



MAP ACADEMY

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[Episode 25: Imagining the Future of Map: Residential Programming](#)

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Nick: Welcome back to *Education Disruption*. After over a year of adapting their model to the current moment of the pandemic, Map Academy, teachers, staff and students are preparing for a reopening and while the focus of the school at the moment is making sure that they can reopen in a safe way, we recently had a conversation with founders, Josh and Rachel about some of their long term goals and aspirations. One of the major ones being housing, and how providing a residential program could potentially be a **[00:00:30]** game-changer for a school-like Map.

Rachel: When we wrote the charter, we wrote in that our long term goal was to have a residential component to Map Academy for students who are homeless or housing insecure because we've known from the very beginning that there are really substantial issues with stable housing in this region.**[00:01:00]** That's true everywhere. It's a problem every place but it's a particularly acute issue where map Academy is located because we're not —

While many of the issues that our students and families face are urban ones, we're not in an urban area. There's parts of our region that are urban, but there's also suburban and even rural factors that come into play and there are not robust systems of housing support in our region. We **[00:01:30]** knew we couldn't really serve fully if we didn't have a place for them to live.

Then I think once we were open, the acute need has just gotten more and more and more clear, as we have been doing this for longer and I would say that that goal of providing a residential option has gone from a long-term goal like someday wouldn't it be great to have to as close to immediate need as we can possibly make it be.

Josh: The effect of housing insecurity **[00:02:00]** on students is tremendous and it goes away beyond academics. If we have a housing insecure student, it's how do we get the student to school. If the student is housing insecure, they're more than likely food insecure. If they're food insecure, they're more than likely clothing insecure, and hygiene insecure. It's the types of support that we need to provide for a housing insecure student is **[00:02:30]** basically everything from the basics necessity of where the student is going to live, to how they're going to get to school to access to laundry to access to a shower to access to food. That's just the quick ones that we rattle off mean to get to us to a point where a student who is truly housing insecure to focus on academics.

If you don't know where you're going to sleep at night, it's a fairly large task to start thinking about what you're going to do a math class. [00:03:00] It's a process to work with a student who is housing and secure and really, in this area, particularly of Massachusetts. The sad reality is, they're going to be housing insecure for a while because there is nothing that they can do.

They can be put on this Section 8 list, which I think the last time we looked into the Section 8 list, the wait was years. We work with community agencies to try to get them into temporary shelters or anywhere that they can live but the options are bleak.

Rachel: The near shelters are there's no local shelters [00:03:30] for adolescents. the local shelters are then intersect with the lack of transportation options. Where there could be shelter, there isn't necessarily transportation and the reality of connecting the dots, it really becomes sort of like a shifting sand. A lot of times when students lose permanent housing, they are...

The term is the colloquialism and sort of couch surfing but the reality [00:04:00] of sharing or being doubled up and having a place to stay, but I can only stay for a week or I can only stay for a couple of weeks, or I can stay there tonight, but not tomorrow. It's constantly shifting. We could find a transportation option that might work to an address that a student is at and then a weekend passes and by Monday, they're somewhere else and we have to start the process again of finding transportation to a different address.

While there are laws that protect students who are homeless and housing insecure, the laws [00:04:30] aren't magic wands. They can stay enrolled here, no matter where they land and there's rights that they have to access to their educational records, and they don't have to provide proof of residency. I mean, there's lots of things that the system does do to try to make it easier but the fundamental bottom line is if you don't have a stable place to live, it's really hard to focus on your high school education.

Josh: Our long-term [00:05:00] goal is to have a residential component connected to Map Academy and what that looks like we're still trying to work out the details of but we know that we need to provide some type of residential component.

Rachel: Yes, and it varies, I think that we could probably fill several different types of programs here and I think one of our as we look at our needs and our students' needs, we are chartered to serve students up through age 24 and some of our older students who are over [00:05:30] age 18, and thereby able to make their own legal decisions, those students do qualify for adult shelter but because it isn't local, it's not ideal to begin with and then it's also not local.

