



PROMISING PRACTICES IN  
HIGH SCHOOL AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

# Developing Youth-Led Activities

Engaging Youth as Leaders and Decision-Makers

*Jordan WRAP – Long Beach Unified School District*



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*Lead Strategically. Work Collaboratively. Act Intentionally.*

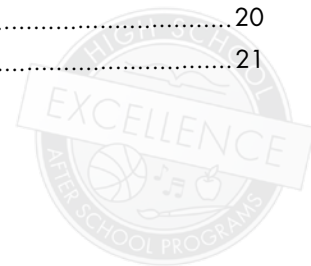
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# Developing Youth-Led Activities Engaging Youth as Leaders and Decision-Makers

Long Beach Jordan WRAP Program

Written By: Michelle R. Perrenoud



Developing Youth-Led Activities and  
Youth Leadership Councils – Case Study

**Foreword:** Quality after school programs incorporate what is commonly referred to as a youth development approach. This approach focuses on what children and youth need as they mature into responsible, caring adults. All effective youth programs have youth development at their core. Youth Development is not offered as a separate program or program component, it is a philosophy in which the principles are intentionally practiced and applied through actions and encompass everything done. Effective youth leadership programs build on solid youth development principles with an emphasis on those areas of development and program components that engage and support youth leadership. Simply stated, Youth Development is a philosophy and an approach – it is not something done to or for youth, but something done with youth.

## About the Program

### LONG BEACH JORDAN HIGH SCHOOL WRAP PROGRAM

Jordan High School is located in North Long Beach, California, and is one of six comprehensive high schools in the Long Beach Unified School District. For the past five years, Jordan High School has been operating the WRAP (*Winners Reaching Amazing Potential*) after school program. The program has an annual grant award of \$250,000 as the primary source of funding through a 21st Century Community Learning Center (21stCCLC) ASSETS grant for high school programs from the California Department of Education. Direct services dollars available for program implementation total \$202,000 and additional in-kind resources of \$15,000 round out the operating budget.

The total student enrollment at Jordan High School is 4,200. The school's student demographic set includes: 58% Hispanic or Latino, 26% African American, 6% Asian, 5% Pacific Islander, 3% White, and 2% Filipino. The Jordan WRAP after school program serves 1,200 unduplicated participants annually with an average daily attendance of 300. The program operates Monday through Friday, 3 – 6 p.m., and offers activities on weekends and evenings as scheduled. (*See Appendix 1: Jordan WRAP – Program Framework*)

### LONG BEACH JORDAN WRAP: IMPACTING KIDS – CHANGING LIVES

The staff team at Long Beach Jordan WRAP is transforming student lives through principles of youth development and youth leadership. There are many diverse and engaging programs and activities offered as a part of the Jordan WRAP Program. At the same time, there is a core theme and approach of youth development and youth leadership that runs true throughout the program and across all of its activities.

## ENVIRONMENT AND SPACE IS CRUCIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

When I visited Jordan WRAP I was intrigued by the location and space on campus where the program was housed. I could see that in the beginning this space was an older, large storage space, maybe for unused items. It was roughly a thirty-foot square, framed cement building, with posts running floor to ceiling mid way across the space and windows high to let light in. It felt like a space where forgotten things came to rest and pile up behind locked doors.

As I sat in the room and took in everything around me, I could see and begin to feel the love and care of the space, which had transformed it into a vibrant “youth center” full of life for and by the youth who were participating in the program. It became apparent that the administration, staff, and youth, collaboratively became trustees and stewards of their space and program. They had worked to make it their place to belong, away from home, where they could be safe and comfortable together working side-by-side.

Lots of color was splashed on the walls and they were decorated with pictures representative of those things which are important to the youth who have spent time there. I saw posters of leaders, some well known throughout history, and others known only to youth living in today’s pop culture. Banners of leadership and character values were posted throughout the space. There were even new divisions of space creatively made by designing and decorating walls of taut hanging butcher paper. Their story began to unveil itself to me. In one corner of the room there was a large conference table with youth seated and standing all around fully engaged with one another. In another corner there was a comfortable lounge area where youth were working together preparing for the day’s activities and evening parent night. It was reaffirming to see how attractive and workable a space with two gently used couches, an overstuffed chair, beanbags, coffee tables and a rug was for those older youth. In another section of the room, amidst what an untrained eye may describe as the center of chaos, was the program’s virtual office space including two desks with chairs, office equipment, and program staff buzzing along working hand-in-hand with the youth.

It was in that moment I found myself listening with the head of an administrator and the heart of a parent. Mind you, it was a Friday afternoon. The office telephone was ringing, the site coordinator’s cell phone vibrating, twenty plus youth leaders were planning and scrambling about, four staff (one full-time site director and three part-time front line staff) were working and providing support to youth as needed, and in total 100 plus youth were participating in various program activities for the day. Positive and supportive conversations were being had. The program and youth were well engaged with, and supervised by, caring and competent staff. The philosophy of youth development and practices of youth leadership principles and youth-led activities were apparent.

My attention was drawn to what I could see was the signature corner of the room. Most impressive were the storyboards of programs and activities that had taken place throughout the year posted as a seamless continuum of activity history within the Jordan WRAP Program. This was *their* wall of pride in programs. With creative flair, each storyboard was like a professionally decorated page torn from a skillfully created scrapbook capturing pictures of memories and detailed vignettes summarizing the activities through the youth’s experiences and in their own words. Imagine with me if you will: a wall stretched nearly twenty-foot long full of storyboards showcasing programs and activities beginning with a Leadership Retreat in the mountains and then following: Homecoming activities, Male Academy Leadership Peer to Mentoring program, Student Leadership Advisory Board leadership activities, Jewelry Making, Pumpkin Carving, Pacific Islander Dance, Latin American Dance, Xi Sisters Service Learning Program, Omega Brothers Service Learning Program, Long Beach Memorial Hospital Helping Needy Families Service Projects, Long Beach City College Adopt A Family Christmas Project, “O” Ambassadors, and other Community Partnering and Service Projects.

