

# WHAT'S HER NUMBER?

When it comes to public school ZIP codes, there's more than meets the eye

In the old saw about real estate, the three most important factors are location, location, location. The same is true of our nation's public schools. A location that is desirable usually has good public schools because good schools attract families and businesses, which drive up real estate prices. In turn, high-priced real estate increases property taxes, which help fund public schools, which attract more affluent families. And so on.

Location matters for schools in rural areas, where family farms are fading into history, and for segregated and impoverished inner-city neighborhoods where many businesses have shut down and middle-class families have moved away.

When it comes to location, a ZIP code—a mere five digits—can frequently describe the quality of the education that public school students receive and sometimes even the direction their lives will take. In this issue—and in others to come—we take you to five ZIP codes to explain the significance of location when it comes to public education.



## A DECADES- OLD BATTLE

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



**78237** Jonathan Bryant taped the death notice for Demetrio Peña

Rodriguez to his classroom door at John F. Kennedy High School. The photo on the black-and-white photocopy showed a man with spectacles and a hint of a smile, and described him simply as a “parent and education activist.”

For Bryant, Rodriguez, who died in April at age 87, was much more than just an “activist.” He was an inspiration and a reason Bryant accepted a teaching job in the low-income, predominantly-Latino Edgewood Independent School District. “I read about Demetrio in college,” says Bryant, 31, who substituted at Kennedy until 2008 when he was hired full time.

Rodriguez was a former parent of the Edgewood School District who, in 1971, joined with other parents to challenge the state’s reliance on local property taxes to finance public schools. Like other states, Texas’ per-pupil spending correlates to variations in local property tax receipts. When *Rodriguez v. San Antonio ISD* was filed, students in poorer districts received only two-thirds of the state funding that was received by students living in wealthier districts. Attorneys for Rodriguez (and some other parents) argued that the situation created a classification of individuals (the poor) that was based on income. They further argued that because public school funding is the responsibility of the

state, Texas was in violation of the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

“The whole logic behind our public school system is that everyone gets an equal chance,” says Bryant, who has a scholar’s knowledge of the case. “Anything short of equity is an injustice.”

The case also spotlighted the financial gulf between working-class, minority districts like Edgewood and predominantly white, affluent ones such as the Alamo Heights Independent School District, just five miles away.

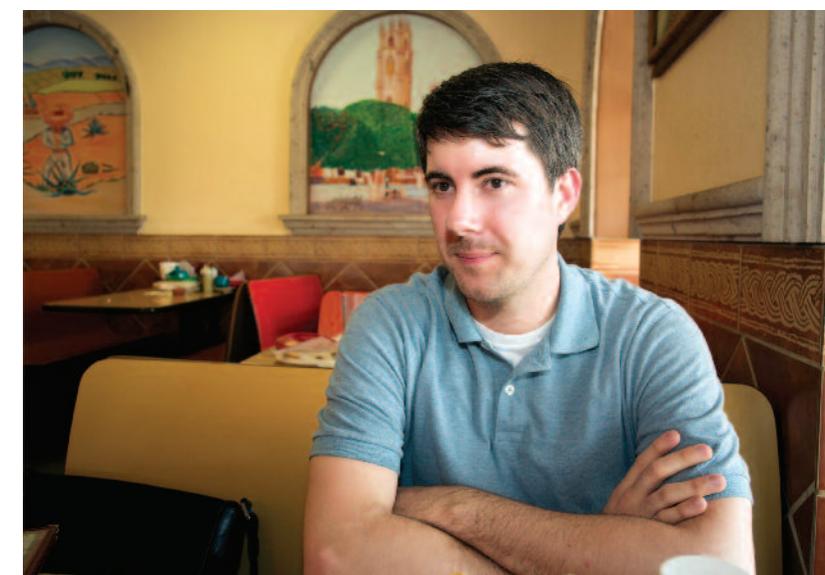
As Bryant walks the polished floors and orderly halls of Kennedy, he points to the glossy white, brick walls with unfinished faces and words. “Budget cuts,” Bryant explains. “The teacher in charge was laid off.”

