformation grant from the Community Development Administration (CDA) to expand its Keeping It Clean (KIC) program by including mowing services. <sup>43</sup> -ULSTL, through its Operation Clean Sweep program, conducted a cleanup/build-up campaign in Kingsway East that covered 10 miles of alleyways and involved around 200 volunteers.
Repurpose of vacant lots	Establish 1 community garden	Transform the 2 existing community gardens into an urban agriculture system	-Rev. Crumpton has expanded the Cote Brillante Community Garden thanks to volunteer work. -Rev. Crumpton contacted Lincoln University to support urban farming in KV.
Increase tree canopy		Implement tree lawn and canopy	Project ReLeaf and Resource Environmental Solutions <sup>44</sup> is in the process of forging an agreement

41. K. McKinney, phone call with the Executive Director, SLACO on December 18th, 2023.

42. B. Potts, email message for NIS for The Ville and the Greater Ville, regarding city services in Kingsville, on December 19th, 2023.

43. City of St. Louis, *Neighborhood Transformation Grant Awards* (City of St. Louis, 2023). Retrieved from: <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/communitydevelopment/documents/upload/CDA-NTG-HUD-HP-NOFA-2023-Funding-Awards-w-Map.pdf>. [Accessed December 2024].

44. City of St. Louis, *Street Trees Inventory* (City of St. Louis, 2023). Retrieved from: <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/parks/forestry/trees/tree-inventory.cfm>. [Accessed 2024 December].

Goal	Initial Objective (annually) (before Fall 2021)	Revised Objective (annually) (Fall 2021-Fall 2024)	Outcomes
		improvements around HES and along St. Louis Ave.	with MSD to begin street improvement project.
<b>Education</b>			
Improvement of school attendance	Meet district objective of 90 by 90 school attendance goal	Expand school transportation to students living within 1 mi. of the neighborhood school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-HES was unable to maintain improved attendance rates.</li> <li>-KBC failed to organize a walking school bus due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).</li> <li>-KBC identified exemption to the state-mandated exclusion of transportation boundary.</li> <li>-KBC was unable to persuade SLPS to follow up.</li> </ul>
Enhancement of HES's curriculum	Improved test scores	Enhance parental and community perception of HES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-HES increased enrollment by almost 50% over the last 5 years (2018-2024).</li> <li>-KBC recruited college students to assist in the after school.</li> <li>-HES increased enrollment in the after-school program.</li> <li>-HES students achieved a marked improvement in state scores from year to year during the pilot.</li> <li>-Parental satisfaction with HES showed 86% approval on the HESFNA survey.</li> </ul>
Solidification of partnership with HES administration	Monthly meetings with HES principal	Formal agreement between KBC and HES/SLPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-KBC signs an initial MOU with SLPS.</li> <li>-WashU receives approval from SLPS to conduct research with confidential data.</li> <li>-SLACO is recognized as a community partner by SLPS, authorizing it to implement a B.E.S.T. Approach pilot project.</li> </ul>
Strengthening of student literacy		Expand and enhance HES library holdings	A local private school donated 800 books to the library, predominantly featuring non-white authors and characters.

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Initial Objective (annually) (before Fall 2021)</b>	<b>Revised Objective (annually) (Fall 2021-Fall 2024)</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Enrichment of community literacy		Provide additional literacy opportunities in the community	KBC installed 2 “Little Libraries” in KV.
Improvement of cradle-to-career outcomes		Identify regional resources to better prepare pre-K students for elementary school and beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-KBC partnered with Trailnet to organize a Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day.</li> <li>-KBC partnered with Forest ReLeaf STEM-focused activity.</li> <li>-KBC produced a Summative Report identifying potential partnerships and programs for implementing recommended action items.</li> </ul>
<b>Safety and Services</b>			
Improvement of pedestrian safety		Assess walking conditions through a sidewalk survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- WashU produced a walkability strategy by recommending street calming measures.</li> <li>- Installation of additional stop signs and speed humps in proximity to HES and Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church was a direct outcome of these recommendations.</li> </ul>
Reduction of neighborhood crime rate		Analyze SLMPD neighborhood crime statistics to identify crime trends in hotspots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-KBC partnered with SLMPD and local Criminal Justice programs to develop crime prevention strategies.<sup>45</sup></li> <li>-KBC launched a Neighborhood Safety Program.</li> <li>-KBC organized National Night Out in both 2022 and 2023.</li> <li>-KBC organized a Neighborhood Watch initiative through the Nextdoor app.</li> <li>-KBC facilitated the installation of security cameras at Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church and selected properties in the neighborhood.</li> </ul>

45. St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, *SLMPD 2024 Homicide Analysis* (SLMD, 2024). Retrieved from: <https://slmpd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/HomicideStatsforWebsite.pdf>. [Accessed December 2024].

