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Johnson, Adriane

Adriane Johnson

Hope Harrod

Damien Johnson

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Adriane Johnson
Interviewers: Hope Herrod, Damien Johnson
July 15th, 2013
St. Helena, SC

HH: So we're here at St. Helena Island Elementary School and my name is Hope Herrod. It is July 15th and I'm sitting here with Mrs. Adriane Johnson, and she is the administrator here at the school.

AJ: Hi, I'm Adriane Johnson. I'm the tap master teacher instructional coach at St. Helena Elementary School and I have been working at the school for about nine years now.

HH: So thank you for talking to us. Just to begin, if you could tell us a little about yourself and sort of your own roots, and how you came to live if you're from here, or if you're a Kumbaya. Just give us a little information about you.

AJ: Yeah, I'm a Kumbaya but I've been coming here for 25 years now. Started coming when I was dating my then fiancé Vin Johnson III and have been a resident here for almost 18 years. I've lived on St. Helena Island. I grew up in Orangeburg, South Carolina, which is about mid-stage, in a large family, very large family, five sisters and three brothers and education was really paramount to us. We did not have a lot, but you know the old saying, we always had food, we were always clean, we were always neat and education was our job. That is what we were supposed to be doing, so very early in life it was instilled in me the value of a good education. And that's really I think what drew me to education initially because when I went to college I wanted to be a psychologist. I knew I wanted to work with children, thought I wanted to be a clinical psychologist but it was just too sterile for me. I wanted a more authentic experience, an interaction with children, so I started substituting after I graduated from college and the bug bit me. I've been hooked ever since and so that is how I ended up here on St. Helena Island Elementary School.

HH: And so when did you start here?

AJ: Working here? I started here in 2005.

HH: And so can you tell us a little about this school? And talk a little bit about, you know, the character of this school and how it may be a little bit different from other experiences.

AJ: This school is very different. First of all, when you walk through the door, it feels like home, it feels like a family. The community, the school is very family oriented. I've worked at other public schools with similar demographics but there's something unique about St. Helena Elementary School. I've worked in the private sector. I've worked in the pre-school. There's no place like St. Helena and I think it's the function of the community itself just being an extension of families. We're all related in some kind of way or other. There really are no in-laws and for the first time, when I came down here everyone... it's like there's this ownership, we all own each other, so it was the first time I heard cousin Hope and cousin this, and uncle this. I mean it was like, "so how is that your cousin"?

“Well you know that’s, that’s Johnny’s boy, his grandmother”, and may not necessarily be able to tell you exactly what the connection is but everybody owns everybody else here, so that is what you’ll feel when you walk into St. Helena Elementary School. You’ll feel love. You’ll feel like family. People just embrace each other. Teachers embrace students. We embrace each other as a faculty. Our engagements are a little bit different. There’s always food, so we like to sit down break bread together. So, that is what is really unique about this community and this school.

HH: And you talked about the fact that everybody owns each other, do you think that that has something to do with the sort of historical heritage of this area? Do you think that it has to do with the roots here being in Gullah?

AJ: I absolutely do. I do.

HH: So, I’m curious, since you are a Kumbaya, when did you first start to really open your eyes to the idea of what Gullah is and when did you first hear those words, or experience that culture?

AJ: The first time I came here, when I ventured out and started to talk to older people, I knew right away that this was a different place because I really didn't understand what the older people were saying. And so, my fiancé, my husband had to tell me what they were talking about, so I was like, “Wow”, this is really something different. And then, right away, even before we were married, I was cousin Adriane, so it was like, “oh”, I’m cousin Adriane. So very early on, I knew that there was something unique about this community. The way that church service was conducted, it was just, it was different, it was like stepping back in time a little bit. So right away, I knew this was a different place and I felt welcome from the very first time I came here.

HH: Do the kids bring any of that? Can you see them bringing- how do you see that?

AJ: They do. They may not necessarily know how they're interconnected or related, but they do. That’s my cousin. That’s my this. That’s my that. He knows my grandmother. This one goes to my church. We do this together. We do that together. So, the kids have a much stronger, I think, interaction and connection outside of school than students typically do, because they do live in family complexes, and because the island is so rural in nature. We speak about the plantations or the communities, and so I can say, “Where are you from”? “Orange grove”. “Okay, I know all the kids that go to that church”. So, they go to church together. They’re on the praise dance team together, they’re on the choir together. They go to PALS together, you know, the summer recreational programs, so they are very connected both inside and outside of school, which I think is kind of atypical when you go just a few miles down the road from where we are.

