Many of Ana Roque de Duprey’s students are bussed in from other parts of the district where schools are overcrowded. As a consequence, students often did not feel a sense of connectedness to the surrounding neighborhood. Likewise, the community was not as involved in the school as Principal Gloria Roman wished. Roman’s idea to bridge that disconnect was to send students out into the community to learn more about it and, in the process, introduce the school to the community.

She partnered with Street-Level Youth Media, an organization that educates Chicago’s urban youths in media arts and emerging technologies, to collaborate on a video project called Discovering West Town Video Project. Eighth-graders researched the West Town community, interviewed residents, and produced two 8-minute documentaries: one investigating gangs and another on a local campaign called No Se Vende (Not for Sale), aimed at preventing an economic development plan that would displace many lower-income residents. Dream funds supported production costs of the video, as well as stipends for guest speakers who provided historical perspective on West Town.

The videos were screened in the classrooms and at parent meetings, and they were also viewed at a Street-Level Youth Media showcase event. “Parents saw how media can be a powerful tool for engaging students in meaningful learning,” Roman said, adding that, “95 percent of students reported that they knew more about the community than they did before the project.” Ana Roque de Duprey’s partnership with Street-Level continues to grow. The school is participating in Street-Level’s My Community Matters project sponsored by the Chicago Children’s Museum, and Street-Level has extended invitations to Ana Roque de Duprey students to attend free summer camps.