Goal	Initial Objective (annually) (before Fall 2021)	Revised Objective (annually) (Fall 2021-Fall 2024)	Outcomes
			-Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church has implemented a youth self-efficacy program that includes activities to promote youth crime prevention.
Identification and delivery of needed services		Survey residents to evaluate community needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-KBC performed an extensive needs assessment through canvassing, HESFNA, key stakeholder interviews, and focus groups.</li> <li>-WashU produced a Summative Report prioritizing community needs and identifying activities, community partners, and resources.</li> <li>-KBC is engaging with local Master of Social Work (MSW) programs to recruit practicum students to assist the HES social worker manage cases within the KV community.</li> </ul>
<b>Technical Assistance</b>			
Development of organizational capacity		Assess skill sets of local community organizations to determine gaps in professional expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-SLACO offered organization training (board development, membership recruitment, organizational best practices, and grant writing and fundraising) to local community organizations.</li> <li>-SLACO received several grants to support various neighborhood initiatives, during the pilot phase of the project, including monies to expand KIC into KV.</li> <li>-Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church was awarded a grant of \$700K for rental unit rehabilitation in Kingsway East.<sup>46</sup></li> <li>-WashU architecture students and faculty worked on a planning framework for KV which included recommendations for vacant lot improvements and climate change initiatives.</li> </ul>

46. City of St. Louis, *City of St. Louis Community Development Administration Housing Production Awards*.

Goal	Initial Objective (annually) (before Fall 2021)	Revised Objective (annually) (Fall 2021-Fall 2024)	Outcomes
			- WashU faculty generated a Summative Report on current conditions, potential resources, and as well as presenting a framework for an action plan.

**Figure 10.** Assessment Summary, Freixas 2025

## Discussion

In today's rapidly evolving society, the potential role of educational institutions extends far beyond the classroom. The B.E.S.T. Approach aligns with other place-based, cradle-to-career and community-school models that position schools as anchors for neighborhood revitalization. Lessons from Promise Neighborhoods indicate that integrated, cross-sector partnerships and coordinated cradle-to-career supports can produce measurable gains when coupled with rigorous implementation and evaluation plans.<sup>47,48</sup> The Community School and Full-Service Community School (FSCS) literature similarly demonstrates how schools acting as hubs for health, social services, and extended-learning opportunities can support student outcomes and community well-being when sustained partnerships and resources are present.<sup>49,50,51</sup> Systematic reviews and syntheses underscore that community schools are a promising equitable school-improvement strategy, but effects are contingent on fidelity, resourcing, and the stability of partnerships.<sup>52,53</sup>

47. P. Tatian, "Evaluating Programs and Impact within Promise Neighborhoods: A Guide to Planning Successful Evaluations" (December 2020) Urban Institute. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103418/evaluating-programs-and-impact-within-promise-neighborhoods\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103418/evaluating-programs-and-impact-within-promise-neighborhoods_0.pdf)

48. M. Gallagher, "Keeping a Promise: Case Studies and Annotated Resources for Promise Neighborhoods Sustainability" (April 2024) Insight Policy Research. U.S. Department of Education. <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pdf/SustainabilityBriefKeeping-a-Promise-Revised-April2024.pdf>

49. J. Richardson, *The Full-Service Community School Movement: Lessons from the James Adams College* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

50. M. Blank, I. Harkavy, J. Quinn, L. Villareal, and D. Goodman, *The Community Schools Revolution: Building Partnerships, Transforming Lives, Advancing Democracy* (Washington D.C.: Collaborative Communications Group Inc 2023).

51. J Dryfoos, "Evaluation of Community Schools: Findings to Date" (2000) <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED450204.pdf>

52. L. Martinez, "Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools: A Case Study" (2013) The Children's Aid Society. Washington, DC: The Finance Project <https://nccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SROI-Case-Study.pdf>

53. A.B Bowden, C.R. Belfield, H.M. Levin, and M. Morales, "A Benefit-Cost Analysis of City Connects" (2015) Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583b86882e69cfc61c6c26dc/t/58cfdcba1b631bf52d377cd8/1490017468049/CityConnects.pdf>

To strengthen the manuscript's analytic claims, we mapped observed outputs and outcomes to the project logic model and to the core WT postulates.

