

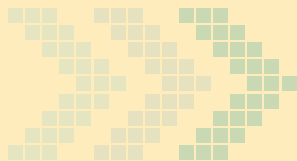
Westside Education & Training Center:

Finding Creative Ways To Combine Residents' Need for Good Jobs with Employers' Need for Trained Workers

By Linda Wilson



Manuel Garza, an early proponent of turning a closed school into the WETC, talks with a student.



In just over 18 months, San Antonio's Westside Education and Training Center went from an idea to a functioning organization, one that is helping residents train for and connect to local jobs as well as take college courses that can lead to careers. In its first year, WETC enrolled 1,347 students, three times more than its target.

“Driving all this was the need to address the long-term demographics of the West Side. There was a clear desire to find ways to improve the educational attainment of students in the Edgewood School District and in the West Side.”

— Dr. Frederico Zaragoza

WETC came into existence so quickly because of several factors:

- The availability of a recently closed school.
- The willingness of a broad range of partners to work together without one organization controlling the process.
- The role that *Making Connections* San Antonio could play to catalyze and support the process.
- The existence of organized residents to make sure that the plans were kept in tune with residents’ needs.
- And the simple fact that WETC is addressing one of this area’s most pressing needs: training that can help residents acquire the skills they need to get jobs that pay enough to support families.

Inside

How the WETC was created 4

How the WETC trains people and connects them with jobs 8

Developing pipelines to a variety of careers 10

Overcoming barriers to work and education 12

Bringing college to the West Side 16

Nearly four years ago Manuel Garza, the former board president of the Edgewood School District on San Antonio’s West Side, often drove past the recently closed Lincoln Elementary School. The empty building bothered him. It also sparked an idea.

“Wouldn’t it be great,” he asked himself, “to use the old elementary school to spur economic development along the Highway 90 corridor? Right now there are a lot of cantinas and tire shops. A new educational facility could improve the image of the community and bring a new culture of learning.”

Garza communicated his idea to then-City Councilman Enrique Barrera. Barrera and Garza convinced many leaders from the City of San Antonio, the Alamo Community College District (ACCD) board and the Edgewood Independent School District (EISD) board to join them in pursuing the idea.

One of these early supporters, Alamo Community College’s Dr. Frederico Zaragoza, emphasizes the role played by West Side residents, who challenged local agencies to use the school building to respond to this community’s diverse educational and training needs.

The community, local school district and the community college soon combined efforts to make this dream a reality. They saw the benefits that would come from creating this new bridge to higher education.

“The core issue on the West Side was the under-skilled and under-educated work force, so our effort focused on improving the skills and education of that workforce.”

— Victor Azios

Fewer than half of West Side residents 25 or older are high school graduates and only four percent have college degrees.



“Driving all this was the need to address the long-term demographics of the West Side,” Dr. Zaragoza says. “There was a clear desire to find ways to improve the educational attainment of students in the Edgewood School District and in the West Side.”

Fewer than half of West Side residents 25 or older are high school graduates and only four percent have college degrees. One result is that the median income of West Side families is low: a little over \$25,000, far below the \$37,300 deemed necessary for a family of four. One child in three lives in a home below the poverty level.

Employment rates on the West Side are also relatively low: only two-thirds of males age 16–64 on the West Side have jobs, compared to three out of four countywide.

Only 51% of West Side females of the same age group have jobs, compared to 62% countywide.

A first for San Antonio’s West Side, the WETC offers a spectrum of post-secondary educational opportunities for youth and adults. Students can study close to home, choosing from courses that give college credit or place them in a quick, workforce “pipeline” to high-paying jobs.

WETC is attracting students from all over San Antonio, but it is especially appealing to young adults and older students who live or work in the West Side area.

The renovated 31,000-square-foot building features 18 classrooms, a technical

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skills assessment lab, a community computer lab, a 2,500-square-foot manufacturing technology lab and the Quest Center, which offers students support services modeled after The Casey Foundation’s Centers for Working Families.

After enrolling 1,347 students during its first year, WETC plans to double its enrollment during its second year. It had 2,113 students as of June 2008.

