

CASE STUDY: THE SPOT PROGRAM AT RALPH J. BUNCHE ACADEMY

Ralph J. Bunche Academy is located in Oakland, California and is one of 52 high schools in Oakland Unified School District. It is a continuation high school that serves 258 students in grades 9 through 12. Fifty-nine percent of the school's student population are African Americans; 35% are Hispanic; 5% are Asian/Pacific Islander; and 2% are Caucasian.

Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) is the lead agency for the afterschool program at Ralph Bunche. The SPOT (Supporting Positive Opportunities for Teens) afterschool program gets the majority of its funding from the ASSETs 21st Century CLC grant. The program serves an average of 60-65 young people per day.

Introduction

This case study focuses on the efforts of the afterschool staff at Ralph Bunche Academy to respond to youth interest in acquiring job skills and the means to earn an income. *Project Mentor* is a new program offering vocational training and internship placements for seniors at the afterschool program. The program is designed to equip seniors with skills that help prepare them for life after high school. Within *Project Mentor*, youth conduct career research, participate in internships and community service, meet with mentors to develop career goals, and create career portfolios, complete with resumes, cover letters, and reference pages.

In addition to the *Project Mentor* component, the afterschool program offers a number of enrichment activities, including basketball, soccer, music and beats, urban art, cosmetology, hairstyling, and weight conditioning. The program also offers academic support, including tutoring and Cyber High, an online class format where youth can study, take classes and earn credits.

Challenge of Continuation High School Settings

In working to establish their program, the SPOT afterschool staff faced a number of challenges that are common to programs that operate within continuation high school settings. Unlike regular comprehensive high schools, Ralph Bunche did not have existing afterschool clubs in place, which meant afterschool staff did not have a base of youth from which to recruit. Though the school's attendance goal is 250, only about 100 youth actually attend on an average day, making the pool of youth they had to reach even smaller.



Additionally, many youth came to Ralph Bunche to get graduation credits and move on, resulting in a large turnover of young people. A number of youth had other obligations after the school day ended, including jobs and parental responsibilities. There were also concerns among youth that staying at their non-neighborhood afterschool program would subject them to crossing through different gang territories after dark.

Given the above challenges, afterschool staff knew that they needed to offer engaging learning opportunities if they were to attract youth to stay afterschool. They gave youth assessments to learn about their needs and interests and found that acquiring job skills and earning money were top priorities among many of them. Additionally, afterschool staff found out by word of mouth from recent graduates that many of them felt unprepared for life after high school.

Alignment with the School

Continuation schools are usually much smaller than comprehensive high schools. Thus, the afterschool program must be prepared to work with the school day in an integrated fashion. To be successful, afterschool staff must work closely with the school administration and personnel.

To enlist the support of the Ralph Bunche school administration, the afterschool staff drew up a proposal of the *Project Mentor* program and presented it to the principal. The principal was asked to agree to a number of terms listed in the proposal, including: making *Project Mentor* a requirement for graduation next year; referring 15 seniors to the program every marking period (6 weeks); allowing seniors to create and present a career portfolio as their senior project; and placing all short-day seniors into the 5th period *Project Mentor* program.

The afterschool staff's efforts to help youth with their homework served to strengthen relationships with the school day teachers. Afterschool staff worked closely and met frequently with the senior teacher and collaborated on the required senior projects. Afterschool staff also enlisted the support of the ROP (Regional Occupation Program) coordinator at the school, who provided them with contacts at local community-based organizations that would accept student interns.

Partnering with Community Organizations and Role Models

Continuation high schools serve a large number of youth who are disengaged from their communities, including organizations and positive role models. The role of afterschool programs can include building bridges between youth and their communities, particularly those settings that offer work experience and employment.

The afterschool staff conducted outreach to community-based organizations to place youth in internship positions at their sites. Through meetings and email communications, the afterschool staff partnered with Youth Radio, The Scotland Center, and Oakland Parks and Recreation. Fifteen youth from the first cohort of *Project Mentor* interned at Defremery Park in Oakland, where they organized and staffed community events. *Project Mentor* staff also worked with Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) to establish youth internships at elementary afterschool programs.



Engaging Youth

As stated above, high school age youth are difficult to attract to programs afterschool, especially youth in continuation high schools.

To recruit youth to *Project Mentor*, the SPOT afterschool staff worked closely with the administration and teachers. They conducted classroom presentations and a school-wide assembly to introduce the program. When word spread among youth that the program was offering jobs, many students signed up.

The SPOT afterschool staff implemented the *Project Mentor* component in January 2010.

Over the course of four months, youth in the program created career portfolios, conducted job research, met with their mentors to receive feedback on their portfolios, and visited local businesses relating to their area of interest. Youth also were required to successfully complete 3 job applications, participate in mock interviews, and develop a 2-year plan for their future career goals.

Graduating seniors participating in *Project Mentor* were required to complete a few additional tasks. They presented a PowerPoint presentation of their career plan as their senior project and participated in college enrollment and scholarship workshops.

In the third week of the program, youth were matched up with mentors who worked in a profession of interest to the youth. Mentors included a music producer, a registered nurse, a case manager, and a social worker.

Those youth who showed “outstanding performance” (consistent program attendance and participation) were awarded a hands-on, paid internship. The SPOT afterschool staff worked to match youth with organizations related to their interests. Youth were also given the opportunity to participate in community service activities to gain important hands-on job skills.

Early Results of *Project Mentor*

The *Project Mentor* program was a very successful component of the larger SPOT afterschool program. Fifty youth graduated from the program in the first 6 months. Youth left the program with new job skills, employment and community service experience, and an increased awareness of available choices and the benefits of long-term planning. Youth also left with career portfolios complete with a resume, cover letter, and references, a 2-year action plan, a letter grade and 2.5 credits, and the successful completion of 3 job applications.

Project Mentor was so successful that several youth who completed the program wanted to come back and serve as a mentor or big brother/big sister to new students. Teachers who saw the value of *Project Mentor* began working with youth who were not enrolled in the afterschool program to create resumes and cover letters as part of their classroom work. Thanks to a strong relationship between the senior teacher and the afterschool staff, the principal agreed to host a school-wide community day for seniors to present their career plans. A video on the *Project Mentor* program was aired at this school-wide event. It can be viewed online at:

<http://www.temescalassociates.com/resources/hsresourcescontinuation.asp>

It was the afterschool staff’s goal to incorporate the job training and career exploration components into the school culture by making it a graduation requirement. Afterschool staff are currently working with the principal to institutionalize the *Project Mentor* component by including it in the registration packet and master curriculum.

Next year (2010-11), *Project Mentor* will consist of six weeks of job training and career exploration and six weeks of full-time internships. Afterschool staff also plan to partner with the Public Health Department to set up 20 internships for Ralph Bunche youth.



This case study was written by Sam Piha and Laura Karosic of Temescal Associates (www.temescalassociates.com) The authors would like to thank the Partnership for Children and Youth and the William T. Grant Foundation for their support in this work.

Photos courtesy of the SPOT afterschool program, managed by Bay Area Community Resources, and located at Ralph J. Bunche Academy High School.