Domains	WT Postulate(s) Supported				Outputs (Activities)	Outcomes
	1	2	3	4		
Beautification	X	X	X	X	Participate in the Prop NS program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enhanced physical appearance of neighborhood</li> <li>-Improved livability</li> <li>-Increased tree canopy</li> <li>-Improved resident satisfaction</li> <li>-Increased safety</li> <li>-Reduced vacancy and population loss</li> </ul>
					Lobby the city to demolish unsalvageable properties	
					Implement a property rehabilitation program.	
					Submit Citizen Service Bureau (CSB) complaints/petitions	
					Organize neighborhood clean-up campaigns	
					Maintain and repurpose vacant lots	
					Participate in the Forest ReLeaf program	
Education	X	X	X	X	Design initiatives to improve school attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased retention/measured attendance</li> <li>-Increased test scores/ literacy</li> <li>-Increased after school participation</li> <li>-Enhanced library usage</li> <li>-Enhanced family /school relations</li> <li>-Improved cradle-to-career outcomes</li> <li>-Increased use of the school as a community anchor</li> </ul>
					Enlarge HES after school program	
					Create new STEM programs for HES's curriculum	
					Solidify partnership between KBC and HES/SLPS	
					Augment HES's library holdings	
					Create a Little Library program in KV	
					Initiate programs to enhance cradle-to-career outcomes	
					Enlarge HES's role in the community	
Safety and Services	X	X	X	X	Design and implement traffic calming measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased resident perception of safety</li> <li>-Improved livability</li> <li>-Enhanced understanding of</li> </ul>
					Partner with SLMPD and local Criminal Justice programs to develop crime prevention strategies	

Domains	WT Postulate(s) Supported				Outputs (Activities)	Outcomes
	1	2	3	4		
					Participate in the National Night Out program	resident service needs - Identified potential service resources and providers
					Organize a Neighborhood Watch initiative	
					Install security cameras	
					Survey residents to evaluate community needs	
					Identify potential service providers	
					Recruit MSW practicum student(s)	
Technical Assistance	X	X	X	X	Offer organizational board training and capacity building assistance	- Developed neighborhood organizational capacity
					Provide grant writing and fundraising support	- Secured grant funding
					Extend design and planning assistance	- Provided planning framework
					Extend research technical support	- Created Summative Report

Figure 11. Pilot Outputs, Outcomes and WT Postulates, Freixas 2025

What the B.E.S.T. Approach adds to this body of work dealing with community or neighborhood schools is the assumption that through the application of WT at the neighborhood level, the school can be instrumental in stabilizing highly distressed neighborhoods. Unlike most contemporary planning theory, the B.E.S.T. Approach is predicated on the belief that distressed neighborhoods need to be rebuilt from the ground up in incremental stages. Once they made the community slightly more attractive and livable through beautification efforts, KBC recognized that the next step was to tackle the academic and social challenges faced not only by the students and their families but the community at large. In short, they understood that their goal was to apply WT at the neighborhood level. Ultimately, KBC confirmed that HES would not only serve as the conduit for addressing the needs of students and families but also to act as the catalyst for long-term community redevelopment.<sup>54</sup>

Community research occurs in real time and in the real world, where variables can never be completely controlled or anticipated. The work was impacted by various challenges that KV and HES faced, including community violence and municipal upheavals. A significant obstacle in terms of research was the collection of primary data. Initially, the ULSTL committed to conducting a door-to-door

54. Reid, "School-Oriented Development."

canvassing of the pilot area. However, after several incidents, the ULSTL had to reassess its commitment and ultimately discontinued the initiative. Moreover, before the planned issuance of the inaugural HESFNA survey, a shooting occurred in close proximity to the school. Consequently, the PI believed that launching the survey would skew the results. Thus, the PI shifted the distribution of HESFNA from the end of the 2022-2023 to the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year. As a result, the PI was unable to collect adequate baseline data to identify the needs of the entire community, not just those involving HES parents and students.

Additionally, the school and SLPS both experienced significant administrative changes. At the school, Principal Dr. Michael Blair, a strong advocate for the initiative, transitioned to a new role within the district in the spring of 2024. The new principal, Dr. Cynthia Williams-Peters, while supportive of the project, faced constraints in assuming her new position due to instability within SLPS. When KBC was formed, the superintendent at the time, Dr. Kelvin Adams, was a proponent of the collective and pushed through an agreement with the SLPS Board that recognized the district's commitment to the project. Although Dr. Keisha Scarlet, the incoming superintendent, did not actively oppose this agreement after Dr. Adams retired, it was not a major priority for her administration. But after Dr. Scarlet was terminated, Dr. Millicent Borishade was appointed her replacement and mandated that all existing research and community partnership agreements be renegotiated. While KBC successfully resumed collaboration with SLPS, HES participation has been adversely affected by the principal's lack of autonomy to act decisively and promptly on KBC initiatives.