It was an ever-present moment: as all the moving parts aligned with each other signifying what one can only experience first-hand to truly know and express beyond doubt what was being experienced was the real thing. When I asked the site director, Candace Meehan, about it all, she remarked, “Our goal (the youth and staff) was first to create a common space where students could come and be peers amongst each other.” She intuitively knew opportunities to integrate youth development and leadership would present themselves given intentional planning and genuine interest of the young people.

Her statement was truly insightful. Being intentional and flexible to create a space and an environment in which youth innovation and leadership flourishes is core to furthering formal structures of any after school program serving high school students. Additionally, infusing the philosophy of youth development

and principles of youth leadership and youth engagement are also imperative. The Jordan WRAP Program has excelled in these areas.

## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE, LEAD, AND SUCCEED

The WRAP Program at Jordan High School is unique in that it is a blended, self-determining, youth-adult partnership program model. It is co-designed and co-advised by a Student Leadership Advisory Board (elected by their peers) who shares decision-making with the site director. The adult site director and program leaders act as facilitators and guides rather than as the leaders. The youth decide what programs they want and need and co-design many of the programs and activities within the Jordan WRAP Program.

In the beginning, Candace knew her kids were looking for a way to stay connected to school and get involved in the after school program at Jordan, they just didn't quite know how to do that for themselves. She knew creating a separate Student Leadership Advisory Board (different than the school day ASB program) serving the after school program would set the stage for youth to really connect and have ownership in the Jordan WRAP Program.

The concept for the youth program at Jordan is formed and implemented by a group of youth with guidance of an exceptional youth development specialist / site director. Over the years the program has flourished to be more youth-driven than in the beginning. As with all successful programs the planning is in the details. It takes strategic leadership, collaborative work, and intentional actions to bring a program from start-up through emerging to developed. To continually maintain and enrich it is an ongoing deliberate process.

To create the student leadership advisory board, the checklist included:

- Connect with school administration
- Advertise a forum to take place over lunchtime
- Design a marketing promo like the DJ Party Flyers kids stuffed in their back pockets
- Market to the entire student body to "Join the Student Leadership Program After School"
- Provide pizza and snacks
- Offer incentive drawings including: CD player, movie tickets, and other teen-valued prizes
- Ask young people for their opinions about what they wanted in an after school program
- Brand what would be available after school
- Provide opportunity for youth to join the After School Student Leadership Advisory Board

Students completed surveys about what they desired in an after school program. Hearing "youth voice" was very important so an open mic was included for kids to speak out and speak up about what they wanted. Candace shared that opportunities to connect and engage with other youth in positive activities after school would be available. Additionally, service hours, skill building, awards, incentives, and leadership opportunities would be offered. Candace believed the students should be empowered to shape the services and programs offered to them. She wanted them to know she needed their help and voices in creating the Jordan WRAP Program. That they should have more influence over what is provided after school, be more involved in the planning and delivery of the services and programs, and have more opportunities to express their own views.

*"I am involved in more after school clubs and activities than I would have ever been. Not only am I staying off the streets, I am contributing to something greater here. Something I am helping to create that is making a difference for me, my school, and my friends."*

**- Jordan WRAP, Member  
Student Leadership Advisory Board**



## Developing Youth-Led Activities and Youth Leadership Councils – Case Study

It didn't take long before Candace was connecting with kids all over campus. Youth were stepping up to sit on the after school Student Leadership Advisory Board and share their thoughts. They were recruiting their peers into the program and the program was growing.

## **GRANT ENCOURAGES RESPONSIBILITY AND BOARD ROLES INSPIRE LEADERSHIP**

Candace's vision was that the Student Leadership Advisory Board members would act as grant managers and program advisors. They would be the face of the Jordan WRAP Program, and they would market the program to their peers. If it were going to be truly successful, the program would need to be by the youth and for the youth. Leadership would be incorporated into the program through opportunities for youth to plan and organize events and activities, develop positive relationships, good communication skills, and group work skills.

After a few months into the program, Candace and the youth leaders realized the Student Leadership Advisory Board needed more structure and opportunities for members to practice leadership through real-world roles. In order to formalize their work, they created official Board positions and titles, and job descriptions with roles and responsibilities. The titled positions, coupled with meaningful roles and responsibilities, allowed for their greater sense of ownership, with clear boundaries and expectations, while working together to make things happen. (See Appendix 2: Student Leadership Advisory Board – Job Descriptions)

Student Leadership Advisory Board members go offsite annually for a leadership retreat where they participate in an outdoor, experiential learning environment. Participants go through activities such as a high and low ropes course, trust fall, and reflection exercises preparing them for their work ahead together. They learn to communicate, trust one another, and hone their teamwork skills. The experience bonds them to each other, builds their understanding about their purpose in life, and teaches them that the program is about more than graduating. They each go to the retreat as individuals with limited connections, but come back with life-long memories and lasting friendships connecting them as a group to their greater work within the Jordan WRAP Program.

*Leadership is the ability to influence and support others in a positive manner for a common goal. Everyone has leadership potential and leadership can be learned and developed through practice. It is a relationship between people and it is determined by the situation at hand. Meaningful roles along with real responsibilities give young people the purpose and skill building they are looking for. They want to belong and they want to know that what they are doing is making a purposeful difference.*

## **YOUTH AS TRUSTEES AND STEWARDS**

The Student Leadership Advisory Board is one of the most important components of the Long Beach Jordan WRAP Program. This component (the Board) within the larger after school program is designed to teach leadership skills while giving students an opportunity to run their own after school program. "This group of students assumes the leadership role to make a difference and to involve other students to become active in their school and our program," shared Daisy Martinez, past Jordan student and Student Leadership Advisory Board President, now a Jordan WRAP Program Staff Leader. Daisy said, "This group of youth leaders is considered the 'helm' of the program. The Student Leadership Advisory Board member's job is to recruit other students into the program, as well as advise on what kinds of programming they would like to see on campus in the after school program, and to plan and implement activities in the program."

The Student Leadership Advisory Board meets weekly and is comprised of nearly twenty members participating as Board Members and Officers in the program. There are eighteen different positions, each with a specific job description, and seat on the board including: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and a Representative for each Grade 9th through 12th, Communications Officer, ASB Representative, Xi Sisters Representative, Omega Brothers Representative, “O” Ambassadors Representative, Historian/Pictures, Historian/Video, Program Representative, Event Coordinator, and Board Members. Attachment 2: Student Leadership Advisory Board – Job Descriptions for additional detail.

