

Tabernacle Presbyterian Church

2024 Mission Study Report

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Tabernacle Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana! We are a member of the Whitewater Valley Presbytery, PC(USA), and on behalf of our leadership, staff, and congregation, we are delighted to introduce you to our community. This document serves as an insightful view into our church history, current activities, and excitement about our worship of God and service to His people. We are a unique church, and have detailed in this report critical factors for a senior pastor that prioritize our desire for Biblical preaching, pastoral care, strategic leadership, and respect for Presbyterian traditions. This study incorporates historical data from our church’s archives, along with an extensive congregational survey and in-depth, facilitated listening sessions conducted in 2024.

As we embark on our search for a new senior pastor, we are praying for pastoral leadership that shares our joy of exploring Biblical truths, ministering to our community, and shining the light of God’s truth to a troubled world looking for a Savior.

HISTORY, MISSION, VISION

Beginnings

Tabernacle Presbyterian Church (Tab) was founded on September 23, 1851 as “Third” Presbyterian Church for the “advancement of Christianity.” We began with 22 charter members, two of whom later became mayors of Indianapolis. Third Pres was located on the corner of Ohio and Illinois in downtown Indianapolis, the city had been founded just 30 years earlier in 1820. By 1920 there were 16 Presbyterian Churches and 3 United Presbyterian Churches in the city.

In July of 1883 Third Presbyterian Church was reorganized and renamed Tabernacle Presbyterian Church. The tabernacle movement was a strategy to reach and welcome unchurched people in

urban areas through a less formal approach to worship as a means to make church more appealing and by eliminating the pew rental system. This was an international movement led by Charles Spurgeon at Metropolitan Tabernacle in London and Charles Finney at Broadway Tabernacle in NYC. The catalyst for the renaming of Third Church was the calling of a new pastor who insisted that the name be changed or he wouldn't accept the call. The name was changed from Third to Tabernacle. The pastor declined the call, but the name stuck.

The Call to 34th and Central

In 1886 Tabernacle Presbyterian Church moved to the corner of 11th and Meridian. Then, sensing that there were too many churches in that small section of the city, we moved again to our third and current site at the corner of 34th and Central in 1921. The impetus for the move was to address the need for Christian education programs for the children in the Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood. In 1919 there 100 children enrolled in our Christian education program, by 1921 there were 1000 children enrolled.

In 1924 the Tab Recreation program was established with a gift of \$50 to help meet the recreational and athletic needs of the children in our church and community. We were one of the first churches in the country to establish a recreation program as part of our outreach and ministry. In 1961 we integrated the program in the midst of racial division, well prior to civil rights legislation. To date there are over 100,000 alumni of Tab Rec and this program is still well recognized throughout the city.

The Decision to Stay and Serve the Community

In 1965 a decision was made which cast the focus and future of Tab. A twelve-member Metropolitan Community Program Committee made the recommendation that Tab remain at our current location. With full recognition of the changes in the neighborhood, increasing racial tension and violence, the migration of our members as well as many other churches and businesses to the suburbs, the increase in the average age of our members and the decline in the levels of participation, we made the counter-cultural, counter-intuitive decision to stay in order to be "a force for Christ in the heart of the city."

Some very significant ministries were birthed including the establishment of the Raphael Health Center (1996), the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic (1994), the Unleavened Bread Café (1997), the Open Door Ministry (2000), and the Oaks Academy (1998).

Mission Statement

In 2009 our session recommitted itself to continued ministry in this place by adopting a new mission statement: Tabernacle Presbyterian Church is called by God, led by faith in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the Kingdom of God through worship, discipleship and outreach. Honoring our heritage at 34th and Central, we will faithfully serve our community, city and world in the present and prepare expectantly for the future.

Vision Renewal of 2016

In 2016, recognizing the 50th anniversary of the Metropolitan Community Program report and our commitment to stay in the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood, the Session commissioned a committee to "revisit Tab's vision, core values, mission and purpose with a dual objective: to

assess our alignment with the Great Commandment (love God and love neighbor) and to discern the priorities that will guide future decisions about the allocation of our energies, abilities, time and financial resources.” The committee spent a year in study, prayer and conversation about Tab’s vision for the future. At the end of the study process the Session adopted the committee’s report which emphasizes the importance of reconciliation, with God and with others, and laid out three key visions to guide our ministry and mission: Greater Faith, Deeper Relationships and a Stronger Community.