HH: Does this culture present any interesting challenges for this school, with respect to the curriculum, or with respect to students coming impaired with language issues?

AJ: There are. Some of our students do come with language deficits. I think the nature of interaction now, in general, is different from what was, even when I was a young person.

There is or there can be kind of a resistance to outsiders or outside influences, so we have to be cautious about how we present things to families, so that it's not intimidating, so that we're not looking down on anybody. So, we want to be very respectful of the culture, very respectful of the dialect, very respectful of the relationship and that kind of homeliness about things. So, we do have to be aware of it, first of all, and work at making ourselves neighborly. You have to be a good neighbor here or you will be fighting an uphill battle because that is one thing that has not changed. If you've got the home relationship, (if you've got buying from the home), if the families feel like you love the children, then they're going to take care of their end of it. So, I think we do have some unique challenges in that role. What we work to do here is to teach the children the difference in honoring the Gullah culture, the dialect and we teach them what the expectations are outside of this community, so that they are able to be successful and aren't viewed as completely outside of this community.

HH: Well we're all urban teachers and, you know, the issue of vernacular language is something that we all encounter and it's different. What does that look like? I don't even know if you've ever worked in an urban environment, but what does that instruction look like? Because I know from our interviews that there are a lot of kids that don't actually speak Gullah in its pure form but they come in with bits of it. So, what does that look like with reading instruction and what does that look like with communications, other than when you tell them there's the home language and there's the, whatever. How do you do that?

AJ: It looks very authentic. As it arises, we address it. We use that opportunity to address it. For instance, let's say we're talking about grammar or guided reading instruction, we have to be cautious when we say, "Does that sound right?" because to them it does sound right, so 's' is on the ends of words, things that they just typically leave off in their speech patterns, we have to address them. We can't say, "Does that sound right?" because that's your go to as a guide. "Does that sound right to say he jump over the", you know, its past-tense "he jump over". "That sounds right to me", so we have to be very explicit as it arises. There's a very unique thing that students say here called possessive. They'll say, "This is Hope's yours". Yeah, so it's not "Hope's box of tissues", it's, "Hope's yours". No, it's "Hope yours" or "Mrs. Johnson yours" and I'm saying "yoz". "It's Mrs. Johnson yoz" and so I can't say, "Does that sound right?" I have to say "It's Mrs. Johnson's" and I have to teach them explicitly about the apostrophe's'. So, they don't speak the language or the Gullah purely but there are definitely heavy influences and it's across the board. The adults say "its Mrs. Johnson yoz", you know, if they grew up here on the island or "Mrs. Johnson yoz".

HH: So does that mean that as a school you have to identify certain patterns and you kind of systematically have to attack them?

AJ: We do.

HH: So it's part of your curriculum to say: Okay well, at some we're going to address this possessive issue and then we're going to address the's' issue.

AJ: It's not as prescriptive as that but we do have dialogue about it, so that all the children are getting the same message, that we're all addressing it in the same way and, most importantly,

that we honor it. We recognize that we have to tell them the other expectations. We don't have a script that says, "When they say Mrs. Johnson yours, you say this", but we know that we all have to give them the same instruction anyway.

HH: And I would imagine that the teachers all are very used to hearing, you know, they can all tell.

AJ: Sometimes they pull some stuff out that's like, "Oh, really? Now what was that"? Where, as before, it would be like, "You don't talk like that. This is what you're supposed to say". I'll say, "No, tell me more about that", you know, "Say that again. What does that mean? Who have you heard say that"? So, you know, we'll have that kind of discussion with students about it.

HH: That sounds like what you mean when you say you're trying to honor them. That's really important because it helps to feel like their culture is actually of worth. In what other ways do you honor the culture in school besides just, you know, having a casual conversation about language?

AJ: We do. We're working to establish an even stronger relationship with Penn Center, so, you know, we do have periodic field trips. Our students do performances there doing showcase kinds of events, so we try to have constant dialogue. Our guidance counselor is really, really strong in that area because she is a student in school, so she really kind of leads us in that way. And you would think that the students living right here, that they would know a whole lot more about Penn Center than they do, but we have to, just like anything else, you would think that living on a barrier island they should know everything about an ocean or marsh habitat, but they don't. So, we have to be very purposeful in our efforts to try to increase their knowledge as much as possible about how people perceive this culture and what its defined as, which is really not as clear depending on who you speak to and what their experiences are. So, we are definitely working to try to increase our students' knowledge.