### ‘Bright and Capable,’ Despite Challenges

Ten minutes north of Kennedy—past a series of overcrowded auto repair shops, an aged strip mall, and the 99-acre San Fernando Cemetery, rests a Kennedy feeder school: F.D. Roosevelt.

#### AT A GLANCE

**Edgewood Independent School District**  
**Spending Per-Pupil : \$8,949**  
**Graduation Rate: 58%**  
**Enrollment: Approximately 12,500**



Leticia Barbosa (top, right) and a group of teachers at Roosevelt Elementary School judge student science projects in the quiet hours after the last bell. “Anything short of equity is an injustice,” says Kennedy High School teacher Jonathan Bryant (right).

Leticia Barbosa has been teaching for 12 years, the last seven at Roosevelt. While some teachers might start their careers in Edgewood to gain experience before transferring to a higher-paying district, Barbosa, who was born in San Antonio, started at a private school in Alamo Heights and then applied to Roosevelt Elementary.

“We’re on the proverbial wrong side of the tracks,” Barbosa says. “But we (the staff) have high expectations for our students. They’re bright and capable.”

“We’re on the proverbial wrong side of the tracks, but we (the staff) have high expectations for our students. They’re bright and capable.”

—LETICIA BARBOSA, ROOSEVELT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Roosevelt is surrounded by despair. Junked cars rest on dirt lawns. Mangy-looking dogs run loose in weeds growing near an abandoned shack. Their laces tied together, sneakers swing from telephone lines to signal which gang “owns” the street. Instead of a religious figure, an outdoor altar holds three

discarded jugs of antifreeze.

With its manicured lawn, stately appearance and 600-plus students wearing crisp white and blue polo-style shirts and khaki bottoms, the school stands in stark contrast to its surroundings. “When I tell people I work here, they have no idea what or where it is,” says Barbosa, who is president of the Edgewood Classroom Teachers Association (ECTA).

Barbosa says she’s not surprised by the reaction, since Edgewood has no book stores, museums, movie theaters or high-profile cultural events to attract non-residents. “We do have a Cinco de Mayo parade that is gaining in popularity,” she says. ECTA participates in the parade by giving books to attendees.

The question remains: What is the best way to finance schools?

The Rodriguez case won in the federal district court, which ruled that per-pupil spending disparities between Edgewood and Alamo Heights and other districts were unconstitutional. Although the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the lower court’s ruling in 1973, the case brought national attention to state school-funding gaps between district haves and have-nots. Since then, the case has been reopened and settled a half-dozen times. Most notably, it set the stage for a 1984 landmark case, which again challenged the equity of the state’s school financing system—*Edgewood ISD v. Kirby*. William Kirby was the Texas commissioner of education.

Initially, eight school districts and 21 parents were represented in the Edgewood case. Ultimately, 67 other school districts as well as many other parents and students joined the original plaintiffs in contesting the state’s reliance on local property taxes to finance public education. Attorneys for the plaintiffs contended that this method was intrinsically unequal because property values varied greatly from district to district, thus creating an imbalance in funds available to educate students on an equal basis.

Since 1984, school districts have sued the state of Texas repeatedly to wrest more money for public education, resulting in five major court decisions. The state has lost them all.

The process began again earlier this year when a state district judge found that Texas was financing its schools in an inadequate, inequitable, and unconstitutional way. The case is back in the Texas Supreme Court.

“Why does the state neglect certain districts?” asks Bryant. “Blissful ignorance. I think everyone has gotten use to the way things are.”

—JOHN ROSALES

## WHERE HAVE ALL THE COUNTRY SCHOOLS GONE?



TRENTON, WIS.

53916

Beverly Smith was a teaching assistant at Trenton Elementary School in a tiny Wisconsin farming town before the school closed in June 2013 after more than half a century.

Like many rural schools shuttering their doors around the country, Trenton Elementary consolidated with a larger school—Prairie View Elementary—which absorbed Trenton’s nearly 100 students and six classroom teachers, but not its three teachers’ assistants. For educators at small, country schools, there are no guarantees. When declining enrollments and shifting populations in remote areas blend with state and federal budget cuts, schools close and people lose jobs.