Alamo Community College District’s Dr. Jo B. Tucker, first director of the WETC, is delighted with its success and the speed with which WETC came together. “Part of our strategic plan at ACCD is to do our best to serve the underserved. Workforce specialty campuses focus on a niche or need. The needs here are so different—things like child

care, literacy programs. We’re partnering with agencies that can help to remove those barriers.”

Community sets vision for WETC

WETC was pieced together within 18 months by a Blue Ribbon Committee that involved the City of San Antonio, Edgewood Independent School District, Alamo Community College District (ACCD), resident leaders, industry representatives, community organizations and many others. *Making Connections*-San Antonio played a key role in helping facilitate and document the process, an example of the role it has tried to play in bringing organizations together to

WETC staff greet the public at the opening of the center.



“At the first Blue Ribbon Committee meeting, we decided there would be no chair. That way, nobody could toot their own horn. We didn’t have a problem with ownership. It’s been a partnership throughout, a collaboration.”

— Manuel Garza

have a sustainable impact on San Antonio’s West Side.

Community people from the Edgewood School District were the first to call for placing a higher education facility in their area, shortly after the District, faced with declining enrollments and population shifts, consolidated and closed several schools in 2004.

Residents were also concerned about the high number of Edgewood high school graduates who did not go to college. Edgewood had already initiated dual credit classes, which give students both high school and college credit. Would the presence of a public institution of higher learning entice more students to embrace the dream of higher education?

Early on, a number of informal meetings were held and a groundswell of interest developed. ACCD, the Edgewood School District and the City of San Antonio recommended that a Blue Ribbon Committee be formed to explore the concept and determine need.

No single entity claimed credit for the effort. “At the first Blue Ribbon Committee meeting, we decided there would be no chair,” Manuel Garza says. “That way, nobody could toot their own horn. We didn’t have a problem with ownership. It’s been a partnership throughout, a collaboration.”

Zaragoza concurs that it was a collective effort, praising the resolve and collaborative spirit of the Blue Ribbon Committee members.

“None of us had the mousetrap defined,” Dr. Zaragoza recalls. “We all wanted to work together to get to the next level. Forming a blue ribbon committee is not unusual, but the implementation process here was different from most committees I’ve been part of. Instead of losing people, more kept coming into the Blue Ribbon Committee—new people.”

No one was turned away, creative thoughts were incorporated and soon the Blue Ribbon Committee had grown to more than 50 members. *Making Connections*’ Rosie Castro, who co-facilitated the Blue Ribbon Committee’s meetings, believes there is a reason that this committee was different.

The Vision

In the summer of 2005, WETC Blue Ribbon Committee members were asked to express their vision of what the center could provide to the community. They called for a workforce education center that would:

- Be a community collaboration.
- Employ shared governance.
- Link short-term with long-term training.
- Offer continuous worker/student follow-up.
- Offer virtual one-stop support services.
- Work with high schools to offer a seamless flow into college and careers.

“If you can draw compatible partners that are cooperative, you can work a great deal faster. If you bring in people who share vision and are willing to work together, they can accomplish a great deal.”

— Rosie Castro

Dr. Frederico Zaragoza says that the committee that developed WETC was different. “Instead of losing people, more kept coming.”



“If you can draw compatible partners that are cooperative, you can work a great deal faster,” Castro says. “If you bring in people who share vision and are willing to work together, they can accomplish a great deal. When you bring in residents who can point out the needs and are part of visioning, you can have a successful venture, and they will become cheerleaders for the effort as well as beneficiaries.”

Alamo Community College’s Dr. Zaragoza believes the Blue Ribbon Committee coalesced around the knowledge that higher education is now a prerequisite for employment and that economic development is driven by the workforce needs of industry.

“The facility is preparing students for driver industry jobs,” he says. “We can provide leadership to the economy and provide job creation in the area.” The hope is that, as it grows, WETC might even attract new industry to the West Side area.

To make the vision a reality, the Blue Ribbon Committee representatives went before each governing body and gained their commitments to invest in the project. Edgewood School District provided the vacant Lincoln school building through a no-cost lease. The City of San Antonio allocated \$150,000. Alamo Community College District met other operating costs through grants and contract funds. Some funding from a \$1.3 million Department of Labor grant was used for the Production Worker

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Training Program and for a Summer Youth Training Program.