In addition to the many components and activities offered, the Jordan WRAP Program challenges youth to develop potential solutions to the social problems they are experiencing and / or defining in the program, their neighborhoods, community, and school. The youth are encouraged to take responsibility for coming up with the solution and also implementing it (with adult guidance and support if needed).

Walking their talk is an essential theme within the Jordan WRAP Program and is a contributing factor to its overall success. One example includes students identifying and fulfilling an unmet need as the result of a newly imposed service learning challenge for students at Jordan. The challenge was met with solutions developed from the students in the After School Program. A Service Learning Student Advisory Board was formed and is in operation today. This board was created to help streamline the process for students who need to fulfill their requirement of 40 community-based service learning hours. Board members now research and identify projects for their peers to get involved in and earn hours. The Board works intentionally to be sure opportunities are rich with growth and learning opportunities.

“Youth are creative, they think outside of the box that adults almost always stay in”, Candace shared. One of her biggest challenges is keeping her kids spirits high and keeping them on track when their expectations and the expectations of the “system” do not align. “Teens are innovative and creative, but sometimes the system does not value that.” Candace is mindful that when they have a great idea that is beyond a comfortable yes, that saying no will only discourage them. “I listen to them and inspire their creativity, often asking that they rethink ideas with new information gained from the dialogue we have had. I encourage them to have an alternate suggestion and solution to present. I may have to redirect their approach, but I am always trying to get to a place where we can make it happen. I never want to shut them down. There is always a way. It may take time, and some alterations, but there is a way.”

## **YOUTH INNOVATION LEADS TO YOUTH-LED ACTIVITIES**

There is no one right way to “map out” developing youth-led activities and engaging youth as leaders and decision-makers in after school programs. The most successful programs are those that incorporate a variety of approaches to meet and address the diversity and complexity of the youth, their personal and leadership development needs, and their advancement in decision-making skills through the issues involved. Students are taking responsibility for their future success while participating in the Jordan WRAP Program. Personal leadership is their greater purpose and connecting to their future in the real-world is vital. They know graduating is their key to moving beyond today’s after school program to life *after* high school.

In addition to the Academic Improvement component where students receive tutoring support, credit recovery, and homework assistance in core subjects and college prep, the Enrichment component offers students an opportunity to enrich their lives through positive forms of disguised learning. Of the many enrichment programs and activities offered, and having already taken into account the two youth advisory boards, the following programs are highlighted as a result of the youth innovation and leadership involved in their creation and continued implementation.

*“Leadership is more about who I am, choose to be, and how I show up... not what I do or title I have.*

*I am more aware of others around me, I listen for different perspectives, and I want to be around positive people making a greater difference.”*

**– Jordan WRAP,  
Program Participant**



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**Xi Sisters / Omega Brothers:** The Xi Sisters club and Omega Brothers club are both community service learning programs. Xi Sisters was created by tenth grade student, Annette Robertson, wanting a club (sorority) where she and girls like her could come together to study and support one another. As it grew over time the club focus was on being college-bound and doing community service outreach. Today it is made up of over 90 girls and functions similar to a service club program on a college campus. Pearl Foundation Inc. and Long Beach City College AKNA are mentors to the girls in this program.

Omega Brothers was created by eleventh grade student, Rudy Fifta, wanting a club (fraternity) for boys to benefit from just as the girls had created for themselves. There are 75 members. The Order of Tong from Long Beach City College serves as mentors to students in this program.

**Hip Hop Dance:** Three students serve as dance instructors teaching their fellow students the latest Hip Hop dance moves. Student instructors receive community service hours for their work and the Hip Hop Dance club performs on campus at school pep rallies and events.

**Pacific Islander Dance & Cultural Program:** Students requested this very successful and well attended program with teens of all ages and races represented. Parents of students were invited to be instructors. Students learn traditional island dances and perform at many community events and competitions. An additional component also includes activities and workshops designed to teach students about the heritage and many different cultures of Polynesia. The program teaches students about the similarities between cultures which helps to promote tolerance.

**Jordan Idol Competition:** Offered by the Student Leadership Advisory Board, this annual singing competition is modeled after American Idol. The purpose of this event is to recruit students into the program. The event brings upwards of 400 students and parents together to promote the Jordan WRAP program. Board members plan and implement the event. It is much anticipated, very successful, fun, and brings awareness of the after school program to the school's teachers and administrators, student body, parents, and surrounding community.

*"I have closer friends here than I would have ever had if I were just going to school. I have friends outside my normal circles and across grades and races that I can connect with during the school day now. I feel like I belong at school, I want to come to school, and I want to be in after school WRAP."*

**- Jordan WRAP, Member  
Student Leadership Advisory Board**

*"Candace: Congratulations to you and your staff. Your diligent efforts to develop a model program are appreciated. Thank you again, for all you do."*

**- M. Jimenez, Co-Principal Jordan High School**

## **LEAD STRATEGICALLY – WORK COLLABORATIVELY – ACT INTENTIONALLY**

Leadership is not simply taught. Leadership is learned and acquired through observation, practice, and participation. We know not all learning and development takes place in the classroom. By providing young people with additional opportunities and support beyond the instructional school day, we give them the skills they need to fully develop as leaders and decision-makers. These principles are not only for use when they are in program, but also when they are out in the world on their own.

Youth engagement, youth development, youth leadership, and youth voice are important components of all after school programs. They provide opportunities for young people to develop the attributes needed to be successful, such as responsibility, integrity, critical thinking, active listening, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, personal qualities such as empathy, caring, flexibility, pro-social behaviors, planning,

and problem solving are developed and honed. Several components of youth leadership are particularly important to high school students. It is imperative that supportive, competent and caring adults are present as role models, mentors and coaches. Also, the program attendees should be offered personal leadership opportunities to learn and practice having healthy expectations, goal setting, self-advocacy, conflict resolution skills, an orientation towards success, and motivation to achieve aspirations. Equally important are the leadership opportunities which teach real-world skills through action and event planning, using their voices, service learning, peer mentoring, leadership training, and organizational leadership.