HH: Well with respect to we're sitting in your room and I can see your data wall. And as instructors, as teachers, we are always constantly thinking about achievement and data and, you know, the struggle is trying to make sure that the data matches the students' ability to show what they know and that's a struggle for all teachers in all districts, especially urban ones. So, I was wondering if you could talk a little about some of the challenges that you see with children and families that might be common, but also might be particular to -

[Clip 2]

HH (continued): -challenges that you see facing families in your school.

AJ: In that regard, I don't think we're a whole lot different than others like your experience. Socially, we are facing some challenges. Economically, we're are facing some challenges. I think that just as a function of, I don't want to say a ((morally declined)) society, but there are strong influences on the parents of our students that we see evident right here. If you had all been here during the school year and saw, every student created a body from head to toe to display their work on throughout the school year. So, each teacher had a classroom with bodies on all

along the school. Now, what you saw were big gold chains on the bodies. Graphics were like, “Bad girls” and, you know, all kinds of things. I mean, gigantic earrings in the boys’ ears. Nose piercings, you know, they got tattoos and we’re looking like, “Wow, if you had told us to draw a self- portrait it would very different”. So, we saw all kinds of things and I was like, “Wow, this is what our kids see themselves as”. So, what we face socially, we try to do a lot with character education just because things are changing. I grew up, “Yes, ma’am. No, ma’am. Yes, sir. No, sir”. You don’t speak until spoken to. You look people in the eye when you’re talking with them and it’s like now, you’re free to leave and, you know, you go away until you’re called on again. That has changed a lot. And so, we do have to teach our children how to be respectful. Again, the expectations are outside of the home, so we have that challenge socially. Economically, we face challenges of making sure the students have what they need when they come to school, so that they can be successful. We have to make sure that they are clean, that they’re not hungry, that they’re not other issues that are unpacking them outside of the home that are coming into the classroom and preventing them from being able to focus and being successful. So, we face challenges in that way. In terms of being prepared when they come to school many of our students are not because they have not had those experiences of being read to.

HH: Is there a Headstart here?

AJ: There is a Headstart and we are working with a partnership here with Headstart right next door, what used to be our early learning center. We still have our four pre- kindergarten classes there but there are early Headstart classes over there, as well. We have to basically work on the whole child when they come to us and they do have challenges with the language, speaking and listening skills, being able to communicate with each other in a civil way, things that we take for granted. Basic social skills like sitting down and eating because, many of our students, they don’t sit, or when they eat it might be in the car, so it’s over music and they just talk really loud when they’re at the lunch table! They want to stand up when they eat and then you do home visits and it’s like, there’s no dining room table, so they’re used to standing up when they eat. So, you know, challenges like that. Building confidence in them, as well, when they are, you know, they play together, they play softball together, they go to the hall together, or they’re in community center together, or they’re in community store together, and now, when they come to school, you have to keep that outside of school. So, maybe over the weekend your family did have a disagreement, but this family, you gotta let it go when you come inside. Again, that family connection sometimes causes some problems but we are working to support our students.

HH: Another question just popped into my head. When we were at your church, well, was that no...

AJ: I was visiting the same day.

HH: We went back to the same church yesterday and the pastor was talking about how they’re starting a school. And so I was curious because what the, kind of the, if there are other schools in the community that are church based that are at all any...

AJ: There aren’t. Primarily because it’s going to cost tuition, you know, that would have to be funded somehow. So no there aren’t new like pastor’s school, but that is really... that’s it.

HH: So all the kids who live here come to this school?

AJ: That's it. Mhm. A few of our students go to Lady's Island elementary but that's the exception. Most of our students go here.

HH: And then there's no middle school?

AJ: Mmm no.

HH: There's a middle school on Lady's Island.

AJ: There is.

HH: And so what is that transition like? Is there anything about transition? Because I would imagine that the kids grow up feeling pretty tucked away.

AJ: Isolated. Mhm.

HH: And isolated so when they have to transition and then integrate with other students who are not as isolated does that- talk about that a little bit.