By August 2006, renovations were complete and the doors were opened.

***Making Connections'* Catalytic Role**

Dr. Zaragoza credits *Making Connections* with playing a major role in the Blue Ribbon Committee's success. “The role that the Casey Foundation and *Making Connections* played was of a catalytic dimension and so important. Victor Azios heard our ideas early on. He was very astute in realizing that the three entities needed a facilitated process to move us in a single direction. *Making*

Connections became the glue that brought and held us together. I'm so thankful for the foundation's involvement. We couldn't have done things without Victor Azios' leadership.”

While the Blue Ribbon Committee worked out its local strategy, *Making Connections* at the national level was enhancing its own theory for increasing family earnings and income in each of its 10 local sites. That theory called for sites to develop workforce pipelines from the initiative's target neighborhoods to regional economic generators. Azios considered that theory and envisioned a different concept for San Antonio.

“In most *Making Connections* sites, the strategy was to build a pipeline to a dominant employer, like Boeing in Seattle/White

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Center,” Azios explains. “In San Antonio, we needed a major shift in the *Making Connections* strategy, since there wasn’t a dominant employer in the West Side, as there was in other sites. With the Blue Ribbon partners, we would create a new and different pipeline. The core issue on the West Side was the under-skilled and under-educated work force, so our effort focused on improving the skills and education of that workforce. That would give them access to good jobs that would bring new assets—a vehicle, housing and child care.

“When the Blue Ribbon Committee was created, I was invited to come in,” Azios recalls. “I explained that *Making Connections* could come into the Committee as a catalyst, bringing technical assistance and resources. They took us up almost immediately on the technical assistance.”

Azios asked *Making Connections* Consultant Rosie Castro to join Alamo Community College’s John Soto as co-facilitators for the Blue Ribbon Committee meetings. *Making Connections*’ local diarist was brought in to document the work. This technical support allowed Committee members to bring their best creative thinking together in a coherent, cohesive way.

The Blue Ribbon Committee also asked Azios to bring the principals together to work out crucial details, adding another dimension to *Making Connections*’ role as a catalyst. Dr. Zaragoza says, “Victor did a lot of work behind the scenes, even calling us together at breakfast meetings at 7 a.m. to resolve issues.”

Creating a seamless flow from education to workplace

“The WETC focus is different from the focus of a one-stop workforce center and different from the focus of a community college,” Azios says. “WETC captures the individual where he or she is at, whether the person is a dropout trying to get a GED or a worker trying to get specific skills to get better employment.

“The concept takes the seven key employment sectors of our community and builds a pipeline to them. In this way, individuals from the West Side, who were at a disadvantage because of their skills and education, can become competitive with other individuals. It’s not only a pipeline; it’s a lifeline to the seven key sectors.

“At the same time, it offers another pipeline to the asset accumulation network, helping families to build assets. That will transform the neighborhood. It is the right kind of strategy.”

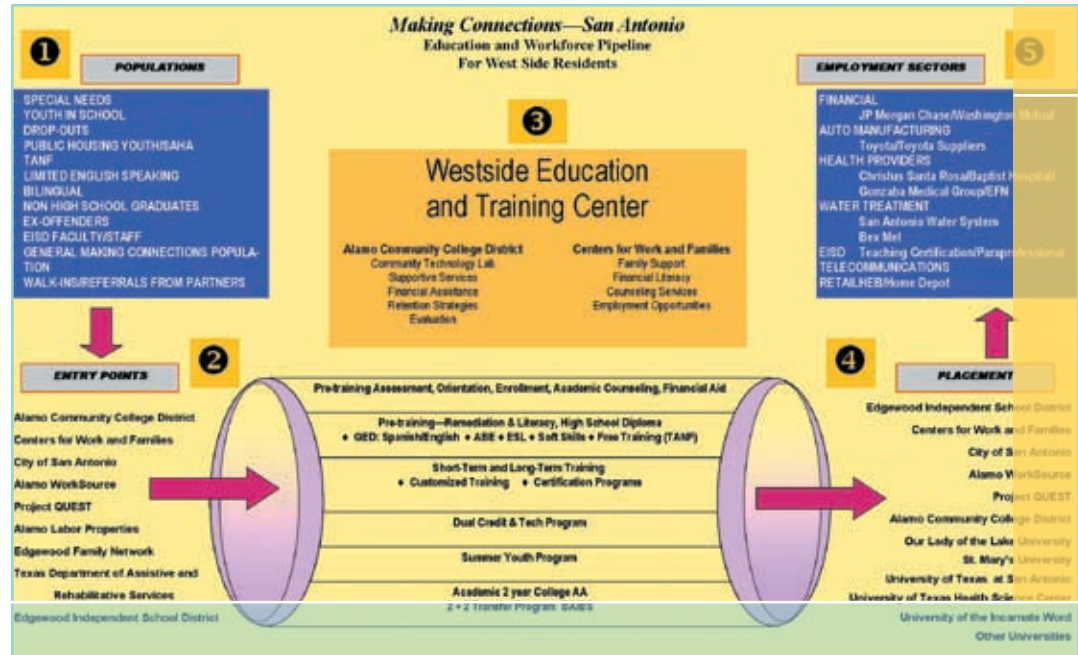
“The WETC curriculum is an attempt to offer a menu of services and appropriate educational interventions based on need,” says Dr. Zaragoza. “This couldn’t have been done if we hadn’t had so many partners. We wanted to stay true to the early vision of the Blue Ribbon group.”