But Smith says that’s not all that’s lost. “A way of life is disappearing,” she says. “Watching the country schools fade away is like watching all of our farms fade away. Before you know it, all the barns will be empty, the pastures will be empty, and the school yards will be empty.”

The consolidation trend started nearly 100 years ago, first cropping up in the 1920s with the development of motorized transportation. For the first time, children could take buses to larger schools in further away towns rather than walk or ride a horse to a closer, one-room schoolhouse. In fact, Trenton was formed by the consolidation of five such schoolhouses when local farmers agreed that their kids should have a more modern facility. After boundaries were redrawn and taxable land base issues worked out, construction of Trenton Consolidated School began in the spring of 1959 and was completed for the 1959 – 1960 school year.

Some were sad to see the historic one-room schools close, but students were thrilled. The new regional school had indoor plumbing and a gymnasium, complete with gleaming hardwood floors and basketball nets. Most of the farm kids had never even held a basketball, let alone played on a team.

Construction of the then-new school’s six classrooms, kitchen, gym, and principal’s office totaled \$165,000. Fifty years later, the district is hoping to get \$50,000 for the building, which needs a new roof and boiler, and often has unsafe drinking water because of contamination from a nearby quarry.

### Change Brings Improvement

Prairie View Elementary, on the other hand, is the newest school building in the Beaver Dam School District. Built in 1998, the light-filled school has all the amenities of a modern facility and was also strategically designed. Realizing the closure of more country schools was likely, the architect created a floor plan that would allow for easy expansion into the surrounding fields to accommodate a growing student population.

In the fall of 2012, the district broke ground on six additional classrooms at Prairie View. With the new classrooms and the transfer of Trenton teachers to

### AT A GLANCE

**Trenton, Wisconsin**  
**Spending Per Pupil: \$11,540**  
**Graduation Rate: 97.5%**  
**Enrollment: 3,611**

From top, the new classrooms under construction at Prairie View Elementary; Principal Debra Lins surrounded by Trenton Elementary students; Beverly Smith lines students up after one of their last country recesses at Trenton.



staff them, class sizes will remain small, and bus rides will also be kept short, since Prairie View is only six miles from Trenton Elementary.

“That was how we won community support,” says Beaver Dam Superintendent Steve Vessey. “Nobody wants to see their community school close, but if parents know their kids will still be in small class sizes at a more modern facility, and that they won’t be riding the bus for long periods of time, it’s a lot more palatable.”

Vessey also shared research with the community showing how achievement increases in multi-section schools because grade-level teachers can collaborate on lessons, share data, and team-teach.

Then there’s the technology.

“It’s hard to argue with technology,” he says. “Back in 1959, they wanted a gym. In 2013, they want wireless high-speed Internet, laptops, and Smartboards.”

At Trenton there was only one outlet in each classroom. Students had to use aging desktops in the tiny school library with an Internet connection so spotty it kicked them off at least three or four times while taking state tests.

Despite the lure of Smartboards and laptops, Trenton students were apprehensive about leaving their small school. They were used to being all together in the same class year after year. At Prairie View, each grade level has two or three classes, so some friends who had always had the same teacher were split up.

“We knew they’d be worried about moving, so we wanted to make the transition easier for the students,” says former Trenton Principal Debra Lins, whose last day with the district was June 30. “So we paired up Trenton kids with pen pals at Prairie View, held visitation days for the Trenton students to check out their new school, and also got the kids together for family nights and movie outings.”

To help ease the transition of the teachers, joint staff meetings began last spring. This way, the Trenton educators could meet and begin collaborating with their new colleagues. Like their students, Trenton’s educators were reluctant to leave their beloved country school behind.

“I hated to see it close,” says fifth-grade teacher Laura Leonard. “We’d become such a tight-knit family. We’ll miss knowing the kids all the way up through the grades.”

Superintendent Vessey knew the school closing would hurt: “We lose good people, like Principal Lins, and three dedicated support staff.”