Cultivating leadership, citizenship, and social skills in high school students is the real behind the scenes work of trained youth development specialists. We know that when the young people we work with have a say in and share responsibility for their schools, cities, local organizations, programs, and activities they are invested in their future and their community. Meaningful engagement and developmentally needed leadership opportunities create and enhance young people's connections and contributions to that larger community. The skills they develop through these opportunities can be useful, drawn upon, and further developed throughout their lives.

*"I am better-rounded as a student now. I am not procrastinating. I am more aware of my options and am making positive decisions for myself. I am involved with others, am team focused, gaining skills I can use, and am making a difference in my community."*

**- Jordan WRAP, President  
Student Leadership Advisory Board**

## About the Featured Practice

### DEVELOPING YOUTH-LED ACTIVITIES: ENGAGING YOUTH AS LEADERS AND DECISION-MAKERS

There is an overarching youth development philosophy in place at Jordan WRAP infusing the principles of effective youth development and youth leadership. This philosophy encompasses everything they do in the program to prepare their youth to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood by building on their capabilities and strengths and by addressing a wide range of developmental needs.

**The manner in which you approach what you do is as important as the decisions you make and the actions you take.** To build the capacity of all youth to engage in leadership, the best strategy is an integrated framework that incorporates multiple levels of youth participation. It can include opportunities to engage as an individual, or team member, at the program level or through youth action teams, as well as opportunities to engage within formal structures, such as a youth representation on the Student Leadership Advisory Board. Youth engagement occurs when young people have the opportunity to not only develop skills and serve their community, but to use their skills to transform their community. Decision-making opportunities teach young people about communication, collaboration, critical thinking, community ownership, building consensus, and democracy while building permanent connections to the people, communities, organizations, programs, and activities with which they are involved. By valuing full youth participation in addressing the issues that face

Pittman (1993) defined Youth Development as the ongoing growth process in which youth are engaged in attempting to meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, and spiritually grounded, and build their skills and the competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.



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our youth, in programs serving young people, and their community, we recognize that youth are uniquely qualified to say what works for young people. Participating youth make connections between school, their work, and community while developing and refining personal goals, identifying career skills, and exploring potential career paths.

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: TERMINOLOGY

Research supports the premise that both youth development and youth leadership programs positively shape the growth of young people. Youth leadership programs build on solid youth development principles, with an emphasis on those development and program components that support youth in their leadership growth.

Researchers and practitioners use a variety of definitions to describe the following terms. Despite the efforts already underway to engage young people in: youth development, youth leadership, youth engagement, youth voice, meaningful youth decision-making, and youth empowerment processes, a review of the youth engagement literature suggests the field is still in its infancy.

**Youth Development** is the acquisition of attitudes, competencies, values, and social skills that will carry youth forward into successful adulthood. (National Research Council) It is a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. (National Collaborative for Youth Members, March 1998) It is a philosophy and approach that guides leaders in the way they organize programs and supports so young people can develop to their fullest potential. Youth Development experiences are connected to positive outcomes in youth, including decreases in negative behaviors (such as alcohol and tobacco use and violence) and increases in positive attitudes and behaviors (such as motivation, academic performance, self-esteem, problem-solving, positive health decisions, and interpersonal skills). *All of these definitions in addition to Pittman's definition outlined previously.*

**Youth Leadership** is an important part of the youth development process. It is both an internal and an external process leading to (1) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence their opinion and behavior, and show the way by going in advance. (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998)

Comprehensive programs and activities focusing on youth leadership are offered to build skills relevant to young people's personal development, as well as their role within a group. On a personal level, young people who participate in these experiences gain insight into themselves. This helps them analyze their strengths and weaknesses, identify their unique passions, and set personal and vocational goals. On a group level, and through group work, youth develop the ability to work with others to: create a shared vision; set strategies, goals, and objectives; and draw on the talents, skills, and energy of others.

Participation in youth leadership development experiences is linked to increased self-efficacy and the development of skills relevant to success in adulthood and the workplace such as decision-making and working well with others. Building self-advocacy and self-determination skills, an important aspect of leadership development for youth with disabilities, correlates with making a successful transition to adulthood. (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, NCWD/Youth, January 2005)

**Youth Engagement** is the optimal degree of youth participation. It is the intentional, meaningful, and sustained involvement of young people in a decision-making activity. It aims to help young people develop the capacity and confidence to participate as productive partners in decisions affecting them individually and collectively. (Understanding the State of Knowledge of Youth Engagement Financing and Sustainability, 2008)

Youth leadership programs build on solid youth development principles, with an emphasis on those development and program components that support youth.



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**Youth Voice** is a key underpinning to positive youth development. It is the process of integrating young peoples’ ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative into community efforts. Youth voice is about considering the perspectives and ideas of youth, respecting what everyone has to say, taking appropriate risks, listening, sharing and working together. (Youth Voice, 2001)

**Youth as Decision-Makers** is a process of involving young people in the decisions that affect their lives. It refers to a variety of efforts to engage young people in any level of determining outcomes or decision-making. Decision-making can be related to an issue, a project, a program or an organization. (Youth Voice, 2001)

**Youth Empowerment** is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of others. (Guide to Social Change Led By and With Young People. The Freechild Project. Vavrus, J. & Fletcher, A. - 2006)

## AREAS OF COMMON COMPETENCIES AND DESIRABLE OUTCOMES

Some common competencies and desirable outcomes emerged from a review of youth development and youth leadership research. The competencies and outcomes are best articulated in a framework created by the Forum for Youth Investment that organizes the range of youth development outcomes into five developmental areas: working, learning, thriving, connecting, and leading. (Ferber, Pittman, and Marshall, 2002) Youth Development programs strive to provide supports, services, and opportunities that help youth achieve positive outcomes in all five of these areas.

Using the Forum for Youth Investment’s framework, NCWD/Youth has outlined intended outcomes and examples of program activities for each of the five areas in the following chart “The Five Areas of Development”.

**Working** refers to the development of positive attitudes, skills, and behaviors around occupational and career direction. Positive outcomes that fall under this area include demonstrated work-readiness skills and involvement in meaningful work that offers advancement, satisfaction, and self-sufficiency. Activities such as career interest assessments and summer internships help youth achieve these outcomes.