At WETC, students can choose from college courses that are transferable to other higher education institutions, or they can

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Without a dominant employer on the West Side, Making Connections had to find partners who together could “create a new and different pipeline,” explains Victor Azios. It needed to build connections to several emerging industries, as this July 2006 chart shows.



select quick turnaround training in skills that can immediately lead to higher-paying jobs in San Antonio. As Dr. Tucker puts it, “People who need a paycheck don’t always have time to wait for a degree.”

Several courses were developed with input from employers who articulated their precise employment needs. To keep the curriculum relevant, students learn which skill sets will make them competitive in the labor market and are currently in demand. Several courses offer immediate certification at completion but also give the students college credit. That way, if they decide to pursue more education later, their training is recognized.

“The important thing with WETC is not only that it is a collaboration of many

partners but that it has the ability to reach out to industries that are hiring and expect to be hiring for a long time,” explains Castro. “We now have the Toyota suppliers, the financial industry and the health industry looking to the Center for trained employees. We have worked really hard to develop this pipeline with the employers by reaching out and meeting with them individually and in their industry clusters as well.”

Dr. Tucker and WETC staff members gather the employers of an industry cluster and ask them to help design the kind of training that *they* want for their employees. They ask the industry people, “What are your needs and what do you want to see a person be capable of doing?” Individual employers are encouraged to develop customized

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curriculum to prepare workers for their specific companies.

Dr. Tucker says that West Side Education and Training Center is considered an Alamo Community College system-wide site that belongs to the whole system, not to just one of the campuses. That means that instructors from three of the five college district campuses come to WETC to offer courses that prepare students for jobs known to be in high demand in the San Antonio area. Examples of these programs include: Production Worker Training, Financial Customer Service Training, Advanced Water Treatment, Community Health Worker and Certified Nursing Assistance.

Placing workers into a variety of pipelines

Students who want to enter a pipeline to high-paying manufacturing jobs take the Production Worker Training classes. Instructors with industrial experience convey knowledge and skills that manufacturers are looking for.

In November 2006, Toyota opened a Tundra truck plant in San Antonio’s Southwest side, infusing high-paying jobs into the metro area. Dr. Tucker notes that some WETC Production Worker graduates moved right into the Toyota pipeline, accepting jobs with manufacturers who supply components for Tundras.

“Toyota has 21 on-site suppliers here in town,” Tucker says. “Toyota helped the college district build a manufacturing curriculum and provided \$500,000 worth of equipment, and they go with Alamo Community College staff to high school campuses to recruit.”

Community Health Worker training at WETC prepares people to work in health and social service agencies. Community Health Workers in San Antonio are often known as *Promotores de Buena Vida*. Trainees develop skills to connect their clients/patients to eligible services. Community Health Workers promote preventive health and help alleviate the effects of chronic diseases like diabetes.