For those students, it might look more like an option that they pay into a sort of like a group home type concept, where they're young adults. They're maintaining employment, an organization charges them [00:06:00] some kind of like a nominal rent that then gets held and then give the students their own money back for a security deposit and for some last month's rent on a place of their own when they graduate.

There's also an issue that we have with students who are not 18, who are perhaps in the custody of the Department of Children and Families. Or they don't have stable adult relationships and sometimes with those students who are minors, still, the [00:06:30] placement options are few and far between if their housing has to change. They have to change schools, and they don't want to change schools or there isn't a school that's going to work for them where they were.

There's like layers, even within saying that we need housing for our students and I think ideally, we will have layers of approach because to provide housing for students who are 16 or 17 years old, would obviously require more supervision more of a dorm. [00:07:00] A monitored boarding school or like a public boarding option and there's schools out there that are doing that as young as Middle School.

We went to a school in DC that has a public boarding option for students in grades six through 12 and they board during the week, and then they go home, or they stay with family on weekends. I would love to see that too as an option that says that might not be the right thing for a 20-year-old who's working. [00:07:30] It might be the right thing for a 16-year-old who otherwise is going to get moved to a residential program in Western Mass and not be able to be a student here anymore.

Josh: The idea of Map Academy students being housing insecure or homeless is directly tied to our model of providing support to students to and through graduation. However, as I mentioned earlier, how the hell do you prepare a kid for life after high school when they don't [00:08:00] know where they're going to sleep at night?

Rachel: We can provide them with an Uber from the train station, which we do on a regular basis and we have laundry facilities that they can come in and do their laundry while they're here and we can send them with food and gift cards and we can try to coordinate shelter and we can talk to Department of Mental Health and do a DMH referral and try to get additional supports but because it's volatile, in much effort in those supports that Josh [00:08:30] is talking about needs to be put into things that change quickly.

If we had our own option, we wouldn't be miraculously removing all the barriers. We would at least be able to plus press pause on the constant shifting sands to say that for this time period we're going to create a stable housing option for this time period so that we can focus on academics. Get some consistent supports in place, and then [00:09:00] work on a longer-term plan.

It's shocking, really, and a lot of times the older students have been through the system at younger ages and they age out there. Part of it comes down to there not being a lot or any sometimes adequate foster parents situations. Where there's homes for students who are connected because if they're minors, they're not street homeless because they get taken into custody by the Department of Children and Families. [00:09:30]

If they're minors, they are housed. But that housing isn't necessarily productive and it can be incredibly traumatic for a student to have to constantly change placements and a lot of those group homes are really complex and not necessarily ideal situations either. If we could have options of our own, I would love to have Map Academy have a dorm that has a free [00:10:00] public boarding option [unintelligible 00:10:02] wealthy schools all over the place that have boarding options. I would like to have Map Academy would be one of the schools that invest that degree of creating a culture and invest in students at the margin.

Josh: If you're a housing insecure, a homeless youth, people who don't work with the student population that we work with, the students in the margins, the students who have dropped out of [00:10:30] high school, the students who don't have the supports at home that other students have. The quick answer or the first initial thought everybody thinks is, well, why don't they just get a job and why don't they just get a place to live?

Just says it's extremely hard to show up to school when you're homeless and focus on academics, it's even more challenging for homeless youth to find and get a job. Because the first thing they ask on an application is address that they feel shamed they don't know [00:11:00] what to put down for an address. The address isn't going to match what their ID says if they happen to have an ID. It's just barrier after barrier after barrier.

There is literally no end in sight for a homeless youth in this general area and the pandemic has only made that worse. As we said, in 2017, it's even more pressing that we make this residential component a reality because there needs to be a more immediate fix to [00:11:30] a student who is homeless and comes to an Map Academy. Realistically, when you really sit down and think about it, in the year 2021 in the United States of America, why do we have kids who are homeless going to school?

