



The Boys & Girls Clubs launched its College Bound program last month with a week-long “boot camp” — called the Jumpstart Conference — for 45 incoming ninth-graders.

Youth get a jump-start on high school

New program aims to address low high school graduation rates

By Chris Canter

When the vast majority of youth living in communities served by the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula are not graduating from high school, something is clearly wrong.

“We as an organization have a responsibility to help do something about it,” said Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula Executive Director Peter Fortenbaugh.

In August, the organization launched its College Bound program with a week-long “boot camp” — called the Jumpstart Conference — for 45 incoming ninth-graders. The five-day learning event was rotated among the organization’s three clubhouses.

At the conference, Sean Mendy, who oversees the College Bound program, said he had overheard a conversation some teens were having at our East Palo Alto clubhouse. “It really upset me,” he said. “A tenth-grader was describing his freshman year to some eighth-grade students and it became clear that he had no idea what it takes to be successful in high school, let alone how to get to college.

The student said he didn’t like a teacher, so he never went to, or prepared for, classes, nor would he complete any of the assignments.

“He thought he had ‘won’ the battle, even though he received an F,” Mr. Mendy said. “Now he has to repeat the already remedial course as a sophomore.”

Mr. Mendy later talked with a group of juniors and seniors at Menlo-Atherton High School about their experiences in their freshman year. “The kids had been moderately successful in high school, but were not on track to go to college,” Mr. Mendy said. “But they hadn’t dropped out so their input was valuable.

“We talked about what would have made their first day, week, quarter, and semester run more

About the author: Chris Canter is director of development for the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula, which has clubhouses in Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Redwood City.

smoothly. We also talked about logistical issues such as working out class schedules in advance, as many of them missed two or more classes their first day because they had to wait in the administrative office for an updated schedule.”

They also talked about skills development, such as learning how to study and take notes. Mr. Mendy asked them if, as incoming ninth-graders, they would attend workshops to help develop these skills. They’re response was an enthusiastic “yes.” Mr. Mendy recruited his colleagues and made the workshop happen.

The students participated in activities focused on note-taking, time management, communication, advocacy, and the importance of having adults as allies.

“Jumpstart was cool because it was an easy and fun way to get ready for high school,” said participant Jerry Coneal. “Jumpstart helped me know what to expect.”

Jerry is now in his third week at Menlo-Atherton High School and says he has already been able to apply many of the skills he learned during Jumpstart.

Mr. Mendy was pleased. “Jumpstart was a great success for our organization,” he said. “As the week went on you could feel the youth starting to buy in to the idea that they don’t have to be a statistic.

“They are learning that they can graduate. They just have to put in hard work and take advantage of the resources they have all around them. Now we have a large group of high school freshmen

who are motivated to graduate and know that we will support them in any way we can.”

Mr. Fortenbaugh called College Bound and Jumpstart “an extremely important initiative.”

For more information about the programs or the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula, visit www.bgcp.org or call (650) 646-6128. ■

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