Establishment of the Community Health Worker training program at WETC came in part because of a successful partnership developed earlier by ACCD and the Edgewood Family Network. (EFN is a grassroots organization that developed through *Making Connections*.)

Northwest Vista College, a division of ACCD, found lackluster enrollment in its Community Health program until its administrators partnered with EFN to locate classes in the West Side. Once classes moved to the West Side and EFN promotores stepped up community recruitment, enrollment in the Health Worker training jumped. West Side residents’ enthusiasm for this program made it a natural for inclusion in WETC’s curriculum.

“One of the most important roles [of the promotores] is to become the eyes and ears of the community health system.”

— Dr. Fernando Guerra

WETC trains people to become community health workers, or “promotores,” including Manuela (Nella) Monsivaiz, Lydia Kret and Estela Sifuentes.



The Community Health Worker program received a big boost in July 2007 when the college district garnered a \$359,495 grant through the Texas Workforce Commission. That grant will create 136 jobs for persons trained to become patient care assistants, public health aides and health educators. This Self-Sufficiency Fund grant helps individuals transition from public assistance back into the workforce. Upon successful completion of their training at WETC, the 136 new *Promotores de Buena Vida* will earn hourly wages of \$10–12 per hour, well above the San Antonio average for hourly workers.

To win this grant, WETC partnered with a health care consortium consisting of Christus Santa Rosa Hospitals, San Antonio

Metropolitan Health District and El Centro Del Barrio Health Clinics. All provide health care to the West Side.

The new trainees will be important links between their communities and the health care system. As Dr. Fernando Guerra, the head of the Metropolitan Health District put it, “One of their most important roles is to become the eyes and ears of the community health system.”

Another WETC course provides entry to water treatment careers. New training equipment was installed at WETC, allowing students to become skilled in this highly specialized, well-paid industry. Graduates of this four-semester program

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— Rosie Castro



Water treatment is a growing occupation that pays well.

are expected to readily find jobs in municipal water treatment, industry or health facilities.

WETC also offers a non-traditional Open Entry/Open Exit program to teach office skills. Students register for Administrative Computer Technology classes that are self-paced and can be taken for college credit or non-credit.

Several WETC courses don’t require high school diplomas or GEDs, although those who need basic education can study for a GED, ESL certification and/or pick up college remedial courses while studying the technical coursework. The computer lab at WETC is open to all community residents, allowing them to access the Internet, practice GED tests or develop further computer skills.

Overcoming barriers to student success

WETC stands out from other educational institutions for the support services it provides its students. “We’re working on removing any barrier to the individual or the family,” Castro explains. “If something is going wrong in the family, you don’t think well and you can’t concentrate. So we hope to have an array of services right there on the spot.

“At WETC, one of the things we’re trying to do is keep people from falling through the cracks. If a person doesn’t qualify for one training or program, there is another means

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ACCD moved its West Side Community Education Center from another site to the WETC. Through this program, college district staff offer assistance with educational planning, financial aid and career preferences. That helps students overcome the barriers that might stand between them and a successful educational experience.

Making Connections also worked with WETC staff to place an office of the Center for Working Families at WETC. Currently, the programs initiated by CWF are handled by Project Quest, which was another *Making*

Connections partner through the Quest Center at WETC. Quest Center staff offer services to students that help them stay in school and support them as they transition to employment, once they have received certification. City officials still hope to place a city-run Center for Working Families at WETC.

The services include advice about income support, Texas Assistance to Needy Families, Children’s Medicaid and CHIP, EITC, housing, credit repair and asset building. Quest Center staff can also help students find part-time employment while they go to school and guide them to child care, transportation and other services.

WETC’s Community Health Worker Program trains people to become patient care assistants, health aides and health educators.



“There was the separation and eventually divorce. Then, we lost the house. Then my Dad, who was my best friend, died in my arms on Easter Sunday. After that, my middle son was diagnosed with cancer.”

— Dalia Silva

Dalia Silva's story: A mother reaches her dream

The Blue Ribbon Committee members who established Westside Education and Training Center (WETC) wanted it to be an educational institution that would support the students, removing impediments that might keep them from completing their training and finding good jobs.

Dalia Silva's story shows just how well that idea is working. Through WETC and the on-site Center for Working Families (CWF), Dalia got the work skills and emotional support she needed to launch a new career with the University of Texas at San Antonio.