We have enough resources that we could provide homes for kids. We would have to figure out the details of it, but the money is there that I don't believe that the money is the issue. [00:12:00] What is the logistics of it? What is the operations of it? How do we get to that point?

Rachel: Yes, because the money I think is connected to the public school. It's all siloed. There's programs out there that have money for housing, and then there's schools that have money for schooling and then there's transportation. The silos of the services because housing affects all of those silos. Usually all schools do for a homeless student is they're obligated to provide transportation. They call the bus company and the bus company [00:12:30] sends a van to go pick up the kid, or they send a cat taxi to come pick up the kid.

The kid can't be excluded from school, but the school shops there. The schools' systems don't usually say, okay, but what about if we actually also took over the housing itself? Like everything else with Map Academy, I feel like the answer to this housing thing is to break down the silos and create a web instead that says that these systems that are out there [00:13:00] trying to support youth are working in collaboration instead of in isolation.

Josh: We wanted to know what additional benefits housing will provide students.

Rachel: The problem that happens when students don't have stable housing is they can't get here regularly and thereby they lose the access. They don't get consistent access to the services that we're able to provide. The housing would allow students to access that more routinely. Instead of seeing [00:13:30] a student they make their way in from the shelter that they're staying at in Boston.

We aim for once a week seeing them in person and they do check-ins with the social work pretty much every day, but they're only here once a week. We could have them here four times a week and thereby increasing their academic progress, creating consistency and having them engage with the supports. Then we would still need to do referrals. I think having housing in and of itself wouldn't be magic because [00:14:00] a lot of the work that has to be done.

The trauma counseling, the future planning, all of that stuff is still monumental, but at least we would have the stability of having access to the students, having access on a more regular basis.

Josh: I think it's really important to make clear that we're not saying we can do a better than any other organization is doing. We're not saying that we could provide a better residential program than [00:14:30] what other residential programs offer, but our vision and our long-term goal is to create it in house because it needs to be faster. The need is immediate. The need is now, well, the

need isn't years from now when a kid's name finally pops up on a Section 8 list and they get a place to live.

The need is like tomorrow that we need to have the ability to confidently say, we have a place that you can say if you're homeless so that we can turn the corner for that student. Because years from now, it might be too late, [00:15:00] but I've seen it as it is too late. It's really important to know when not saying we can do it better than anybody else is doing it, but we could do it a lot faster if we had it in house.

Rachel: Well, and then there's the foster care students and students with open cases with the department of children and families. That is like another layer of different types of support. If we had a placement and we worked with DCF, those open cases of DCF are places where there's things in the home that are causing significant conflict [00:15:30] in trauma and uncertainty. To be able to have a place, and those things happen so quickly, like all of it can happen. All of it changes so fast.

The kid can have a place to be doubled up and then all of a sudden they don't anymore. They break up with the girl that they've been staying with, or the grandmother comes home and kicks them out or somebody gets arrested at that address and their police are watching now and they can't stay there anymore. It's the same thing with the DCF cases like something happens, someone files a report [00:16:00] of neglect or abuse, and all of a sudden what seemed stable is completely not stable.

A housing option that allowed us to be nimble and responsive, even if it was on a short-term basis would be a tremendous benefit.

Josh: I don't think it's out of reach, but I think now that we're an operating school, we're in year three, the need is there. We have the students, we could fill the house tomorrow, [00:16:30] but the societal impact on it, particularly for the students that would have a shot to live in this house would be huge. It would transform their lives. In a dorm

Raxhel: In a dorm, both. I know there's layers.

Nick: To support Map Academy, visit themapacademy.org. Map Academy is a free public alternative high school in Plymouth, Massachusetts, that reconnect students to opportunity and learning. Thank you for listening to the final episode of season three of *Education Disruption* [00:17:00]. We'll be back soon with season four. Until then, please subscribe and give us a rating. My name's Nick Tetrault, our executive producer is Kristen Hughes, and this is a Hairpin production.

[00:17:19] [END OF AUDIO]