Tabernacle Presbyterian Church has always been committed to a “two- legged Gospel” a balance of evangelical witness from the pulpit and social involvement in the community. Either one without other is insufficient in living out whole Gospel. This was modeled in Jesus’ ministry, in His preaching/teaching, as well as His healing/feeding, His care for the body as well as the soul. The word “tabernacle” means “the dwelling place of God among His people.” It is our prayer that this is what we are in the present and will continue to be in the future, even as we have been in the past.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Tab is a church committed to biblical principles and the Lordship of Jesus Christ, rooted in the inerrancy of Scripture as a foundation for preaching, teaching, programming, outreach, stewardship, and congregational life activities. We are anchored in the essentials of our faith, and able to weather the changing cultural tides while maintaining our witness of the Gospel to a lost world looking for a Savior. The Apostles’ Creed is often recited in our worship services, and summarizes essential tenets of our faith:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Tab encourages members to ask challenging questions of Scripture, digging into the Bible’s depth and breadth. We journey together in our search to understand God’s Word, and hold the tension of different approaches to understanding Scripture. Our 2024 congregational survey benchmarked Tab as being in the 90th percentile of theological diversity as compared to other congregations. Tab attracts a diverse membership, some of whom are lifelong Presbyterians, some who are new to the Christian faith, and others who were raised in a different Christian tradition. Tab explores the Bible, engaging even in challenging passages to help build our faith. We maintain our essential beliefs while valuing theological diversity as an important part of our spiritual growth.

As Tab engages in a search for a new senior pastor, we look forward with prayerful expectation that God will provide a leader who shares our deeply-held, essential beliefs, challenges us to learn

and grow, and respects our desire to embrace others in our congregation whose beliefs vary from ours.

The Bible provides many examples of God's people living in different cultures and times while also living out biblical principles and ministering to a lost world. Throughout human history and in the present, God's Word has remained unchanging in different cultures and times. During Tab's existence, we have prioritized our commitment to serving with humility and integrity, reaching local and international communities that represent diverse cultures and groups. We are moved with compassion by the suffering in society, while remaining committed to our core biblical beliefs and choosing not to be swayed by the changing social or political tides.

As such, the Session approved statements about biblical standards for all church leaders (2012) and how Tab views the institution of marriage (2014). The 2012 statement describes what we confess to believe, the privilege of serving in church leadership, and qualities for conduct based on 1 Tim. 3:1-12 and Titus 1:5-9. The 2014 statement affirms that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, and that marriage ceremonies and worship services recognizing a civil marriage, other than between a man and a woman, will not be performed at Tab.

The 2024 congregational survey asked the congregation to agree or disagree with the 2014 statement on marriage. Of the respondents, 69% affirmed their support, 26% disagreed with the statement, and 5% were unsure.

CRITICAL FACTORS FOR A FUTURE SENIOR PASTOR

In the results of the 2024 congregational survey, we learned that Tab is a clergy-focused church, with great respect for pastoral leadership, and expectations that the senior pastor has experience in providing continuity while exploring different approaches to leading the congregation and problem solving. Tab also expects the senior pastor will seek and listen to the voice of the congregation and lay leaders on matters of consequence.

As a clergy-focused church, Tab is looking for a senior pastor who can articulate a vision that honors the mission of Tab and sets a clear plan for growth to engage members in the work of the church. Members expect preaching and Christian education to provide consistent scriptural teaching, explaining the timeless truths of Scripture in ways that are relevant to our contemporary lives. Tab is eager to learn from a senior pastor who inspires the congregation by connecting them to eternal biblical truths. Members want to grow and nurture their faith through studying the Bible privately and with others. We expect the pastor to engage in individual study, participate in Tab Christian education opportunities, and seek community from pastoral peer groups to grow in the knowledge of God.

