Growing Up Boulder's Whittier HOP Transit Study Report

Summary of findings fall 2016

Report produced April 2017 by Cathy Hill and Susan Glairon

Overview

Growing Up Boulder (GUB), Boulder's child and youth-friendly city initiative, is a program within CU's Community Engagement Design and Research Center (CEDaR). GUB's mission is to empower Boulder's young people with opportunities for inclusion, influence, and deliberation on local issues that affect their lives.

In September 2016, GUB began engaging youth voice in the public outreach stage of GO Boulder's HOP Transit Study. The 2016-2017 HOP Transit Study seeks to gather input in revitalizing the HOP bus experience and address changes that have occurred in land use and transportation options since the HOP's inception twenty-two years ago.

During the fall semester, Growing Up Staff and undergraduate Environmental Design (ENVD) Program mentors from CU worked with Whittier International Elementary School second grade students and their English Language Learner (ELL) teachers. The students included twelve ELLs, ages 7-8. The primary objective of the engagement was to have students study the HOP bus by experiencing it first-hand, and then make recommendations to GO Boulder for improving the bus rider experience. GO Boulder staff were keenly interested in knowing what these school-age students' ideas were in making the HOP experience more child and family-friendly.

"A lot of heads are better than one!"
Second-grade Whittier Elementary student

By the Numbers

- 12 ELL students ages 7-8
- 2 Whittier ELL teachers
- 1 GUB program associate
- 2 undergraduate Environmental Design students from CU
- 1 GO Boulder planner
- 2 community members (provided expertise)
- 5 community members (attended Share Out presentation)
- 21 classroom hours

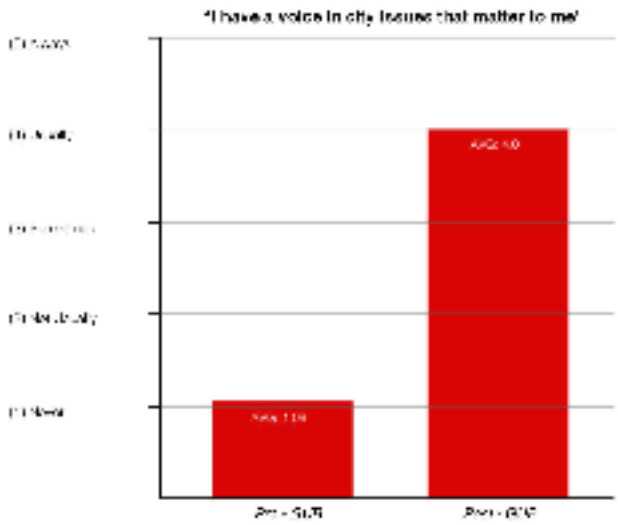
During the HOP field trip, a Whittier student frames the local fares in green, showing that she likes bus fares posted at her eye level because she and other children can easily read them.

Summary of Findings

Whittier's ELL second-graders had three recommendations for HOP bus improvements. First, children valued the idea of being able to ride the bus independently. In order to do that, students need to be able to read the bus signage at each stop. Currently, signs are at an adult level. Lowering the signs at bus stops to the level where most children can read them was the students' first recommendation. Second, students like the idea of having a place to sit while waiting for a bus to arrive. To this end, students recommended installing a bench at the 20th and Pearl bus stop location, the closest HOP stop to their school. Last, students want riding a HOP bus to be a fun and interesting experience. Currently, signage inside HOP buses is geared towards adult riders. According to Whittier students, adult signage does not equate to "fun or interesting" to the HOP's youngest riders. Therefore, Whittier students would like to see signage that is geared towards riders their age. Having artwork created by youth inside each HOP bus was their primary recommendation to GO Boulder. All three recommendations reflect student values, and each recommendation helps support the HOP bus in being a more child and family-friendly experience.

Reflections

Prior to participating in the HOP Transit project, Whittier students felt that they "never have a voice in city issues that matter to me" (average class score: 1.09, with 1 equals "Never" and 5 equals "Always"). After the project ended, students felt they "usually" have a voice, with an average class score of 4.0, where a score of 4.0 equals "usually." This, and other survey results, demonstrates that young people appreciate the opportunity to engage in decisions that affect their lives.