**Learning** refers to the development of positive basic and applied academic attitudes, skills, and behaviors. Beneficial outcomes that fall under this area include rational problem solving and critical thinking. Activities such as group problem-solving games and contextualized learning using academic skills to complete a project help youth achieve these outcomes.

**Thriving** refers to the development of attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are demonstrated by maintaining optimal physical and emotional wellbeing. Beneficial outcomes that fall under this area include knowledge and practice of good nutrition and hygiene and the capacity to identify risky conditions. Activities such as workshops on nutrition and hygiene and role-playing adverse situations help youth achieve these outcomes.

**Connecting** refers to the development of positive social behaviors, skills, and attitudes. Positive outcomes that fall under this area include quality relationships, the ability to build trust, and effective communication. Activities such as adult mentoring, positive peer interactions, and team-building exercises help youth achieve these outcomes.

**Leading** refers to the development of positive skills, attitudes, and behaviors around civic involvement and personal goal-setting. Beneficial outcomes that fall under this area include a sense of responsibility to oneself and others and the ability to articulate one’s personal values. Activities such as the opportunity to take a leadership role and participation in community service projects help youth achieve these outcomes.

## NOTES FROM WORKING IN THE FIELD

People and their signature practices come and go, but principles of effective youth development and youth leadership are constant. The following are suggested fundamentals at the heart of best practices necessary for youth-led activities and youth as leaders and decision-makers to be possible in programs:

- Buy-in at the highest level within the organization supporting youth development and youth leadership is essential;
- Competent, caring, connected adults who genuinely model principles of effective youth development and leadership, and demonstrate shared decision-making with youth working hands-on with youth participants and the program;
- Youth are valued, involved early in the planning process, have a seat at the decision-making table and share decision-making responsibility and power;
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are established and understood by all; a common goal, meaningful engagement, and purposeful work is primary;
- Young people are advancing in their skills and abilities in making complex decisions affecting themselves and impacting youth and their community.

## RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

Much of the literature on youth-led innovation after school can be characterized as aspirational and reports on promising practices rather than providing clear evidence of best practices and outcomes. What we do know from research and experience in the field is that engaging youth as leaders and in the decision-making process leads to decisions that are more responsive and appropriate to youths' needs and interests. Though further research is needed to determine what is most effective in engaging youth, the evidence strongly suggests the best way to ensure success is to include youth throughout the entire design, implementation, and evaluation of a program.

Meaningful youth engagement and participation involves recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of youth by providing opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them, at both individual and systemic levels (Community Crime Prevention Guide, 1996). Youth who participate in youth development and youth leadership experiences are more likely to do well in school, be involved in their community, and transition positively through adolescence to adulthood. Research also supports the movement's claims that in addition to benefits for young people and adults, institutions also benefit from youth involvement (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2001).

## CHALLENGES

There are some challenges to successfully engaging youth as leaders and decision-makers when implementing youth-led activities, especially when youth and adults are working together. One of the biggest challenges is the misperception adults and youth have of each other. Overcoming stereotypes of each other, by both youth and adults, is critical to supporting youth-adult partnerships and successful program implementation. With intentional training and dialogue about the types of misperceptions that may affect their work together, the challenges can be lessened dramatically.

Often, and mistakenly, the terms "youth development", "youth leadership", "youth engagement", "youth voice", "youth as decision-makers", and "youth empowerment" are used interchangeably. It is important to know and understand the difference between the elements and how each is applied. Additionally, knowing and understanding the differences between "forced youth participation", "limited youth involvement", and "true youth engagement" is essential (*See Appendix 3: Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation*) for greater detail.

There are other challenges to keep in mind such as making leadership appealing to youth rather than the perception that it's just more work for them. Also, transportation can be an obstacle as they are reliant on public transportation and their own two feet most often. There can also be a mismatch between expectations and skills for and between youth and adults, as well as not enough time or support for thorough dialogue to intentionally develop skills and knowledge of the process and decisions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Following are ten recommendations and successful strategies that will assist you in planning for a comprehensive youth development approach to offering and implementing your high school after school program.

### 1. Youth Development is the Philosophical Foundation for Programming

A working knowledge and an understanding of the principles of youth development is a must. This understanding includes the fact that youth development is not a component of the program, but rather the philosophical foundation and basis of operations.

### 2. Age and Stage Appropriate Programming

Staff are intentionally planning for and providing quality instruction, training, informal and formal learning activities that are appropriate for high school students. Staff members are appropriate adult mentors who build quality relationships, set high expectations, and clear standards while creating opportunities for meaningful engagement and age and stage appropriate responsibilities.

### 3. Organizational Leadership

Beliefs guide behaviors and attitudes shape actions. Youth engagement must be a priority of the organization and the leadership team. The commitment to and belief in youth development and leadership should have a focus on vision, learning and engagement rather than on rule-making, management, and enforcement.

### 4. Train All Youth and Staff in: Youth Development, Youth Leadership, Youth Participation, Youth Involvement, Youth Engagement, Youth Voice, and Youth Empowerment

While these terms are similar, each represents a unique element of the work you do with older youth in the after school program. Lead strategically, work collaboratively, and act intentionally when integrating these philosophies and approaches into your practice as a youth development specialist.

### 5. Full-Time Site Director

Having permanent staff is the most critical factor for creating the after school program's culture and climate. A full-time site director serves as the backbone of the program and as part of the school's leadership team: building relationships with key stakeholders across the program, during the school day and implementing the program during after school hours of operation. The site director must be a skilled facilitator, manager, and coordinator and be well trained in youth development and youth leadership. Programs that try to save money by hiring part-time leadership often find it is a more costly choice than thought, especially considering the workload, responsibilities, and deliverables of the position over the long-term.

### 6. Trained Staff Team

Hiring and retaining a staff team of competent, caring adults who model youth development and leadership is essential. In addition, it is critical to keep staff turnover to a minimum. Staff skills can be expanded through substantive training. Provide a variety of practical and diverse professional development opportunities to all levels of staff. Provide intentional training in all program areas.

### 7. Meaningful Engagement for All Youth

Young people functioning as competent citizens are capable and deserve a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. The goal is to facilitate movement on the continuum from youth participation to youth involvement to reaching youth engagement. Youth voice is encouraged and exhibited, which leads to youth buy-in, which leads to a successful program.