AJ: That transition can be extremely difficult. And I will be honest with you, most of what they say when they see a child, "Oh, he's from St. Helena. She's from St. Helena", again because the discipline is usually different. Our students were staying with us until fifth grade. The other schools feed in at fifth grade, so the other students have had an opportunity for one year to get acclimated to the middle school way, or that administrator's way. Where our schools do not have that advantage, our students do not have that advantage. They come in the sixth grade with the expectation that, you know, they're are going to toe the line like everybody else and they don't necessarily have the same experience. And they don't because here, they're still, it's still, love, and there's nurturing, and they get a lot of counseling and, you know, students are in here if they need to refocus or reflect time. Whereas over there it's like, "Oh, you're in middle school now. You should know better than that".

HH: Who goes to that school?

AJ: Ugh, that's another big issue because the feeder schools that feed into that middle school, as well, are Lady's Island Elementary school, which is an art integrated school. And then Coosa elementary school, and students at Coosa tend to be a little more, well, a lot more affluent than our students are. So you have a whole other set of issues with our students being labeled- with them being looked at as trouble makers- very troubled students when they go over there. So yeah, that's always been a big concern of ours and this year parents, this and last year, parents have had the option of whether or not to keep their students at St. Helena or to send them over Lady's Island. We lost about, from 67 to 31 students in one year, so about half of them went over. This year we may have 8 to 12 fifth graders stay with us because, you know, there's the

perception that there's something that my child is missing out on by not having the advantage of just being in that culture over there for a year, so...

HH: Does that impact, the decreased enrollment, does that impact your funding?

AJ: It does. It impacts our staffing here at the school, so we lost staffing for two teachers this year. I mean, but there's something appealing about going to the middle school a year earlier.

HH: Do you have any designs to try to figure out how to get them back?

AJ: Oh yeah, our new administrator is going to be making phone calls, just being very honest with the parents about how successful the students were and just what we have to offer here at the school that would benefit the students for one additional year for them to stay here. I don't mean this, and it's going to sound kind of crummy, but the students that stay are the ones that need that, they tend to be, maybe the student with a lot more behavioral challenges because they know what's going to happen when they go there. You have a school resource officer. You try that over there, there's not going to be counseling in Mrs. Johnson's room. The police will be, you understand what I'm saying? It also tends to be students who may be a little bit more underachieving academically, where they know they are going to get slower paced, more individualized, you know, reading intervention after school and all of those other things that are offered. So we typically have the students that stay, not always, but, you know, students that stay that really need another year of that home- that home touch, you know, that I've been talking about. So that impacts our data as well on the state wide.

HH: Yeah, I'm sure. I could talk about the challenges in D.C. with that as well with just, you know, enrollment and numbers and fluctuation in school and kids being pulled into other schools. So the one we learned is that the island, I'm just interested generally in knowing about the kinds of services outside or kinds of programs outside of school to support children. So, there's no Y here?

AJ: No.

HH: Why? Why is that? You have the auxiliary to hold-

AJ: We have a YMC but you know how far it is from here?

HH: No, I don't know.

AJ: It's, I would say, about 15 miles from here.

HH: Where is it?

AJ: It is in Port Royal.

HH: Oh.

AJ: It's in Port Royal.

HH: So that means you don't get the support of the-

AJ: Well, it's also very expensive. You know like, I get a discount as a Beaufort county district employee and it's like, "Whoa". I'm looking like, "Oh, that's kind of expensive for me", so it really just isn't reasonable for-

HH: Doesn't serve kids. So, what kinds of programs, I heard you mention something about you have praise dance teams?

AJ: Praise dance teams at the churches. Those are typically, you know, they're just at that particular church, you know, they might perform on Sundays, or fellowship with other children just like that.

HH: Do kids participate? Like if you could talk about some of those things and talk about participation around elementary school all the way up to, if you can, if there are programs that kind of catch kids at middle school age?

AJ: Mm, nothing outside of here on the island, nothing. Church, because that's why, when I talked to y'all initially I talked about how integral the churches are because a lot of the things that they offer within their churches it can vary from church to church depending on how large their congregation is. Depending on, you know, what resources they're able to pull in, but it's basically church or school. There are some down in the Stock community. There's the Scott Hall. Not a lot of it is really organized, or so structured around academics like the PALS at the Penn Center camp. They have a lot of youth that are working with that, so it's really, really limited. We offer after school here for our students, four days a week, that's funded partially by the United Way, so we have a partnership with them. But that is it.