Another challenge that KBC encountered was inadequate community involvement. Although the fledgling neighborhood association had a strong board of directors, it struggled to build membership and establish a robust community presence. Similarly, even though Dr. Williams-Peters was an enthusiastic supportive of an active Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO), she faced administrative hurdles in creating one. Consequently, KBC did not achieve the level of community engagement it had envisioned.

Despite these daunting challenges, preliminary results from KBC's pilot study suggest that the B.E.S.T. Approach has begun to slow the neighborhood's decline. KBC's efforts have reduced the rate of new vacancies and population loss. While the area still suffers from abundant vacant lots and boarded-up buildings, KBC's beautification initiatives have significantly improved the neighborhood's physical conditions and appearance. Although HES test scores remain unacceptable, tracking student cohorts reveals considerable academic improvement among HES students during the pilot period. While KV is still not a safe place, KBC has started formulating initiatives to enhance walkability and reduce crime. Additionally, KBC has identified and prioritized the residents' needs. Notwithstanding the inability to build the organizational capacity of the primary neighborhood association, KBC has provided considerable community support through professional assistance.

Regarding next steps, KBC's primary objective is to foster a stronger sense of community and place. To achieve this, KBC plans to focus on forming an active PTO at HES. KBC's second objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of resident needs through the collection of additional primary data and the adoption of

evaluation designs appropriate for place-based initiatives—such as matched comparison cohorts, stepped-wedge/phased rollouts, and longitudinal community tracking—to better isolate program effects and assess scalability. Once that is obtained, KBC will be better equipped to identify and prioritize potential service providers and necessary resources. A third objective for KBC is to implement initiatives identified in the action plan for each of the four B.E.S.T. Approach domains. By focusing on these key areas, KBC will prioritize projects that enhance the physical environment, improve educational outcomes, provide needed services, ensure the safety of residents, and provide technical assistance to empower individuals and local organizations. Through this holistic approach, KBC aims to create a more livable, safe, and supportive community for all residents in KV (Figure 12).

## Project Summary

*The B.E.S.T. Approach*

Beautification	Education	Services & Safety	Technical Assistance
<p><b>Goal:</b> to make KV a more attractive and livable community, to stabilize its population, and create a sense of neighborhood pride</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> vacancy; age of housing stock; state of street infrastructure; lack of tree canopy; maintenance of landscape; illegal dumping</p> <p><b>Actions taken (2019-2023):</b> 373 buildings demolished (Kingsways East+Greater Ville); 2 clean up campaigns by OCS; 168 requests for City services; funding for rehab of 4 rental units; 25-30 home improvement renovations referrals; 10 bldgs. renovation funded by Prop NS; recommended community garden expansion; data collection; HESNFA survey;</p> <p><b>Impacts:</b> general appearance improvement; identification of KV boundaries; creation of the B.E.S.T. Collective</p> <p><b>Actions planned (2024-2025):</b> Data collection and community input</p> <p><b>Interventions:</b> securing + selling LRA properties; demolish properties beyond repair; NIS advice on city initiatives; clean-up campaigns; identify home repair funding; secure funding for landscape maintenance; complete beautification plan</p>	<p><b>Goal:</b> to address the academic deficiencies and the rate of attendance at HES. Additionally, to strength community literacy as well as to enhance youth self-efficacy</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> academic achievement levels; rate of absenteeism; rate of student mobility; safe travel to and from school; education assistance; unemployment</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> HSSU students/ MAD Mentor Program provide mentoring and tutoring; petition for exemption of one-mile radius transportation restriction;; HESNFA survey; HES library augmented; Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church little library; data collection;</p> <p><b>Impacts:</b> hiring of 3 HSSU students for out-of-school program; increase in literature from AA authors and w/non white characters; state awareness on one-mile restriction revision need; creation of the B.E.S.T. Collective</p> <p><b>Actions planned:</b> data collection and community input</p> <p><b>Interventions:</b> strengthening and expansion of HES out-of-school programming; preschool extended to early head start program; development of STEM curricula; streghtening HES and community literacy; application for SRTS funding; youth education</p>	<p><b>Goal:</b> to expand the availability of services to the families at HES and residents of KV; ensure walkability and safety for HES and reduce crime.</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> pedestrian safety; housing assistance; inadequate basic services; lack of building density and tree cover; crime;</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> HESNFA survey; National Night Out; street calming humps and cameras installed; petition for exemption of one-mile radius transportation restriction; walking bus coordination;Neighborhood Watch (Next Door); youth crime prevention program; new affordable housing renovation; data collection;</p> <p><b>Impacts:</b> creation of the B.E.S.T. Collective</p> <p><b>Actions planned:</b> Data collection and community input;</p> <p><b>Interventions:</b> wraparound services implementation; infrastructure improvements and street calming measures, safety education for pedestrians and bicycle users; community crime prevention plan; youth self-efficacy program; housing assistance program</p>	<p><b>Goal:</b> to provide KV residents with organizational capacity; to address unemployment rates for both youth and adults in the neighborhood.</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> organizational capacity; financial literacy; business training and support;</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> employment efforts for youth and young adults; organizational capacity building; data collection;</p> <p><b>Impacts:</b> creation of the B.E.S.T. Collective</p> <p><b>Actions planned:</b> Data collection and community input;</p> <p><b>Interventions:</b> free job skills training, employment referral and career fair opportunities; organization capacity building initiatives; develop urban agriculture/farming economic model; draft neighborhood plan</p>