### **8. Youth Council (Student Leadership Advisory Board)**

Youth voice, shared leadership, and informed decision-making are vital elements. One avenue for learning and taking on the roles and responsibilities of leadership lies within the Youth Council. Students are more than ambassadors of the program; they plan, develop, implement, and evaluate activities and events. They advise and provide crucial feedback on program design and offerings. Having the Youth Council helps program participants take ownership and pride in their after school program. The Youth Council is formalized youth engagement.

### **9. Community-Based Service Learning**

One of the most powerful avenues for youth participation is identifying, planning, and implementing service learning projects that meet a need in the community. Hands-on, experiential learning allows youth the opportunity to build their capacity, develop skills, and increase knowledge as they apply these to real-world situations. Successful projects are intentionally tied to specific learning objectives, and many of the best are tied to several areas of study. This expands the impact projects have on learning and provides students with a deeper understanding of how different subjects are interrelated and apply to the real-world.

### **10. Concentrated Marketing Strategy**

Marketing is important to success in recruiting participants for the after school program. Flyers, posters, and announcements are created by program participants for distribution to the student body and for teachers to post in classrooms. Peer-to-peer marketing is the best strategy for older youth.

## **SHAPING THE FIELD OF AFTER SCHOOL**

There is growing widespread support for the intentional, purposeful, and meaningful engagement of young people as leaders and decision-makers in their after school programs. Youth are capable of making meaningful contributions and their voice is a necessary element of this youth engagement and leadership component. Meeting the priorities of the after school program should derive from the grass-roots level and stem from the needs of the youth in the program. While young people need guidance to initiate activities, their energy, fresh new ideas, creativity, perspectives, and their relevant knowledge about young people's needs and interests, must be acknowledged and nurtured. Youth-led activities, including Student Leadership Advisory Boards and Service Learning Clubs, have become a major pathway for supporting youth engagement, youth leadership, and youth voice in after school programs.

While research in the field shows the importance of examining outcomes related to youth development, youth engagement, youth leadership, and youth voice in after school programs, it is equally important to determine promising and successful practices to understand how such outcomes can be achieved. Addressing how each of these youth development practices are undertaken within an after school program lends itself to emerging and promising practices from the field. There is a lack of research and resources available specifically addressing these topics in the after school field and movement, especially pertaining to high school aged youth.

## **INFLUENTIAL LEADERS OF THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT**

The following individuals are renowned leaders, researchers, authors, and authorities. They are each pioneers and their independent work and contributions have left an indelible mark on the field. Staying abreast of their past work and current research will better assist you in being prepared for what is to come in the advancement of the field of after school as it pertains to youth development, youth leadership, and youth engagement. Integrating their research into your practice will set you apart from your peers.

**Karen J. Pittman**, President and CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment is a sociologist and recognized as the international leader of the youth development movement. She has made a career starting organizations and initiatives that promote youth development. Committed to increasing the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement in the United States, the Forum supports organizations and communities that invest in young people by promoting a "big picture" approach to planning, research, advocacy

and policy development among the broad range of national organizations that help communities invest in children, youth and families. A widely published author, Karen has written three books and dozens of articles on youth issues and is a regularly featured columnist in the youth development newspaper, Youth Today. ([www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org))

**Roger Hart**, sociologist, wrote a book called *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care* for UNICEF in 1997. This groundbreaking work put the work of young people and adult allies around the world in the context of a global movement for participation, offering needed guidance and criticism of many efforts. The "Ladder of Children's Participation," also called the "Ladder of Youth Participation," is one of many significant tools from the book. For an adaptation that closely aligns with work in after school check out Adam Fletcher and The Freechild Project. ([www.freechild.org](http://www.freechild.org))

**Peter Benson**, President and CEO of Minneapolis-based Search Institute, is one of the world's leading authorities on positive human development. Dr. Benson's international reputation in human development emerged in the 1990s through his innovative, research-based framework of Developmental Assets, the most widely recognized approach to positive youth development in the United States and, increasingly, around the world. His vision, research, and public voice have inspired a sea of change in research, practice, and policy. He is an accomplished author and researcher. ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org))

**Bonnie Bernard**, Senior Program Associate at WestEd is credited for her leading work in resiliency and prevention as one of three forces undergirding the shift from deficit-based prevention to asset-based youth development in the 1990s. Bernard's research of over 15 years documents both positive learning and behavioral outcomes when learning environment meet the developmental needs for belonging, respect, power and meaning among young people. During her career, she has also helped to design statewide and national prevention policy, has authored several groundbreaking books and written a nationally-acclaimed column in *Prevention Forum*, and is particularly known for her ability to integrate research across disciplines and to bridge policy with actual practice. Most recently, she has been recognized for introducing and conceptualizing Resilience Theory and its application. ([www.wested.org](http://www.wested.org))

**Robert Halpern**, Professor at the Erikson Institute for Graduate Study in Child Development in Chicago and a Faculty Associate at Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *The Means to Grow Up: Reinventing Apprenticeship as a Developmental Support in Adolescence* (Routledge, 2008), *Making Play Work: The Promise of After-School Programs for Low-Income Children* (Teachers College Press, 2003), *Fragile Families, Fragile Solutions: A History of Supportive Services for Families in Poverty* (Columbia University Press, 1999) and *Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty* (Columbia University Press, 1995), as well as numerous articles and chapters on the effects of poverty on children and families, and the role of services in poor families' lives. In recent years Dr. Halpern's research has focused on after-school and youth programs. His current work focuses on: the value of apprenticeship-like learning experiences during adolescence; understanding youth culture and culturally relevant programming. ([www.erickson.edu](http://www.erickson.edu))

## In Conclusion

What you have read is a high level account of the inner workings of the Jordan WRAP Program. What appears to be an overnight success has actually taken nearly five years of hard work. With much planning, success and failure a consistent theme of intentionality appeared, lending itself to becoming more than just a signature practice for the program, but also a promising practice for the field. The increasing recognition of the importance of youth development and leadership for all youth holds both promise and challenge in the after school field. By ensuring all youth have access to a quality after school program focused on youth development and leadership, Jordan WRAP is strategically working to meet the challenge.