HH: And you mentioned softball. Is that a school-?

AJ: The PALS.

HH: Oh, okay. Can you talk about PALS?

AJ: The Parks and Leisure Services for Beaufort country, so the parents do have to pay money for that as well. But they're organized teams and they compete against each other county wise, stuff like that, so some students are able to participate in that as well. There really isn't, you know, that is a challenge that we face, finding something positive and productive for the students to do outside of school that doesn't cost a whole lot of money. And I would imagine that's a challenge anywhere.

HH: Well, from walking around, I mean it certainly is a beautiful building and certainly we've met some of the people who work here, and you're right, it seems like such a, you know- I think twice I walked in and I said, "I'm here to see Mrs. Johnson". And they're like, "Who"? "Like Adriane". "Oh yeah, Adriane", you know, they kind of knew. And, you know, it seems like the

kind of place where students really do come to feel nurtured. If you could talk about the things that you are most proud of about the school.

AJ: Mm, the love. How, when you come in, if you come in the mornings, our students, from the time they get off the bus, they've gotten at least ten hugs before they get to me. Every adult that they past says good morning to them. We know them by name and I have a traffic jam. That's my duty station right at the end of the hallway, so every one of them gets a hug from me in the morning. I can tell when it's like, "Oh, what's going on this morning sugar? Somethings not right." So, I'm very very proud of the way we care about our students. How we know our students very intimately, so we are able to provide them with what they need. I'm extremely proud of the faculty here and how –

[Clip 3]

AJ (continued): ... invested they are in the success of our students, so they are willing to do those whatever-it-takes kind of things. We have an angel tree, it's like a mini tree but we buy toys for children who might not necessarily have a, you know, a good Christmas. So we adopt families. We get their uniform sizes. We get a couple things off their wish list. We do a lot of things like that. I'm very proud of the fellowship that we have with the churches and the community. Once a year, and I really want to see this happen more than once a year, but the pastors and officers of churches come, and they typically come in the fall, and they do a walk for them and talk with them about what they can do out in the churches to support the school. So I'm really just proud of the relationship that we have here that we're really working to expand. I'd like to see some things happen with the corporate world because, you know, the bottom line is you need money to do things, to provide quality programs and things for children, so I'd like to see us expand in that way. But I'm really proud of the outreach and I expect to see that grow exponentially this year and the upcoming years.

HH: Just maybe one or two last questions. I'm interested in talking about your stem school, so if you could talk a little bit about your stem school and the fact that there are very few operating elementary schools that are stem and they've, sort of, all charted the territory together. And so for people who might be interested in just, you know, hearing about how your stem school runs, if you could talk about that a little bit.

AJ: Yeah, we are. We adopted science, technology, engineering, and math about five years ago. We were very fortunate to receive a lot of funding, a lot of materials, and a lot of resources, so when we began to implement stem, we had one person in on every grade level in our school working on the curriculum maps for stem. So, we actually were in the building writing the units. Stem was a strong complement to our students because it allowed them- we did mechanical engineering. We did chemical engineering. We looked at it all. The engineering is elementary curriculum. We looked at- so there was a quarterly project. We had stem showcases where the district personnel came through. Each child had one or two projects represented. Families were able to come through and the students were able to explain. So we're looking at really revitalizing that program. Teachers need more training on it to really embed because what it really should look like is, when you walk in, you shouldn't be able to tell that it's science or (ya lay) time because the curriculum is just that embedded. So, you know, when we started it, what

we did was we used a lot of nonfiction text from our guided reading materials. We were also fortunate to be a reading full school, so we have an amazing literacy room, where teachers can checkout materials that are aligned to the social studies and science content standards. So we're excited about that. More training is needed, but I think we can definitely do it effectively. Our students love inquiry based activities, so I think it's a strong compliment for the way our students like to learn. They like to get down and dirty, so it's highly engaging for them as well.

HH: Yeah, it really is. So as we wrap up, I was wondering if you could give us some words of advice to either a student who's pulling, you know, one of these interviews and your interview, and listening to you when you're talking about schools. And maybe there's someone who's a budding teacher who is interested in just learning about schools and different communities. What would you like them to know about this place and school on St. Helena and your experience as an educator?