Figure 12 Project Summary, Freixas 2025

## Conclusion

The pilot study of the KV B.E.S.T. Approach was designed to assess the effectiveness of the program in promoting community stabilization and revitalization. This evaluation was framed around several explicit research questions, which guided the analysis of various aspects of the program’s implementation and outcomes. The primary findings reveal critical insights into the potential of neighborhood schools as drivers of community rejuvenation and the effectiveness of the B.E.S.T. domains in achieving measurable results.

One of the key questions of the study was whether neighborhood schools could act as catalysts for community stabilization and revitalization. The findings indicate a mixed positive outcome. On one hand, HES (the neighborhood school) experienced a significant enrollment increase of nearly 50 percent from 2018 to 2024. This growth was also accompanied by a rise in participation in after-school programs, suggesting that families have become more engaged with the school. However, despite these positive changes, issues such as vacancy rates and population loss persist, indicating that full neighborhood stabilization has not yet been realized.

The evaluation also delved into how the various domains of the B.E.S.T. Approach contributed to measurable outcomes. In terms of beautification efforts, KBC's nomination of eighteen properties for Prop NS funding, along with the demolition of seven buildings under Operation Clean Sweep and SLACO's expansion of cleanup/mowing services showcased tangible improvements in the maintenance of alleys and vacant lots.

Regarding education, significant positive change was reflected by the rise in HES enrollment, the year-to-year improvement by cohorts on standardized tests and by the fact that parental satisfaction via HESFNA reached 86 percent. However, attendance goals set for the school remained unmet due to the inability to create a walking school bus because of FERPA constraints and the lack of success in lobbying the district to alter its policy with respect to state transportation funding. In addition, the research was impacted by the district's reluctance to share data after the change in administration.

In terms of safety, KBC was able to enhance neighborhood walkability with the implementation of traffic calming measures—like additional stop signs and speed humps—and the establishment of community safety initiatives—such as Neighborhood Safety Program, National Night Out events, a Neighborhood Watch, and selected camera installations. Nonetheless, the study did not report a significant, sustained decline in crime rates directly attributable to these pilot efforts. Regarding Services, KBC identified potential service resources and providers as well as prioritizing resident service needs through the HESFNA survey. However, KBC has been unable to date to adequately address them.

The provision of technical assistance was the fourth domain of the B.E.S.T. Approach in the pilot. KBC was successful in providing needed professional assistance. SLACO offered organizational support with training in essential areas—such as board development and grant writing, WashU faculty generated a Summative Report on current conditions and presented an action plan. In addition, WashU architecture faculty and students developed a community planning framework. However, the neighborhood continues to face challenges requiring additional professional assistance.

The third major research question of the study considered the replicability and sustainability of the B.E.S.T. Approach. The findings would seem to be cautiously optimistic. The pilot demonstrated tangible outputs, including property nominations, demolitions, and grant acquisitions, suggesting potential for scaling up. But the PI recognizes the need for further validation. An external evaluator recommended that additional primary data collection and a complete implementation cycle be conducted to affirm the approach's long-term viability. Furthermore, the findings highlighted the necessary policy adjustments essential for institutionalizing and scaling the B.E.S.T.

approach. Operational policy constraints were identified, including the need for streamlined MOUs and data-sharing protocols with the school district, as well as the impact of FERPA-like regulations on transportation and walking school initiatives. Effective scaling would also benefit from established funding streams, guidance on privacy-compliant data sharing, and coordinated city-level strategies that align housing, public works, and school policies.