As a young girl growing up on the West Side, Dalia always dreamed of working in an office. It would take many years to realize that dream. After an early marriage, Dalia devoted her time to raising three boys and never went back to school.

Unexpectedly single after 32 years of marriage, she found herself alone with her boys. She also discovered that papers she'd signed earlier had placed two mortgages on her West Side home and that it was under foreclosure. Her paycheck as a cashier just wasn't enough to keep up with house payments. Eventually she gave up the home and moved to a more affordable rental unit.

She fights back tears when she recalls the years that preceded her discovery of WETC. “I've been trying to get back on my feet these last four years,” she says. “There was the separation and eventually divorce. Then, we lost the house. Then my Dad, who was my best friend, died in my arms on Easter Sunday. After that, my middle son was diagnosed with cancer.”

Insurance wouldn't pay for a complicated second surgery for her son. Dalia desperately sought a way to raise some money. Friends and neighbors rallied to help her find a way.

“We needed \$2,000 for my son's second surgery. I'd never done a fundraiser before, but I have a lot of friends. Pretty soon, we had a committee of eight people planning a barbecue fundraiser for my son. It just grew. First we printed tickets for 300 plates, then another 300. Finally we sold tickets for 700 plates. Most of the supplies were donated. Someone knew someone who donated the bread. Someone else knew some caterers who cooked the food. What we raised was more than enough for the surgery.”

As her son recovered and she moved into a more affordable townhome, she had time to think about her own future. While looking for a better-paying job, she ran across something that would change her life.

“My two sons and I were struggling,” she remembers. “I kept thinking I need to go back to school. One day, when I was at the employment office looking for a job, I came across a flyer announcing that you could get trained in Microsoft Word at the Westside Education and Training Center.”

When Dalia enrolled for the self-paced word processing class at the WETC, she knew she would be getting office skills. She didn't know she would also find warm, encouraging people who would be there for her even after she had completed the classes. She found that extra measure of support in the staff at the Center for Working Families (CWF) office housed at WETC.

“Sometimes I would just go in and cry. No matter how much time it took, they would listen to me and they wouldn’t let me give up.”

— Dalia Silva

Dalia Silva, at work at a local university, wanted to “give up” when she started looking for a job. But she says WETC staff “were my strength.”



“When I went out to look for work in the beginning, I wanted to give up. The people at WETC were my strength. I had so much help from Irma DeLeon at the Center for Working Families, as well as from Christine Pfaff who works for WETC and from Lynda Sanchez from Alamo Work Source. Sometimes I would just go in and cry. No matter how much time it took, they would listen to me and they wouldn’t let me give up.”

CWF and WETC connect students to simple resources that can spell the difference between job search success and failure. Dalia got a voucher to buy a new outfit for the job interview and gas money that kept her car moving to interviews and through her first month on the job.

“With their help, I got an assignment as a receptionist. But it was temporary and I couldn’t stay on

there for a permanent job,” Silva says. “One day, a customer told me about a job at UTSA. I applied for it and got it.”

Networking paid off. Dalia landed the job as an office assistant for the Student Health Services Department at the University of Texas at San Antonio. At the student clinic, she finds that she is now the one assisting students, just as she was once assisted.

“I’m so happy,” she exclaims. “I’m learning a lot about doctors, nurses and how to fill out charts. Working for UTSA, I can take free classes that will help me in my job – like upgrading my computer skills and learning how to work with students with disabilities. My supervisor tells me I can be somebody in this company. I love this job and I have to succeed!”

“Living in an area like the West Side that is very property poor,
our students don’t have access to many educational institutions.
WETC allows us to have access to the public college programs right in our area.”

— Elizabeth Garza

A new conduit to higher education for Edgewood students

Edgewood School District Assistant Superintendent Elizabeth Garza says that the biggest thing WETC brings to Edgewood students is access. “Living in an area like the West Side that is very property poor, our students don’t have access to many educational institutions other than the public schools and public libraries that are here. WETC allows us to have access to the public college programs right in our area. Not only our students, but even their parents can have access to classes to further their education, as well as improve their economic situation.