"We like taking action."
Second-grade Whittier Elementary student

Project Description

Under the guidance of teachers Tamar van Vliet and Alysia Hayas, the second grade ELL students studied the HOP bus experience and sought ways to create an improved child and family-friendly HOP bus experience. Their engagement with the HOP Transit Study included a field trip, extensive classroom research, visits from guest experts, and a class presentation to city and community members and GUB staff.

During their inquiry, students learned essential background knowledge about transit in Boulder, the HOP bus, new English vocabulary words, techniques and skills specific to persuasive writing, group decision making, digital presentation production, and oral presentation.

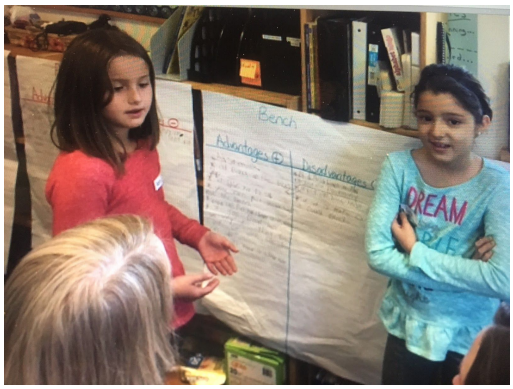
Classroom teachers began the study by introducing students to Roots & Shoots, wildlife activist Jane Goodall's after school program. Similar to GUB's philosophy and Whittier's International Baccalaureate program, Roots & Shoots places the power for creating solutions to big challenges in the hands of young people, treating children as experts, and utilizing service projects through which students develop a sense of service and leadership in their own communities. Overall, students learn to become advocates and activists for causes that matter to them.

Using the Roots & Shoots 4-Step model, students mapped the HOP route to learn about the HOP bus and route. Students then experienced the HOP first-hand by going on a field trip to learn about bus stops and what riding the bus was like. Students used red and green frames to identify what they liked (green, called "advantages") and didn't like (red, "disadvantages") about the HOP. Back in the classroom, students classified field trip photographs into four categories: safe, fun, comfortable, easy/convenient. Students reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of the bus stop and their experience riding the bus. The students later wrote captions for the photos that explained the "advantages" and "disadvantages" they saw on their field trip. This process helped students discover possible ways they could improve the HOP.

Next, Natalie Stiffler from GO Boulder visited the class as a transportation expert. She listened to their ideas and findings, and provided feedback. Natalie also extended the students' learning by giving them information about her job as a planner and details related to the HOP Transit Study. After Natalie's visit, students prioritized their findings, developed a plan for solutions, and thought about the action steps they'd take to improve the HOP bus experience. The four-month study culminated in the students presenting their final recommendations to city and community members and GUB staff at a Share Out Day in December 2016.

Share Out

At the share out, students presented what they learned as well as outlines of their recommendations. Visitors were impressed by many aspects of the presentation. Highlights include the students' collaborative decision-making process, the depth of research, and the systematic approach for analyzing their topic. They also liked that students were confident, well-prepared and presented as a team. Visitors wanted to return to see the students witness and celebrate the results of their work when the projects are installed by the city.



Whittier HOP Transit Study Actions

Whittier second-grade students saw their recommendations put into action. During winter and spring 2017, students collaborated with former Whittier teacher and local artist Shari Southward to create a mural entitled, *How Many Bunnies Do You See?* GO Boulder generously had the mural professionally reproduced for all of its HOP buses, and the mural will also be displayed in several city offices. In addition, GO Boulder is installing a bench at the 20th and Pearl HOP stop near Whittier. A plaque acknowledging the children's contributions will be installed on the bench. Buses are expected to have the artwork and the bench installed by the end of April 2017. A celebration is planned for April 27, 2017.

"Beautiful work kids and teachers!"
"(Putting up children's artwork on the HOP), will show that children live in the city, too."

~A visitor who attended the Dec. 8, 2016 Share Out

Conclusion

Through Growing Up Boulder's Whittier HOP Transit Study project, we confirmed that not only do elementary school students want to have a voice in designing essential parts of their community, but they have many great ideas for how to do so.