In short, the pilot study of the KV B.E.S.T. Approach reveals both promising outcomes and critical challenges. While significant strides were made in community engagement and educational improvements, persistent issues of vacancy and safety require ongoing attention and collaboration across various sectors to achieve sustained community revitalization.

Yet, while KBC and the PI have seemingly reached a consensus that the B.E.S.T. Approach has merit in providing a pathway to stabilize highly distressed communities, a pressing reality persists. Many urban areas in the U.S., like KV, now face the absence of a local school. The alarming rate at which neighborhood-based schools have been closed across the country stems from a combination of declining inner-city populations and the rise of magnet and charter schools (Figure 13). As a result, many areas in American post-industrial cities have become “school deserts,” where the lack of educational institutions not only hinders efforts to address student academic deficiencies, but also complicates the delivery of essential services to residents and weakens the sense of community.

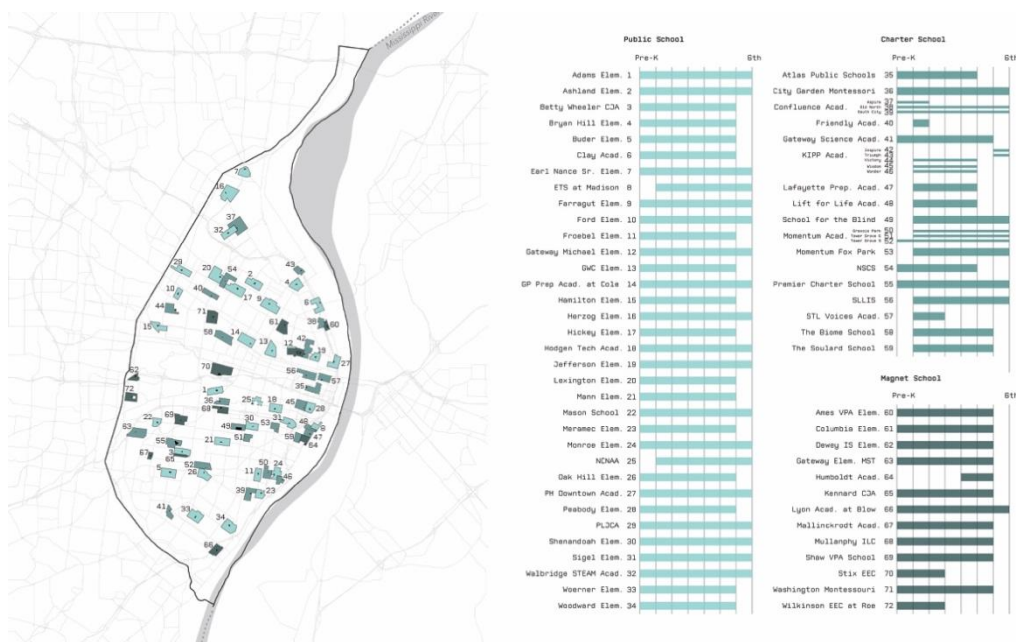


Figure 13: St. Louis Elementary School Distribution, Freixas 2025

In the past, churches and places of worship often served as alternative community anchors, providing support and sense of belonging. However, most church congregations are no longer neighborhood-based, further exacerbating the challenges encountered in these areas. The absence of an institutional presence in the most vulnerable neighborhoods highlights a significant gap in community infrastructure.

The main takeaway from this research, therefore, is that the first step in revitalizing highly distressed urban areas may not necessarily involve constructing new housing or pursuing economic development initiatives. Instead, it may be essential to prioritize preserving existing neighborhood schools or introducing alternative community-based bodies.

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## **Appendix**

1. Summative Report. <https://wustl.box.com/s/9w7kxo0zfu0x6ca3hzsyu4l96k69nmu>
2. SBD Research Course Book. [https://wustl.box.com/s/czxfutlprzhn6tdchwdzg9dkxmu\\_h77jm](https://wustl.box.com/s/czxfutlprzhn6tdchwdzg9dkxmu_h77jm)
3. SBD Student Course Book. <https://doi.org/10.7936/qe2n-jk46>