## Developing Youth-Led Activities and Youth Leadership Councils – Case Study

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1: Jordan WRAP – Program Framework

### LB WRAP Program

#### Jordan WRAP

#### Program Components & Activities

The following table represents a high level summary of Jordan WRAP Program Components and respective Activities offered (but not limited to):

<b>Jordan WRAP</b>	
<b>PROGRAM COMPONENTS</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>
<b>Academic Improvement</b>	Homework Assistance / Tutorial CAHSEE SAT/ CST Credit Recovery Program
<b>Leadership &amp; Enrichment</b>	Student Leadership Advisory Board Service Learning Advisory Board Service Learning Xi Sisters Program Omega Brothers Program
<b>Recreation / Nutrition / Fitness &amp; Health</b>	Dance Fitness Nutrition Education Personal Hygiene First Aid Classes
<b>Enrichment – Disguised Learning</b>	Jewelry Making Scrap Booking Digital Media
<b>Career – Life After High School</b>	Life Skills College Tours Resume / Career / Skill Building
<b>Family Literacy</b>	Parent Activities
<b>Snack</b>	Nutrition and Nutrition Education

## **LB WRAP Program**

### **Jordan WRAP**

#### **Youth Leadership Programs / Youth Voice**

##### **Events & Activities Student Leadership Advisory Board puts on:**

- Pumpkin Carving Contest
- Thanksgiving Food Drives
- Holiday service projects
- Marketing Events/ Campaign
- Jordan Idol Competition
- So You Think You Can Dance Competition
- Easter Egg Hunts
- On Campus Service Projects

##### **Events & Activities of Xi and Omega Service Learning Programs**

- Adopt a Family from Long Beach City College Women's and Men's Re-entry Program
- Memorial Hospital: Toy Drive and Socks/Sandals Drive (serving ill children and homeless people in the Emergency Department of the hospital)
- Bingo at the Elderly Home
- College Tours (UC, CSU, and JC)
- Peer Tutoring & Study Hall
- Stepping / Fitness

##### **Events & Activities of O Ambassadors "One Love", Oprah Winfrey - Free the Children Angel Network**

- Fundraise money for East Asia Free the Children
- Community Service Projects on and off campus
- Planning their trip to China in Summer 2010

##### **Events and Activities of the Male Academy**

- Prevent violence on and off campus with peers
- Serve as peer mediators and conflict resolution counselors
- Provide outreach to surrounding middle and elementary schools
- Anti-Violence Service Projects in the community and surrounding neighborhoods
- College Tours (UC, CSU, JC)



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## **APPENDIX 2: Student Leadership Advisory Board – Leadership Descriptions**

### **LB WRAP Program**

#### **Jordan WRAP**

#### **Student Leadership Advisory Board – Job Descriptions**

##### **President**

- Presides over all Student Leadership Advisory Board Meetings
- Prepares the Agenda for each meeting
- Meets with the Advisor prior to each meeting
- Keeps all other officers and board members in order and quiet during meetings
- Can call special meetings with approval of the advisor
- Make sure all other officers are doing their jobs (checks in with everyone on the board)
- Makes sure everyone is abiding by the rules
- Promotes LB WRAP Program on Campus

##### **Vice President**

- Becomes acting President when the President is unable to fulfill his/her duties
- Responsible for overseeing all events put on by Student Leadership Advisory Board
- Is the lead facilitator for the LB WRAP Rules, helps to implement these rules, and maintain the rules

##### **Secretary**

- Keeps minutes of all meetings (types them up by next meeting and passes them out)
- Calls roll at all meetings - makes sure everyone has signed-in on the sign-in sheet
- Is responsible for updating and reminding board members of upcoming events
- Maintains a complete minute record for the semester
- Is responsible for signing people in on the attendance sheets at all events

##### **Treasurer**

- In charge of fundraisers
- Reports to the board about finances

##### **12th Grade Representative**

- Is responsible for marketing the LB WRAP Program among 12th graders
- Is responsible for signing up new 12th graders to the program
- Serves as the official representative for all 12th graders on campus
- Passes out flyers at lunch time and talks to Seniors who are interested in LB WRAP
- Participates in all Student Leadership Advisory Board meetings and all events
- Submits a weekly report to the board about what he/she is doing to involve 12th graders in the program

##### **11th Grade Representatives**

- Is responsible for marketing the LB WRAP Program among 11th graders
- Is responsible for signing up new 11th graders to the program
- Serves as the official representative for all 11th graders on campus
- Passes out flyers at lunch time and talks to Juniors who are interested in LB WRAP
- Participates in all Student Leadership Advisory Board meetings and all events
- Submits a weekly report to the board about what he/she is doing to involve 11th graders in the program

##### **10th Grade Representative**

- Is responsible for marketing the LB WRAP Program among 10th graders
- Is responsible for signing up new 10th graders to the program
- Serves as the official representative for all 10th graders on campus
- Passes out flyers at lunch time and talks to Sophomores who are interested in LB WRAP
- Participates in all Student Leadership Advisory Board meetings and all events

- Submits a weekly report to the board about what he/she is doing to involve 10th graders in the program

### **9th Grade Representative**

- Is responsible for marketing the LB WRAP Program among 9th graders
- Is responsible for signing up new 9th graders to the program
- Serves as the official representative for all 9th graders on campus
- Passes out flyers at lunch time and talks to Freshmen who are interested in LB WRAP
- Participates in all Student Leadership Advisory Board meetings and all events
- Will bring a report back to the board every week about what he/she is doing to involve 9th graders in the program

### **Communications Officer**

- Is responsible for making sure flyers are made to announce all upcoming events to student body
- Posts flyers around campus and puts flyers in teacher mailboxes
- Makes posters to post on building walls
- Informs student body of upcoming service hour opportunities
- Informs MR. Hodges of upcoming events and makes sure it does not conflict with any ASB activities
- Submits a weekly report to the board about your marketing efforts

### **ASB Representative**

- Serves as a liaison between the Student Leadership Advisory Board and the ASB Board
- Submits a report every week about what the ASB Board is doing
- Submits a report every week to ASB about what the Student Leadership Advisory Board is doing
- Informs the board of all upcoming activities
- Helps promote LB WRAP Programs with ASB Body
- Collaborates events between Student Leadership Advisory Board and the ASB Board