AJ: This is absolutely an amazing place to live and to work. You have to be passionate. Temper your passion because you will wear yourself out. There is always work to do but it's an amazing place to live and learn and work, and I think what is so unique about- oh, I think that you need the educators who probably say this: We learn so much from each other and were not necessarily a culture of teaching but a culture of learning and so we are down in the trenches with our students everyday trying to make them positive and productive citizens, showing them that there's a great big world outside this little island of St. Helena. They can be successful. They can do it. They can go out and compete globally with their peers. The sky isn't even the limit. That's too low, so they can be successful. For a teacher who would come here, I would say: Nothing in college is going to prepare you for an experience like this, it never does. Just believe in students and set the standards so high that they go, "Huh"? And you say, "Yeah". That's what it is and you're going to be successful and they absolutely will rise to the occasion.

HH: Thank you very for setting a time for us. It's been a pleasure just to, you know, be able to hear your perspective about the school and we've been working to get in here for a couple of years now, so we consider ourselves very fortunate to be able to talk to you today.

AJ: Thank you, thank you. HH: Thank you.

DJ: Can I ask a couple of questions?

AJ and HH: Sure.

DJ: I'm was really intrigued watching your kids this morning. There are kids who half of their family is in St. Helena and half of their family is up country. And... where are they in terms of those two cultures?

AJ: I think they're here because kids tend to go back to what's familiar to them, so even though they have roots outside of here they tend to come back to what's comfortable and what's most familiar. Mhm.

DJ: Another question is, you've been here long enough to have seen a lot of change, a lot of development. What's your perspective on that?

AJ: I think that controlled development is a good thing. I don't know what I would do without that family dollar there now because I used to have to travel seven miles to get things before and it's such a lifesaver. But we know that we want to maintain the integrity of the island. We want to keep the rural character, so kind of just the way it is now. Now, it's just enough without being too much, so a family dollar is cool, a Walmart, never going to happen. A grocery store, probably not either. They tried to put a public over here, right on the corner. I think right where Exxon is. They tried for years, it didn't happen. It was gonna be a small, ya know, it was too commercial looking, I think. It would've stood out like a sore thumb. There will not be a housing development. I can tell you that's not going to happen. Not as long as these people that are here now are still alive. Now this generation, they might sell off the land or something but because it's like, you know, the old folks, they say, "God ain't making no more land", you know, they'll say that. And he's not, it's like, if you have land, you have wealth. And so we encourage people. They'll be a big thing with churches. Pay your taxes. If you don't have the money, churches support people because we do not want that land to go to auction. Because if someone from the outside comes in and sees marsh front property, to us it's just marsh, it's the creek or whatever, you know, the kids call it. To them, they see the big two story house and that, so I don't think a lot of housing development is going to take place. Data is very developed. Fripp, Hunting, St. Helena, you don't see it here and I don't think you will because people want to keep the wide open space.

DJ: Thank you.

AJ: Anything? No? I love it. Ya'll should come like live here longer than two or three weeks.

DJ: I agree.

HH: We'd love to. We'd love to. It's wonderful to be here.

AJ: I've never experienced anything like this and I worked at Shanklin Elementary for five years, which is out by the Laurel Bay area. You would think it's a similar demographic just because it tends to be minority children, but there's a whole other culture out there, which I can't speak about on camera, but a whole other culture out there. No other place like it. I've worked in a private sector where parents would spend 150 dollars on one scholastic book order for one child, wouldn't trade it for the world. I gotta be here. This is where I have to be.

HH: It just occurred to me that we didn't talk at all about the migrant program.

AJ: Oh, yes!

HH: If you could talk about that because that's something that's very particular of a community like this one that people up north don't really see a lot of that. Can you talk about the genesis of that and how it operates and sort of what that looks like?

AJ: Wow, what it looks like is when the crops that are ready to be harvested here- are ready, their families come down to harvest them and so we provide school for the students while they're here. There is an early Headstart component to it as well, so their infants and toddlers are given quality child care while they're here. And then students K through, I think we have up to 7th graders here, and then the others go to other places.

HH: In what months do they arrive?

AJ: They got here in June. The first week of June and they typically stay- around the 4th of July is kind of pushing it, so we got an extra week in this year just because the way the weather patterns have been. The students come here from all kinds of places. Depends on what crops their parents pick, so some of them are headed back to their parents' home countries. Others, a lot of them are going to Virginia for the next, depending on what their specialty is. They travel the United States and they have to get quality education when their parents are harvesting.