Tab has identified critical success factors for a senior pastor:

- Preach with scriptural and personal integrity, respecting the entirety and inerrancy of the Bible, inspiring members to grow in their own faith and knowledge of God.
- Build on the Presbyterian Church traditions in worship services, while bringing new, innovative ideas to energize the services and improve the worship experience with involvement of lay leaders.

- Lead with a clear, strategic vision that engages God's people in practical and meaningful ways to reach our local and international communities, especially during times of change.
- Motivate the congregation to grow the church by bringing those in the community who are unchurched into a relationship with Christ.
- Provide pastoral care to members by participating in church activities outside of worship services, celebrating life milestones, and demonstrating empathy to members in times of need and loss.

CONGREGATIONAL VOICE

In preparation for the senior pastor search, Tab contracted a consultant to administer an in-depth congregational survey. The purpose was to give voice to the congregation, and reflect their joys, concerns, and passions for Tab's past and its future. It also provides insights into Tab's uniqueness as compared to other churches.

The survey revealed a passion for worship services that are vibrant, meaningful, and disciplined in structure. Members want opportunities to plan and participate in worship services with the pastor and lay leadership. We also want the direction of the church to include thoughtful conversations with member engagement as part of the decision-making process for important matters. For Tab congregants, faith is central to our lives rather than peripheral or episodic. Tab ranks in the 89th percentile compared with other churches in spiritual vitality.

Hearth & Home Culture

Tab has nurtured a "Hearth & Home" culture, where individuals and families prioritize connection and community. We are identified by our emphasis on hospitality, forgiveness and caring, with a great desire to welcome new members and embrace those returning to the community after an extended absence. To lead effectively, our future senior pastor will honor our established values and cultivate our spiritual vitality through relationship development, conflict management, and diverse Christian education opportunities. Tab's desire for hospitality and relationship building requires careful nurturing from our senior pastor to assist us with retaining missional focus while casting a clear vision for the future.

Tab looks expectantly to the future and wants respect shown to our past, to honor those who stepped out in faith and sacrificed to build our congregation. Our congregation has partnered with local and international organizations to help our neighbors, even launching new ministries that now operate independently. Tab is perceived by its members and the community as a mature church with deep roots in Scripture and in our community.

We now look forward to recruiting a pastor that honors that legacy while balancing needs for growth. Members want to balance a respect for tradition with a vibrant and energetic approach to embracing new opportunities. We embrace growth and change, and we are seeking a pastor who is passionate about our mission and devoted to care of our members.

Building Trust

According to the congregational survey, Tab's perception of its ability to appropriately manage and resolve conflict is low relative to other churches (22nd percentile). However, when we met in

person for the listening sessions, Tab members indicated a strong belief that problems are resolved through healthy discussion, and acceptance of differing opinions and beliefs. Areas for Tab's development include enhancing communication and improving transparency to build trust in the church. There is room for improvement, and the next pastor can help us to grow corporately in this area.

Hospitality & Vitality

The survey measured Tab's perception of its capacity for hospitality, defined as the ability to offer themselves and their resources to people who are new, different, or in need. Respondents rated Tab high in hospitality. Tab's vitality includes excitement with church activities regarding the positive, passionate, and persuasive engagement of members in the mission of the church.

Worship Services

Traditional and Contemporary Worship Services

Prior to Covid19 and quarantine, Tab held three services. The 8 am was an intimate, traditional service held in the chapel where communion is served each week. The 9 am was a contemporary service with praise and worship held in the sanctuary, and the 11 am was a traditional service with full choirs, handbells, and occasionally an orchestra. During quarantine, we held one service and returned to two services following the end of the pandemic. While the 8 am service remains the same, the 9 am and 11 am were combined into one service held at 10 am.

The combined 10 am service switches between a traditional service with hymns and a more contemporary service without hymns every other Sunday. Communion is served once a month. Overwhelmingly, Tab members find the 10 am combined service to be inadequate. There is respect for diversity of worship styles, and a belief that we can better retain unity by providing members with service options that match individual needs for the management of personal and work obligations, worshipping God in person, and connecting with other members.