But when Gov. Scott Walker slashed education funding by \$1.85 billion in 2011, the district was already operating at a \$400,000 deficit. The district did a feasibility study, and found that the population of Trenton was steadily decreasing. With declining enrollment, aging infrastructure, and the need for access to technology, the decision was hard, but clear.

“I could create an argument with my heart to keep the school open, but not with my brain,” Vessey says. “Fortunately, the community got it. ‘We don’t love it,’ they said, ‘but we get it.’”

Hopefully, the next community in the district will ‘get it’ when it happens to them. South Beaver Dam Elementary will likely be the next country school to close and consolidate with Prairie View.

—CINDY LONG

Find out more about Trenton Elementary School at [nea.org/zipcodes](http://nea.org/zipcodes).

# AMID GREAT CHALLENGE, PROGRESS

EAST NASHVILLE, TENN.



**37206** At the beginning of each school year in August, students at Ross Elementary receive a list of 10 basic school supplies they will need during that year. Children share the list with their parents, who indicate what they will be able to provide. Usually, says third-grade teacher Lauryn England, only about a quarter of the school’s families can afford the necessary supplies.

“We’re making progress but these kids face enormous challenges in their daily lives.”

—LAURYN ENGLAND, ROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“On the most basic level, teachers are struggling to put even the most basic supplies in the hands of the students,” England says. A similar ritual plays out again in late May when Ross teachers assemble packages of books, educational games, and other resources that might help the children stay engaged in learning over the summer. For schools like Ross that have so many low-income families, “summer dip” doesn’t describe a day at the beach or a pool. It refers instead to a potential decline in learning due to disengagement during a long, listless summer.

Ross Elementary sits on McFerrin Avenue in East Nashville—a 12-square-mile area known for its trendy restaurants, shops, music clubs, and art galleries. The urban area also has high levels of poverty and crime.

Its students are predominantly African American and low-income. Nine out of 10 Ross students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and the school has faced an all-too-familiar slate of challenges—a yawning achievement gap, low enrollment, teacher attrition, and minimal parental engagement. And since the city struck down its busing policies in the late 1990s, neighborhood schools in Nashville’s high poverty areas are increasingly isolated as re-segregation has taken hold across the area.

England notices that friends who teach at more affluent schools in the city can rely on parents to

provide the supplies and extras that teachers need. Children at the more affluent schools “are obviously less ‘school dependent’ than our students,” England says. “They have other avenues, namely the home, to help supplement their education.”

While students at Ross may be swimming upstream, staff report many real improvements and remain dedicated to helping students reach their goals. It’s a commitment that’s woven into the school’s official motto: “Every Student, Every Day, Some Success in Some Way.”

England says the school is lucky to have some strong community partnerships, though teachers and staff do have to make the effort to seek them. “But if we ask, it’ll be there. Especially if you make it clear how they’re helping benefits the students.”

“[Ross Elementary School] has a dynamic and supportive principal, a dedicated and talented staff, and they have been empowered to use their professional expertise to meet their students’ needs,” says Metropolitan Nashville Education Association President Stephen Henry.

## Doing What’s Right

Many urban school districts across the nation have become the scourge of the media and lawmakers who believe they represent little more than complete and utter failure of the public school system. Nashville is no exception. Educators here are not blind to the tremendous challenges, but refuse to fall in line behind ideas they believe will be a disservice to many of their students.

The Nashville school board shares the sentiment. From 2012 to 2013, it repeatedly rejected an application from Phoenix-based charter operator Great Hearts Academies to open up shop—despite intense pressure from state lawmakers to have the application approved. The new charter was to have been located in West Nashville, a mostly white and affluent area. Great Hearts operators did not provide a plan to ensure racial diversity.

In a city with a largely segregated student population, the creation of a school that would exacerbate the isolation of low-income students was a non-starter for Nashville’s public

education advocates, according to school board member Amy Frogge.

“We were not about to approve a school that used taxpayers’ dollars to open up in an affluent part of town without explaining how it was going to attract kids from high-poverty neighborhoods,” she says.