“But the biggest thing it brings is access to a higher education program right here in our neighborhood — located in close proximity — one that offers a variety of ways that they can improve themselves beyond high school.”

With WETC in the neighborhood, Edgewood is developing new approaches for keeping students on the learning track. During the Spring Semester 2008, it initiated the Middle College Program.

“This program is for some of those high-risk students whose needs can’t be met through our traditional high school setting,” Garza explains. “They might be over age, behind on credits, dropped out of school or struggling with other issues. Some are parents

Through its “Middle College” program housed at WETC, the Edgewood School District reaches non-traditional students. In this photo are Gloria Valle, Yessica Banda and Adeline Zacharie.



“This program is for some of those high-risk students whose needs can’t be met through our traditional high school setting. They might be over-age, behind on credits, dropped out of school or struggling with other issues. Some are parents themselves.”

— Elizabeth Garza

Edgewood’s historic role in school reform

Historically, Edgewood School District has figured prominently in nationwide efforts to achieve equity in school finance. Once the poorest school district in the state, the small district has very little tax base.

In the 1960s Edgewood made national headlines. Demetrio Rodriguez brought suit against the San Antonio Independent School District and the State of Texas in 1968 in an attempt to enroll his children in a financially better school system than Edgewood. The suit eventually was heard before the Supreme Court.

The case was defeated by one vote, but it was successful in that it brought attention to the plight of tax-poor and predominately minority school districts. Significant educational reforms, increased funding and research initiated by the federal government resulted from the “Rodriguez Case.”

—Excerpt from “History of EISD” on the district’s website at www.eisd.net/history

themselves or have to work to contribute financially to their families.”

Through the Middle College Program, Edgewood and WETC have created another educational opportunity for these at-risk youth. Sixty students—30 from each high

school—were identified for the pilot of this program.

The Middle College students who can’t attend high school during normal hours can complete basic courses through a self-paced online lab program located at WETC. At the same time, they can enroll in some of the career pathway programs that WETC offers, such as the Certified Nursing Assistant and the Production Worker Program. Edgewood has hired some of its own retired teachers to be at the labs on a part-time basis, as well as a full-time case manager to be on-site for these students.

“We hope that because the WETC is open longer, our students can go to the labs and get these classes at a time that is convenient to them, so they can work around their job schedules,” Garza says. “At the same time, they might be enticed to continue with these college programs. If this pilot effort works well, we’d expand it.”

Community will have role in WETC governance

The WETC materialized in record time because proponents adhered to what might be called the principle of “build it and they will come.” Blue Ribbon Committee members focused on implementation first, working together to establish the Center, select the right curriculum and recruit the students. In doing so, they set aside the details of governance to be resolved after the facility had become a reality.

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—Elizabeth Garza



Many WETC classes combine hands-on experiences with classroom instruction.

During 2007, they focused attention on governance and evaluation. They continued their resolve to maintain the high level of community involvement that birthed the facility. By-laws were agreed upon in November 2007. In 2008, the Blue Ribbon Committee transitioned to the WETC Stakeholder Committee, which will convene twice yearly, functioning in an advisory capacity. Meanwhile, a WETC Advisory Board selected by the Blue Ribbon Committee conducts interim business and oversees the daily workings of the Center. The Advisory Board has representation from the City, the Edgewood School District, Alamo Community College, the community, industry and workforce agencies.

At the end of 2007, *Making Connections* San Antonio transitioned to a Local

Management Entity, or “LME.” That entity, which continues the *Making Connections* work begun by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1999, will continue to have links to the WETC. An LME representative sits on the WETC Advisory Board, and Alamo Community College, in turn, is part of the LME’s Workforce and Earnings Table.

An evaluation subcommittee is developing a plan to track students while they are enrolled and follow them through placement and beyond. The proposed tracking will measure the long-term impact of their education. Confidentiality issues and the constraints of working with several governmental bodies make this evaluation component complex. Partners are working to devise a plan that will safeguard student confidentiality while still providing a

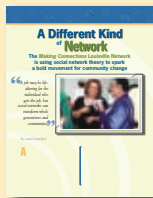
An evaluation subcommittee is developing a plan to track students while they are enrolled and follow them through placement and beyond. The plan will measure the long-term impact of their education.

comprehensive array of data to measure WETC's success.