Requests from Whittier's second-grade ELL class for improvements for the HOP bus and route proved consistent: students want features that make it easier and more enjoyable for all kids to ride city buses. They want signs that are accessible to all kids, places to rest while waiting for buses, and bus artwork to make the ride interesting and enjoyable. We hope that this report provides the tools for policy makers, both locally and beyond, to design kid-friendly buses using the ideas from Whittier International Elementary School's young people.

Partners and Appreciation

The Whittier HOP Transit Study was the result of a collaborative process. Growing Up Boulder would like to extend our thanks to all of our partners below. Financial support came from the City of Boulder and the University of Colorado Boulder.This study was possible thanks to the time and dedication of the following individuals:

- Boulder Valley School Teachers
    - Tamar van Vliet, Whittier teacher
    - Alysia Hayas, Whittier teacher
    - Sarah Oswick, Whittier principal
- Community Members and Partners
    - Aileen Carrigan, Transportation Consultant, Bespoke Transit Solutions
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- CU Environmental Design Student Mentors
    - Madilynn Martinson
    - Natalia Morroquin
- GO Boulder/Transportation Staff
    - Kathleen Bracke
    - Oscar Saucedo-Andrade
    - Natalie Stiffler
    - Laura Telles
- Growing Up Boulder Staff
    - Cathy Hill
    - Mara Mintzer
    - Susan Glairon
- University of Colorado Professors
    - Louis Chawla
    - Willem van Vliet

Appendices

This section identifies classroom demographics and offers expanded details of the HOP Transit Study engagement.

Whittier International School ELL Classroom Description

Classroom Demographic Information:

- 1 student from China
- 3 students from Bosnia
- 1 student from South Korea
- 1 student from the Ukraine
- 6 Spanish-speaking students from the U.S. and Mexico

Project Activities Summary

This summary includes activities by date:

September 23, 2016: Cathy Hill, Growing Up Boulder program associate gave students an introduction to GUB, with a specific focus on the HOP Transit Study. Teachers Alysia Hayas and Tamar van Vliet introduced the concept of engaging with the Boulder community. Students were eager to learn more about how to make their voices heard.

Sept. 30, 2016: Teacher gave students background information about the Roots and Shoots Organization, Jane Goodall's global youth-led community action program. Students watched videos that described action research projects about people, animals, and the environment.

Oct. 7, 2016: Kristine Mathiasen, Colorado representative for Roots and Shoots, gave an overview of the program and examples of service learning projects from around the world. Students learned key mapping vocabulary and started mapping the HOP route for the HOP Transit Study Project.

Oct. 21, 2016: The class walked to the nearest HOP bus stop, and students used red and green frames to frame what they liked (green) and didn't like (red) while teachers took photos. Students, teachers, and mentors rode the HOP. They continued identifying additional "advantages" and "disadvantages" they saw during the ride.

Oct. 24, 2016: Students wrote captions for the field trip photos, classifying the photographs into four categories: safe, fun, comfortable, easy/convenient. Students reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of the bus stop and their experience riding the bus.

Oct. 28, 2016: Students wrote invitations to GO Boulder, a city organization that works to increase travel choices in Boulder, requesting that someone from GO Boulder (transportation planner) visit the class. The intent was to obtain answers to students' questions about the HOP Transit Study, as well as to review action projects that would be realistic for the class. Students benefitted from oral rehearsal and sentence stems to help them write the invitations.

Nov. 8, 2016: Natalie Stifler from GO Boulder gave history and background information about the HOP. She answered student questions and explained the cost and next steps for students ideas. It was somewhat challenging for students to grasp the difference between a project costing $30,000 and project costing $3,000.