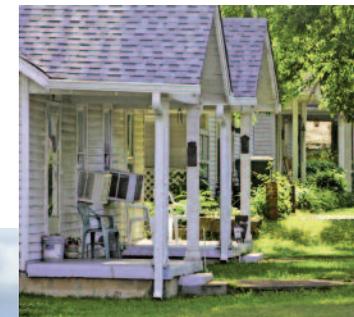
Despite repeated attempts by the state legislature to force the Nashville school board to accept the application, Frogge and other members voted against allowing the new charter school.

“The state government was pushing an education agenda that can be detrimental to

## AT A GLANCE

**Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools**  
**Spending Per Pupil: \$9,586**  
**Graduation Rate: 76%**  
**Enrollment: 75,080**

With poverty and unemployment high, many East Nashville schools rely on community organizations and businesses to provide school supplies.



our most disadvantaged students,” Frogge says. “It comes down to basic fairness.”

For England and other East Nashville teachers, the ongoing political battles may seem removed from the daily challenges of teaching in a low-income neighborhood. They know it affects them, but school days are short, resources are scarce, and achieving the school motto of finding “some success in some way” for every student can be elusive.

“We’re making progress but these kids face enormous challenges in their daily lives,” England says. “As teachers, we can’t change their economic situation, but we can help these students once they walk into school.”

“Of all the things these kids lack, having good teachers at a good school shouldn’t be one of them.”

—TIM WALKER

## EXCLUSIVE AND INCLUSIVE

BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE, MD.

# 20814

On the quiet, leafy streets of Bethesda and Chevy Chase, Md., sit stately homes with professionally manicured lawns and circular driveways cradling European cars. Nearby busy shopping corridors are lined with wine bars, gourmet markets, and upscale stores like Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

This Washington, D.C., suburb is part of Montgomery County, Md., among the nation’s wealthiest counties. Many of its public high school students attend Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School (B-CC), consistently ranked as one of the best public high schools in the nation. The school also rivals the area’s most elite private schools, and has educated the children of ambassadors, World Bank economists, and Washington lobbyists.

But B-CC is hardly a country club school; it is made up of a broad mix of students from diverse economic backgrounds. It serves middle- and low-income students from nearby Kensington and Silver Spring, and from Bethesda and Chevy Chase. According to recent

statistics, about 19 percent of B-CC students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

A more remarkable statistic, however, is that 96 percent of the school’s students—including those who come from the stately homes and those who live in more affordable apartments or townhouses—head to college.

“We expect everyone to do well here,” says B-CC resource counselor Colleen Desmond. “It’s a culture of expectation—all of our students are expected to take rigorous classes with the support they need. And because of that, all our kids achieve.”

Research backs her up. A Century Foundation study, “Housing Policy Is School Policy,” found that low-income students in Montgomery County who attend schools with low levels of poverty significantly outperform low-income students who attend schools with high poverty rates. This includes high-poverty schools with state-of-the-art educational interventions. According to the study, it’s because of the county’s economic integration.

Under Montgomery County’s zoning policy, the public housing authority can purchase one-third of the homes within each subdivision to operate as subsidized housing. Thus, families with lower incomes can live in affluent neighborhoods and send their kids to school alongside students from middle- or higher-income families.

Why do they do better once they’re at these more affluent schools? Century Foundation researcher Richard Kahlenberg, who supervised the study, points to three factors: students, parents, and educators.

“It’s influential for an economically disadvantaged student to be in a school where classmates expect to go on to college and are more academically engaged,” Kahlenberg explains. “Typically, they’re more engaged because of parents who, for a variety of reasons are in a better position to be involved in school affairs.” Adding that affluent parents are “four times as likely to be members of the PTA and twice as likely to volunteer in class.”

According to Kahlenberg, the third factor is the quality of educators who are drawn to lower poverty

“We expect everyone to do well here.”  
—COLLEEN DESMOND,  
BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE  
HIGH SCHOOL

schools. Educators are as interested in working conditions as in salary, Kahlenberg says. “They want conditions where they can focus on teaching and not discipline, where parents are involved in their children’s academic success, and where students strive for excellence.”