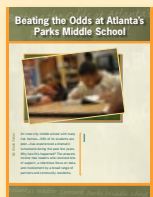
With success come challenges. Because of its popularity and better-than-expected enrollment, WETC is running out of space. WETC planners are already considering what

will happen when the three-year building lease with Edgewood runs out. Hope is that WETC can make permanent roots in a new building, one specifically designed for the institution. When that happens, the dream of Manuel Garza, Enrique Barrera and others will have come to full fruition.

Diarist Project Publications



A Different Kind of Network: The *Making Connections* Louisville Network is building an ambitious community-wide network that is linking residents not just to one another, but also to many opportunities provided by *Making Connections*' partners, such as jobs and asset-building programs. In addition, the network is building new relationships between service providers and residents.



Beating the Odds at Atlanta's Parks Middle School: An inner-city middle school with many risk factors—94% of its students are poor—has experienced a dramatic turnaround during the past few years. In math, for example, the percentage of eighth graders exceeding the state's standards rose from 1% to 46%. Why has this happened? The answers involve new leaders who received lots of support, a relentless focus on data and involvement by a broad range of partners and community residents.



Motivated by Her Two Children, Mayra Lopez Learns To Be an Activist: In part because of her involvement with *Making Connections*, Mayra Lopez has become a leader of efforts to make her Oakland neighborhood a better place to raise children. While her story is a very personal one, it also communicates a lot about the process that people living in tough neighborhoods go through to change their lives and their communities.



"On the Big Battles, we were getting our butts kicked." The long-time director of a growing organizing group in Denver – and a long-time close partner of *Making Connections*-Denver – reflects about why his group decided to invest so heavily in a long-term initiative like *Making Connections* and what has come out of this investment.



"The work just has to keep going" – A Reflection on Denver's Community Court: As the people who helped convince Denver's juvenile justice system to create a community court based in a *Making Connections*-Denver neighborhood learned, convincing a system to agree to a reform is just the first step. Then that reform needs to be implemented and ultimately institutionalized.



Dealing with the Here and Now: Making Connections in Hartford's resident-run small grants program: Any long-term community change initiative has a short-term challenge: how to give the community's residents a sense that things are changing now. In a few *Making Connections* sites, resident-run small grants programs have led to some concrete changes in its target neighborhoods while also demonstrating the principle that residents themselves can make things happen in their neighborhoods.

These and many other publications are available at www.DiaristProject.org.

“WETC captures the individual where he or she is at, whether the person is a dropout trying to get a GED or a worker trying to get specific skills to get better employment.”

— Victor Azios

The Diarist Project

This is one of a series of publications about the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *Making Connections* Initiative put together by The Diarist Project. The project is a new approach the foundation is using to learn from its efforts to strengthen families and transform struggling neighborhoods.

Diarists work to capture strategies and insights of the people who are leading the neighborhood transformation work. In *Making Connections*, the diarist works closely with the staff people who lead the work in each city.

This story was written by Linda Wilson, the *Making Connections* San Antonio diarist. It was edited by Tim Saasta, diarist coordinator. *Published November 2008.*

Making Connections is a Casey Foundation initiative to support work that demonstrates the simple premise that kids thrive when their families are strong and their communities supportive. What began in 1999 as a demonstration project in selected neighborhoods in 22 cities is now an intricate network of people and groups committed to making strong families and neighborhoods their highest priorities.

The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** (AECF.org) works to build better futures for disadvantaged

children and their families in the United States. Its primary mission is to foster public policies, human service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families.



Dalia Silva

Photos by Joel Salcido (pages 1, 3, 12, 18), Tamara Casso (4, 6, 7, 15, 20), Alamo Community College District (11, 13) and Yvonne Pena/Edgewood ISO (16).

For more information about **The Diarist Project**, contact Tim Saasta at Tim@CharityChoices.com. Diarist publication are available at: **www.DiaristProject.org**.

Making Connections San Antonio is a long-term, community-wide effort to improve the quality of life for families living on the city’s West Side. It is now led by a Local Management Entity comprised of the City of San Antonio Department of Community Initiatives, Catholic Charities, Family Service Association and Edgewood Independent School District, along with local residents. For more information, contact:

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