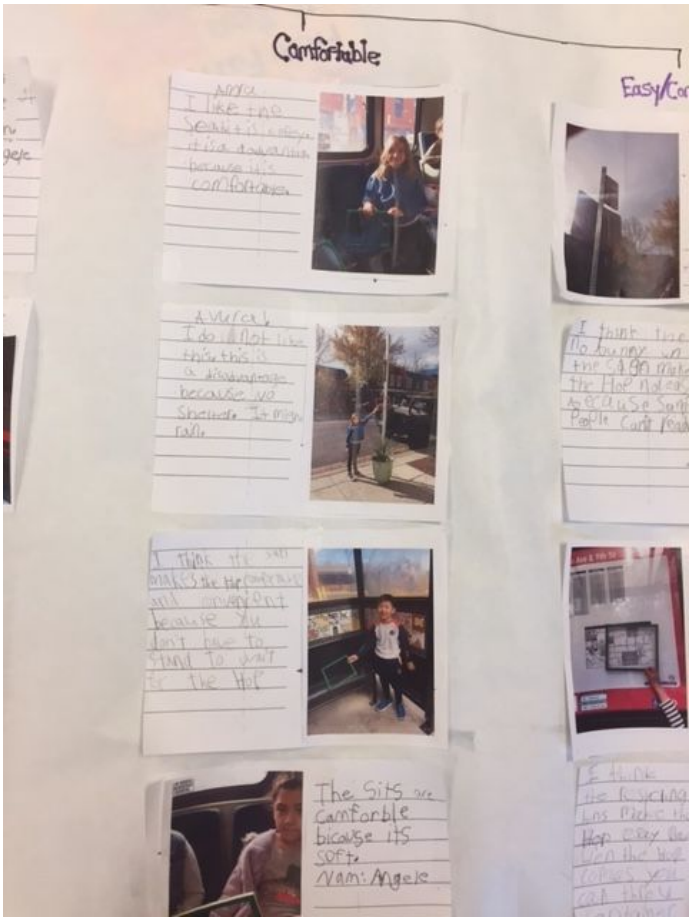
Nov. 14, 2016: In groups of two, students made T-charts with the advantages and disadvantages of each action idea and then orally presented the advantages and disadvantages of their ideas to the group.

Nov. 15, 2016: Students reviewed the advantages and disadvantages on the T-charts and voted on an action idea to work on as a group. Everyone voted for the project with the most advantages and least number of disadvantages. The idea with the most votes was putting artwork onto HOP buses.

Nov. 16, 2016: Students wrote persuasive letters to Natalie and the GO Boulder team about the advantages of putting artwork on the bus while reviewing letter writing and learning how to write persuasively. They created a powerpoint for their recommendations.

Nov. 18, 2016: Students practiced their digital presentation, poster explanations, and how to answer possible questions from visitors. The students became more comfortable with the vocabulary, ideas and language the more they practiced.

December 6, 2016: Students presented a HOP Transit Study powerpoint outlining their process and recommendation for GO Boulder. A question-answer session followed. Afterwards, students gave guests a "tour" of their learning charts to show their thinking and learning throughout the inquiry.



Photos of the students' chart showing part of their decision-making process. Photo by Alysia Hayas

HOP bus.

Students used red and green frames to show the things they liked and didn't like about the Hop Bus. In this photo a teacher holds a sign for a student to show that the students didn't like the bus signs because they are too high for children to read.

Student quotes:

- A lot of heads are better than one.
- We like taking action.
- It's fun to go out into the community.
- Presenting was fun.
- We were reflective when we did advantage and disadvantage.
- We like to learn together.
- We learned from each other and others' ideas.

What do you remember about what the city leaders said to you after your presentation?

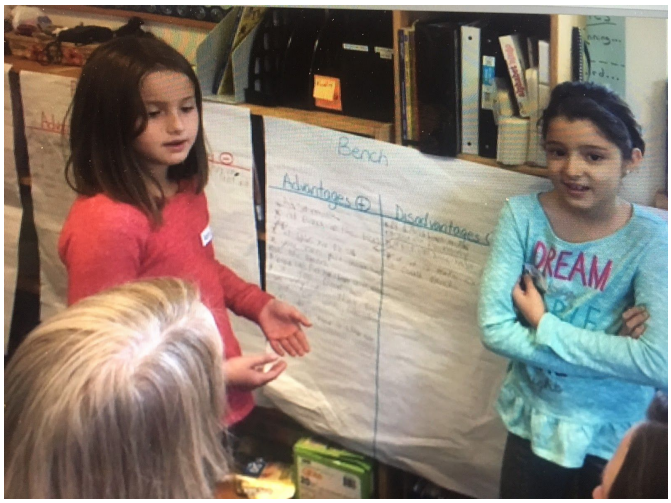
- The kids worked hard!
- Everyone worked as a team.
- Everyone communicated and talked at the front.(They weren't shy.)
- They loved the work and the ideas.
- They asked questions. They said, "Tell us more."
- They liked the "art on the bus" idea.
- They wanted to know about how we voted and the "advantages" and "disadvantages."
- They liked that we introduced ourselves.
- They said "Thank you for working hard!"
- They said, "Kids have ideas that adults don't think about."
- They liked when we were talking a lot to explain the posters.
- They liked that we were reflective about the advantages and disadvantages.
- Everyone did a good job!