He is quick to add that low-income parents are equally concerned about their children’s education, but frequently less able to participate as fully as they would like. Impediments include having more than one job, little flexibility at work, and needing to take

fully prepare them for the rigors of B-CC. It also funds Time for Academic Progress, or “TAP,” an after-school tutoring program for English, math, and science. This way, extra support isn’t the sole province of wealthy kids whose parents can pay for private tutors.

Founded by three B-CC parents, the Foundation’s newest program, College Tracks, works with low- and moderate-income students who can succeed in college, but might not get there because they’re unfamiliar with the application process and with finding financial aid and scholarships.

### AT A GLANCE

**Montgomery County Schools**  
Spending per pupil: **\$15,421**  
Graduation rate: **90%**  
Enrollment: **148,779**

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School has all the state-of-the-art advantages of an affluent neighborhood school, which helps students of all income levels succeed.



public transportation to school meetings and events, sometimes with small children in tow, because child care is unavailable or unaffordable.

“At mixed-income schools, there’s a better chance of having a core of actively engaged parents, and those mixed-income schools just work better,” Kahlenberg says.

The most visible core of engaged parents at B-CC is the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Educational Foundation (BCCEF), made up of parents, alumni, and community members. BCCEF’s mission is to identify needs at the school and raise the funds from current and former B-CC families, alumni, friends, towns, and local businesses to meet those needs.

“We don’t have enough lower-income students to qualify for much federal support, but we still have needs,” says BCCEF President Matthew Gandal, a B-CC parent.

The foundation funds a Summer Academy for at-risk eighth graders before they enter high school to



“The goal of the staff and volunteers is to get students to the finish line,” says Gandal. “And it’s paying off. Hundreds of students go through the program and we’ve had a 99 percent success rate.”

Programs like this help alleviate some of the discomfort less affluent parents feel when their children first enter B-CC.

B-CC Principal Karen Lockard recalls a mother whose gifted son had just come from a lower-income school in a poor neighborhood. She wanted to be sure he didn’t get lost.

“Don’t assume that just because my kid is black that he’s a thug,” the mother warned. “I want him in calculus, where he belongs.”

The educators at B-CC agreed. Their philosophy is that everyone should be in AP and honors classes by the time they’re juniors.

“It’s no longer just white, rich kids,” says Lockard.

Just as all-black and all-white schools were separate and unequal, “separate schools for rich and poor are never going to be equal,” says Kahlenberg. “Housing policies need to be changed to allow for more economic integration.”

The nation’s neighborhoods are becoming increasingly segregated by economic status. When a neighborhood determines the school, it can undercut the democratic promise. Kahlenberg says, “Any student, no matter what her parents’ income, should have equal access to a high-quality public education.”

—CINDY LONG

Learn how some districts are finding ways to create economic integration at [nea.org/zipcodes](http://nea.org/zipcodes).

## PAIN AND PROMISE

STOCKTON, CALIF.



**95206** The sign announcing the city’s population, above a tall bank of high grass along the road to the Stockton Airport, is battered and weather-beaten. In many ways, the condition of the sign reflects the condition of the southern part of the city, ZIP code 95206, a designation that marks one of the poorest neighborhoods in this city of nearly 300,000.

The sign also symbolizes the educators of this area of Stockton, beaten up by their conditions but still standing.

During the nation’s economic crisis, Stockton homeowners lost their properties in record numbers. Last year, the city made headlines by becoming the largest in the nation to declare bankruptcy.

Stockton Classroom Teachers Association president Ellen Olds remembers when the news hit. “I had calls from media in Japan and even Brazil,” she says. “But I made a point to tell reporters that for our members, there was much more.

“In addition to the city bankruptcy and foreclosure crisis affecting the community and our parents,” explains Olds, “our members had to cope with the roller coaster nature of staffing our schools due to layoffs around the state, and the lack of resources for our classrooms.”

The city benefitted from federal School Improvement Grants to shore up parent resources and community support. But the district has continued to struggle with fully staffing its schools and serving the needs of a struggling population.