HH: It's interesting because we walked through and met them. I don't know if you took us through but someone took us through and the thing that we kept talking about was just how happy they seemed, you know. In this program and just how so well adjusted and in such a transient lifestyle that could be very unsettling, but they were all so calm and excited about where they got to. And the perspective that they have to offer is incredible. What is it that you all do here that make them feel just so, at home?

AJ: I think it's that very same thing. It's like business as usual for St. Helena Elementary school. The class that I worked with, I bonded with the students immediately. We spent the first one or two days just building community with them and making them feel like, you know, we know that we're going to live together for about a month, but it's going to be an amazing month. So we just- we have a blast. I miss them! I had to be out of town for their last day, so I was kind of devastated in that regard. But they are very resilient. It's like, "Oh, next I'm going to Virginia" and I was like "Are you going to see this one"? And they're like "Yeah, I'm gonna see her. Let me take her stuff!" They meet up in certain places, so they are an amazing group of children.

HH: Is it a bilingual program? Are there children who don't have English as a home language or don't the speak any English at all?

AJ: There are. Oh yeah.

HH: And so what do you do for those students?

AJ: We have an ESLL teacher here for those students. I had one student who came about a month before the regular school year, she was here as well. And so I had to have a separate set of plans for her. And then my teacher assistant is our district bilingual liaison and interpreter, so she was able to communicate with her and the children helped me out tremendously as well. So, she was teaching me some Spanish. I was teaching her some things in English but yeah, we do provide everything. They get dental care. The Ronal McDonald truck comes and does dental screenings and then they go to the clinic and get free dental care. They get medical services, so everything that they need is provided while they're here.

HH: Does the government fund for that?

AJ: Yes. Mhm.

HH: So then in the Ronald McDonald, do they have to pull all that together, or do you have to pull together all of this?

AJ: No, all those things are funded by the state.

HH: Do you have the same kids every year?

AJ: Most of the times yes, we do. There are some kids that come back.

HH: And the records transfer?

AJ: Well, you know, we just had a conversation about that. Looking at next year, the state director wants us to start finding where the home schools are, if at all the possible-

[Clip 4]

- from where they just came from and getting records before they come here. We do diagnostic testing when they come but if we have a little bit more information before they arrive we can be more purposeful in our instructions. We do do diagnostic testing when they come.

HH: Two more questions.

AJ: No problem.

HH: Are the teachers who teach in the migrant program the same teachers that teach during the school year?

AJ: Not necessarily.

HH: Where do they come from?

AJ: From district schools. Schools from different counties.

HH: Are there other migrant programs around?

AJ: There are.

HH: Where are they located?

AJ: We have one here. It just depends on where the kids have to go to school but there are. Where they're going now, there will be others.

HH: Where's the next closest one?

AJ: I'll have to ask Ms. Gale where the next program is.

HH: But not close?

AJ: No, no. And then, for some of the older children, the oldest wide out of school youth program, they go there in the evening. So we have some students during the day but they also go to the camps. My teacher assistant, she be working till 9, 10:30 at night.

HH: For school programs?

AJ: Mhm.

HH: Because those kids are working during the day?

AJ: There are some and families too, working with the families too. We really wanted to do a lot with the literacy outreach this year, and really teaching them, just like our students here, that wherever you are, there are some basic structures that you need to have in place. You always need to have a place to set up for them to do their homework. You gotta have this, you gotta have that. These are things that you can do with your students. I mean you might not speak English but you can do flash cards with them.

There are things that you can do at home as well, so we are really working on giving them services as well.

HH: Do the kids who are in the migrant program have opportunities to interact with the kids who are here on the island?

AJ: No.

HH: Just completely different?

AJ: No, they don't. Field trips, like when we went to the public pool, then, but not academically.

HH: That's a really neat program. It's one of those things that you don't really think about and how much there is to offer for kids who are traveling around.

AJ: Nah, I mean, I'm sure you guys have captured that, you know, this is a culture to be appreciated. That there should not be stigmatized or students labeled as ignorant. Just like anybody else, it's different, you know. Talking about the migrant program, we tend to think that because someone cannot speak English, that they're academically- no the student might be very gifted, just can't communicate with me. So, I think that would be what I want but our students have amazing gifts and talents and potential. We're just different... up here.

[End of interview]