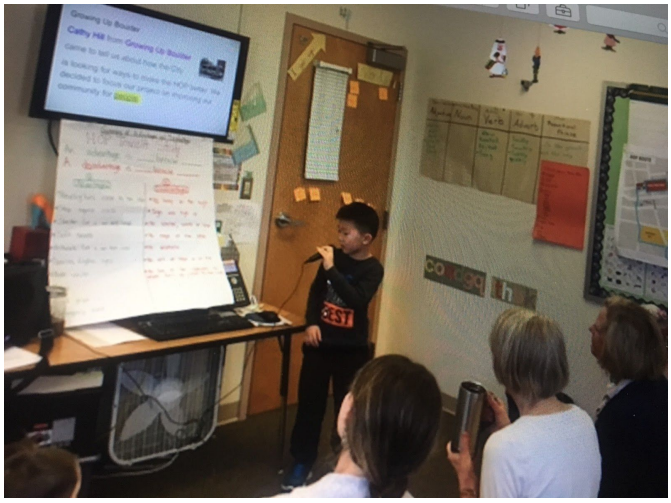
What did you learn about working as a team and making decisions? What did you discover about yourself as a learner?

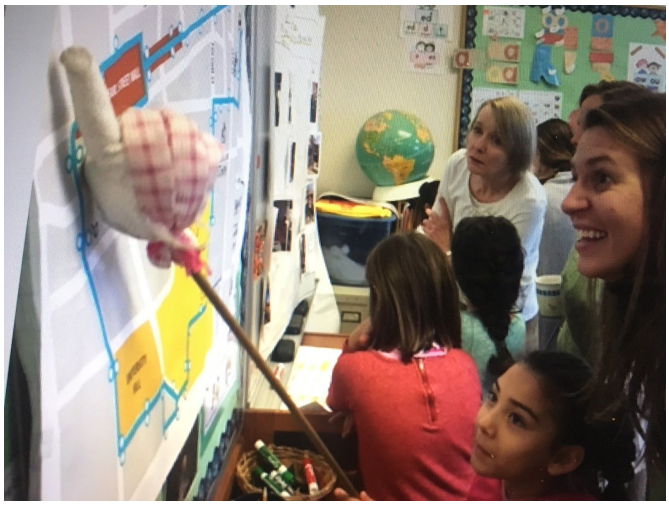
- We learned from each other and others' ideas.
- We learned how to take turns talking and how to listen to others.
- We were inquirers. We studied. We asked questions and learned.
- Going on a field trip was a great way to learn about the HOP.
- Using the frames was a great way to learn.
- We learned about Jane Goodall and how we can make a difference in our community for people, animals, and the environment.

What went well in our presentation? Why?

- We weren't hiding behind papers. We were confident and enthusiastic.
- We were inquirers when we asked Natalie (of GO Boulder) about action.
- We showed cooperation when we gave everyone a turn.
- They told us we did a good job. (They showed appreciation.)
- We shared our ideas and spoke loudly.
- They asked us questions. (They were inquirers.)
- We did the right thing by helping the city and the bus ride. (We were principled.)
- We were risk-takers by doing a presentation in front of the city leaders.







SHARE OUT

Second-grade Whittier students share their project process and final recommendations during a Share Out Day with GUB friends, GO Boulder staff and other city staff members on Dec. 8, 2016. The students' recommendations included lowering bus stop signs, installing a bench at a bus stop and adding children's art to buses to make the 23-year-old HOP busline more youth-friendly. Photos by Alysia Hayas

Whittier students present to visitors from GO Boulder, GUB and other city and community members during the final Share Out. Photos by Alysia Hayas.