What is it like to teach in Stockton? “Exhausting,” says Olds. “What our members have to endure is so tough and they’re tired.”

### ‘Difficult and Unsettling’

Brianna Clegg is a classic example of the shifting sands of job security in her district.

Now in her sixth year of teaching, she has been at three different schools, three different years. She has taught middle school, older elementary, and early grades. “I’ve been laid off, had the layoff rescinded, laid off again, hired, and let go, all in my first few years of teaching.”

In one instance, after being honored as an outstanding employee at the school awards dinner, Clegg returned home to find a layoff notice waiting for her. Today, she teaches kindergarten students at Taylor Leadership Academy—a position she loves. Her brightly colored classroom shows it, and it’s where she wants to stay.

“It’s so difficult and unsettling,” says Clegg, who grew up attending Stockton schools. “Once I was asked to step in after Halloween for a sixth-grade class. You can imagine how tough it would be to set up the class, lessons, and classroom structure and try to do this immediately. I couldn’t take that one.”

As if that weren’t enough, says Olds, the SCTA president, the lack of funding for staffing has prevented the district from using long-term substitutes for more than

20 days, because doing so would mean the district would have to cover benefits and more.

Students in this predominantly low-income area are deeply affected.

“I’ve been laid off, had the layoff rescinded, laid off again, hired, and let go, all in my first few years of teaching.”

—BRIANNA CLEGG,  
TAYLOR ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL

### AT A GLANCE

**Stockton, California**  
Spending Per Pupil: **\$9,421**  
Graduation Rate: **66%**  
Enrollment: **38,141**



Stockton Classroom Teachers Association President Ellen Olds (top) believes her city’s future depends on keeping members like kindergarten teacher Brianna Clegg (right) and high school teacher Ed Auerbach (below).



uphill battle he and his colleagues often face in the classroom—and in the public eye—but he doesn’t want to be anywhere else.

“We teach in spite of parents telling their children they need to leave school to work because they have to provide for their family,” says Auerbach. “We teach in spite of peers pressuring students not to engage in their studies.”

“I teach for students like Irene Hernandez-Martinez, Catheryn Zinski, and Molly Vang, students who keep working hard on their school work,” adds Auerbach. “And for a former student who wasn’t a good student at all until his senior year when a lesson on the stock market turned him on

to learning. Today, he’s in community college.”

And then there’s Elia Nuñez, one of nine children and the first in her family to go to college. Abandoned by her biological parents when she was two years old, Nuñez finished at the top of her class despite working 30 hours a week to help pay the rent and food for her sister and her aunt, who both have families.

Nuñez received a full scholarship to attend the University of Santa Clara this fall. “I’m going to study for a degree in public policy, so I can help a city start over,” says Nuñez.

Recession-weary leaders like Olds, point to members like Auerbach and Clegg plus a new generation of teachers and leaders. “I’ve had two Hmong former students and another Laotian student decide teaching was their way of helping their own community and its students,” says Olds. “Even my own children decided to become teachers though they know it’s not an easy job. I told them that it’s a tough life. They didn’t even hesitate. Today, they’re wonderful in the classroom.”

Olds says the public needs to look at what’s happening in cities like Stockton.

“I see Stockton as the epicenter of public education’s financial crisis and challenge,” says Olds. “If we don’t wake up as a country and see what needs to be done to help these educators do their jobs and give students their chance to succeed in a city like Stockton, then the rest of the nation should worry.”

—ANITA MERINA

### ‘I Can’t Abandon Them’

“These are children who have people who walk out of their lives all of the time, and here you are, giving them substitute teachers who can’t stay and asking them to open up and trust them,” says Clegg. “Students have looked at me as if to say, ‘OK, when are you going to leave?’ It’s simply not fair to them and I’m not surprised when they don’t engage. It makes my work harder but I have to hang in there.”

Clegg is now settled into her job and is cautiously hopeful about her prospects.

“I can’t abandon them, with society telling these kids they can’t succeed.”

Ed Auerbach a government and finance teacher at Thomas Edison High School in Stockton, agrees. After 13 years in the classroom, he is frustrated about the