Tab members believe we can still be one church, even if we are worshipping in multiple services. Expanding and refining opportunities to worship, while retaining congregational unity, represents an area where a new senior pastor's clear vision and strategic leadership are needed to meet the diverse worship needs.

Order of Service & Composition

Tab members expect the service to celebrate the Presbyterian tradition by honoring Scripture, liturgy, prayer, and preaching in a disciplined format. This format should invite congregants to participate in reading, singing, and listening to the pastors and lay leaders speak from the pulpit. There is also an expectation that services should be disciplined and timely, concluding with a maximum of a one-hour service. All activities in worship should provide congregants with meaningful ways to worship, exploring themes from traditional texts and Scripture.

Survey respondents expressed a desire for a greater sense of community as part of the worship experience. Worshippers value corporate prayer in the service, expecting it will be conducted in meaningful ways within a disciplined service. Members value corporate prayer that is reflective and participatory, and includes time for prayer requests that reflect congregation needs and concerns.

Liturgy

There is a strong desire to affirm our faith as a congregation through reciting liturgy. Members want to recite ancient and original texts that connect us to the many saints who have gone before us. The expectation is that our liturgy be based on Scripture without using contemporary language and references that are unclear as to their scriptural authenticity. Members also desire to return to the practice of having lay people read traditional liturgy. Survey respondents rank traditional liturgy as an important part of their faith and treasure its recitation during congregational worship.

Scripture, Sermons, & Spiritual Nourishment

The 2024 congregational survey resoundingly expressed members' desire for biblical teaching, and for Tab not to conform to social trends that require us to change our theology. Members do not want to bow to the world's view of social and political agendas that conflict with biblical teaching.

Congregants have a clear desire to grow in their biblical understanding and expect scriptural references to be present in sermons emphasizing expository preaching to explain God's Word "verse by verse". Specifically, congregants do not want political and social commentary from the pulpit. It is seen as a distraction that divides the congregation by exalting the expression of personal agendas over biblical teaching. Survey respondents want to connect to God's Word as the authority, rather than the speaker's personal interpretation. The scriptural teaching should focus on the richness and depth of God's Word.

Members listed a variety of means by which they receive spiritual nurturing, including Bible studies, education programs, prayer, the centering quality of the building itself, and sermons. Others reported that the relationships and connection fostered during corporate prayer, the caring nature of the congregation, small groups, and serving the community together nurtured them. Tab also desires engagement of the children and youth in a multigenerational church that values its young people.

Pastoral Care

Tab has a strong desire for pastoral care that displays genuine joy in serving the congregation, taking time to get to know members, and spending time with members at Tab events and meetings. Beyond the worship service, members experience life milestones and desire a senior pastor who will celebrate and mourn with them. In our world of virtual meetings and digital technology, members prioritize in-person interactions with other members and their pastor. The accessibility and visibility of our senior pastor is a priority, with an energetic approach to developing intentional connections with members and their families.

Members reported a desire to have a formalized lay program to work alongside the pastors to meet the wide range of congregant needs. There were frequently voiced desires to ensure visits were being made in homes, hospitals, and other community-based settings. Because most member homes and neighborhoods aren't proximate to the church location, the geographic diversity of Tab members is a significant challenge to delivering comprehensive, consistent, and accessible pastoral care. In addition, 24% of the respondents live alone, representing an

additional consideration for a future senior pastor in designing pastoral care outreach that considers the needs of this group.

Tab expects pastoral leadership to demonstrate integrity, transparency, and compassion in interactions with staff, lay leadership, members, ministry partners, and the Indianapolis community. A new pastor must encourage unity, not division. As we journey together through tumultuous times in our country, community, and the world at large, we want Tab to be a beacon of light where we can respectfully disagree and remain in community with each other.

CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The administrative duties of the senior pastor include serving as head of staff, moderator of session and congregational meetings, and leadership over all programming. The senior pastor facilitates the work between session committees and staff in the shared administration of Tab assets, programming, and budget.