### **Xi Representative**

- Serves as a liaison between the Student Leadership Advisory Board and the Xi Sisters Program

### **Omega Representative**

- Serves as a liaison between the Student Leadership Advisory Board and the Omega Brothers program

### **O Ambassadors Representative**

- Serves as a liaison between the Student Leadership Advisory Board and the “One Love” O Ambassadors Program

### **Historian – Photo**

- Takes pictures at every meeting
- Takes pictures at all events
- Makes posters with pictures of LB WRAP

### **Historian – Video**

- Videotapes events and/or meetings (upon request)

### **Program Representative**

- Serves as the liaison between LB WRAP and the Student Leadership Advisory Board
- Submits a weekly report to the board about what the after school program is doing
- Submits a weekly report to the after school program about what the Student Leadership Advisory Board is doing
- Informs the board of all upcoming activities
- Helps promote LB WRAP Programs with student body
- Collaborates events between the Student Leadership Advisory Board and the after school program

### **Event Coordinator**

- Responsible for coordinating all events LB WRAP puts on

### **Board Member**

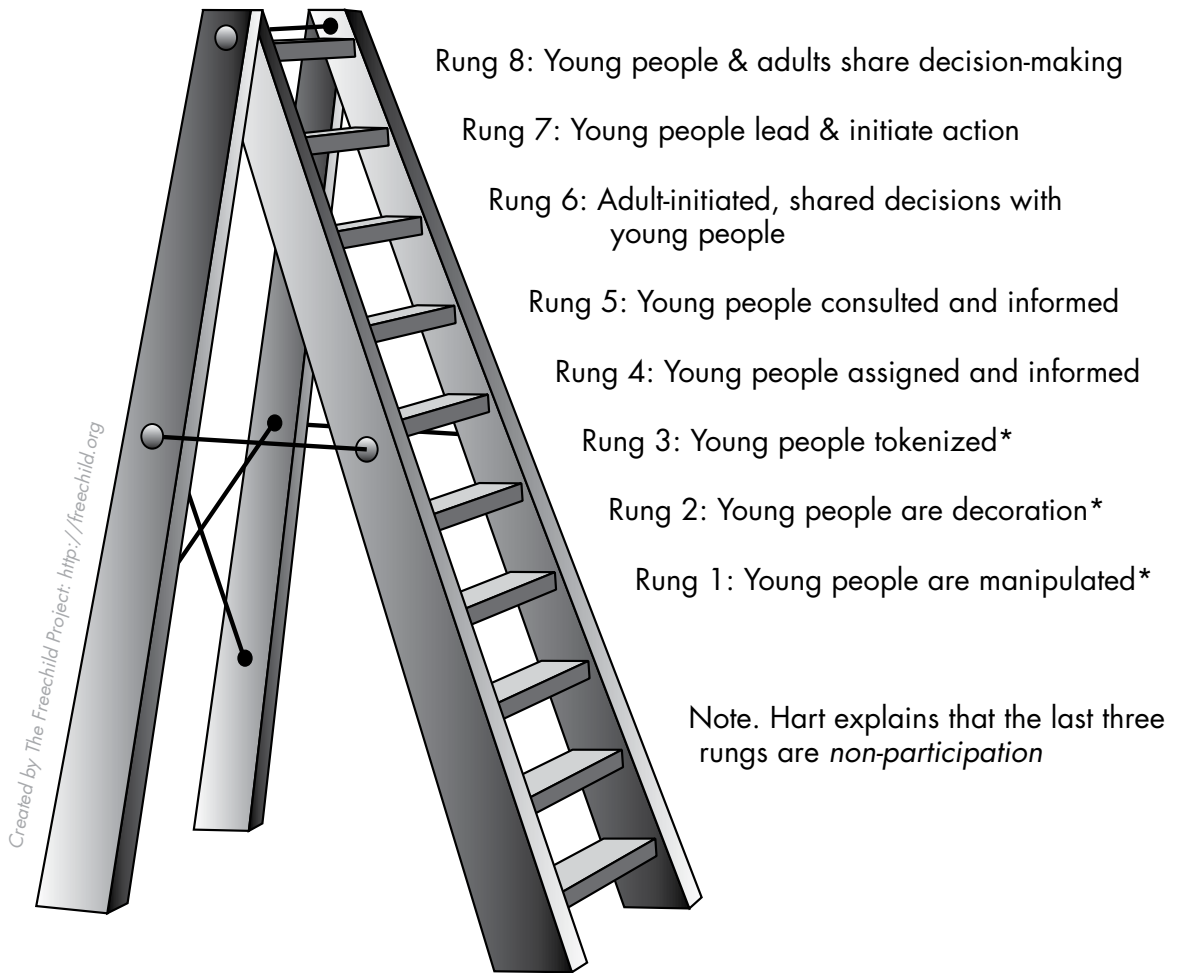
- Participates in all Student Leadership Advisory Board meetings
- Participates in all Student Leadership Advisory Board events
- Supports the officers in planning and marketing projects
- Helps to recruit students and helps the Communications Officer with promoting activities
- Brings in new members to the LB WRAP Program
- Helps in signing in students at all events



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### APPENDIX 3: Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

#### Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

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### About the Author

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### Join the Network Older Youth Committee

The Older Youth Committee is committed to amplifying the needs of older youth by supporting innovative best practices among middle and high school after school practitioners. Committee membership is free, open to all, and subject to your availability and inspiration. Committee meetings happen every two months via toll free conference call. Meet with other high school practitioners, program directors, and statewide leadership and learn how to more effectively serve high school youth. [www.afterschoolnetwork.org](http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org)

### Attend the Step Up High School Summit



Every November the Network hosts the Step Up High School After School Summit in San Diego. Program administrators, high school after school practitioners and high school principals are encouraged to attend. The Summit will focus on successful strategies for high school after school programs.

[www.afterschoolnetwork.org/step-up](http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/step-up)

### Add your program to the Network High School Program Directory

The High School Directory is a way for high school after school programs to locate other programs to network, share promising practices with programs of similar interest areas. Add your program to the directory and locate other programs with similar focus areas or geography.

[www.afterschoolnetwork.org/hs\\_directory](http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/hs_directory)



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