Head of Staff

The church enjoys high levels of commitment to its mission among its employees. Many of the staff have a tenure of over a decade, and some have served Tab for multiple decades. This deep bench of talent is excited to welcome a new head of staff who honors Tab's traditions while leading staff through change management, succession planning, and adoption of new, innovative methods and programming. Tab employees expect the senior pastor to engage in active listening, ensure civil discourse when balancing different points of view, and manage conflict resolution effectively.

2025 Leadership & Staff List*

Interim Senior Pastor	Assoc. Pastor/Missions Director
Children's Ministry Director	Community Ministry Coordinator
Contemporary Worship Leader	Custodians (3)
Director of Finance	Director of Communications
Director of Music Ministries	Director of Youth Ministry
Facilities Manager	Front Office/Congregational Care
Kitchen Assistant	Recreation Director
Recreation Assistant/Chaplain	Recreation Assistant

*Includes full and part-time positions

Property & Buildings

Tab's property includes the church building, a modified, fifteenth-century, French Gothic-style church erected in 1921 and completed in 1929. Characterized by the pointed arch motif, hammer beam trusses, carved woodwork, stained glass windows and verticality, it stands as one of the finest examples of this style architecture in America. The exterior of the building is of Indiana limestone and encloses over 53,000 square feet of floor space. Tab's physical footprint includes a high school regulation-size football/soccer turf field with spectator stands to hold 250 people. In addition, Tab maintains the grounds of an adjacent park that hosts free, outdoor concerts (TabJams) and contains a children's playground; both are accessible at no charge to our neighbors.

Members are energized by opportunities to serve, and as a future senior pastor considers growth in our programs, it's important to understand that location and lifestyles are often a barrier for member engagement. When programs are held during regular business hours, it can be challenging for those who work to participate in person, and traveling to the church building may not be feasible during the regular work week for some individuals. There is a need for thoughtful consideration and congregational input regarding when and where programming occurs to meet the complicated and diverse needs of this multigenerational church.

Tab's devotion to serving God is a strong identity that is well known in the surrounding community and beyond. We believe that God called our church to 34th and Central and He still has a mission for us here and around the globe. By being faithful to this call we show our love for Christ, in keeping with Matthew 25:40, as inscribed on our communion table, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me." There are numerous hands-on opportunities to demonstrate God's love through service. Tab has five Ministries, nine Ministry Partners and nine Global Mission Partners.

The Tab Ministries are led by Tab staff and volunteers:

- Open Door: Serves a hot lunch three days a week, and creates a sense of community.
- Tab Community Care: Team members meet with neighbors and provide utility assistance, resource referral, and compassion.
- Tab Tutoring: Offers after-school tutoring in a faith-based environment.
- Fresh Stop: A fresh produce co-op providing seasonal items with a sliding scale fee.
- Mozel Sanders: Tab provides kitchen support for this annual Thanksgiving Meal across Indianapolis.

Tab's Indianapolis Ministry Partners include:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| ○ Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic | Legal Services |
| ○ Mapleton-Fall Creek Development Corporation | Housing |
| ○ Indy Grace Place | Housing & Re-entry Services |
| ○ The Oaks Academy | Education |
| ○ Raphael Health Center | Healthcare |
| ○ Circles Indy | Reducing Poverty |
| ○ Mid-North Food Pantry | Food Insecurity |
| ○ Freewheelin' Community Bikes | Transportation & Community |
| ○ Horizons at St. Richard's Episcopal School | Education |

Tab's Global Missions Partners serve in the following countries:

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|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| ○ Beyond | Thailand |
| ○ Navigators | Mongolia |
| ○ World Gospel Missions | Philadelphia |
| ○ Christian Union Sports Club | Colombia |
| ○ Missio-Link | Romania |
| ○ Mana Deschisa | Romania |
| ○ Justice Venture International | Global, primarily Asia |
| ○ Umoja Partnership | Kenya |
| ○ Neighborhood Ministries | Phoenix, Arizona |

The mission of Tab Recreation (“Tab Rec”) is to demonstrate the Kingdom of God through recreation outreach. It has thrived for 100 years, at 34th and Central. Its strong, positive reputation among families around the city is longstanding and brings hundreds of youth and adults to our fields and gym to play sports, learn sportsmanship, and honor God. Tab Rec serves more than 1000 youth annually and has more than 100,000 alumni. When someone comes to Tab for the first time, they are struck by the lighted ball field that is used year-round through organized activities and pick-up games by our neighbors. There is a recreation director and supporting staff and volunteers, and financial support through the Endowment Fund and church budget.

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

At Tab, we view our diversity not as a problem to be solved, but as our unique asset. We want to worship and serve with people who are different than us in belief, demographics, and more. Tab is located in the Mapleton-Fall Creek Northside Neighborhood of Indianapolis, considered the central north part of the city. Mapleton-Fall Creek is bounded by 38th street, Fall Creek Parkway and Meridian Street. Mapleton-Fall Creek is a widely diverse area today with significant poverty, and federally funded housing, alongside multimillion-dollar homes undergoing gentrification. Indianapolis is the 16th largest U.S. city by population.

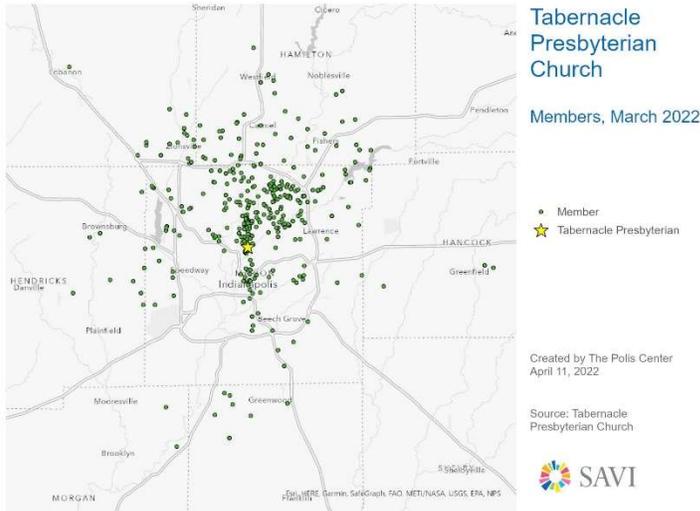
Indianapolis Demographics (US Census of Indianapolis, 2023)

Population	879,293	
Persons under 5 years	7.0%	
Persons under 18 years	24.5%	
Persons 65 years and over	12.8%	
Female persons	51.4%	
White	55.7%	
Black or African American	28.8%	
Asian	4.2%	
Hispanic or Latino	10.9%	
Education		
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2018-2022		87.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2018-2022		33.4%
Health		
With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2018-2022		10.4%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years		10.7%
Employment, Income, & Poverty		
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2018-2022		24.0 mi
Median household income (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022		\$59,110
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022		\$34,592
Persons in poverty	15.9%	

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Indianapolis city \(balance\), Indiana](#)

Tab Member Demographics

Indianapolis is surrounded by large suburban communities such as Carmel, Fishers, Zionsville, Greenfield and others. Tab members come from all parts of these suburbs as well as the city boundaries. (See Polis Study Chart, below). Few Tab attendees live within one mile of the church (4%); 14% live more than 15 miles from the church and 60% live 5-15 miles away. 85% percent of survey respondents have earned a college degree or higher.



The 2023 Church Statistical Report provides the following membership information. Total active members- 618; Average weekly attendance-345

Age of Active Members (Youth not considered active members)	Gender Distribution	Racial ethnicity	Youth in Congregation
18-25: 15	Women: 355	Asian Pacific: 6	Age 4 and under: 50
26-40: 107	Men: 263	Black: 24	Elementary K-5 th : 65
41-55: 96	Non-Binary: 0	Middle Eastern: 0	Middle School 6 th -8 th : 19
56-70: 207		Hispanic: 3	High School: 36
Over 70: 193		White: 577	
		Multiracial: 8	
TOTAL 618	TOTAL 618	TOTAL 618	TOTAL 170

Resources for further information: Tabpres.org