



Youth Get a Jump-Start toward High School and College

New Boys & Girls Club Program Aims to Address Low Graduation Rate

“When the vast majority of youth from your community are not graduating from high school, something is clearly wrong and we as an organization have a responsibility to help do something about it.” said Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula Executive Director Peter Fortenbaugh. The Club recently launched its new College Bound program, kicking the effort off with a week-long “boot camp” for 45 rising ninth graders..

The Club’s High School Jumpstart Conference was a five day learning event that took place across the organization’s clubhouses.

“I overheard a conversation some teens were having at our East Palo Alto clubhouse that really upset me.” said Sean Mendy who over sees the program. A 10th grader was describing his freshman year to some 8th 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. One story he told was about a relationship he had with a teacher. He said he didn’t like the teacher, so he never went to or prepared for class, nor would he complete any of the assignments. He thought that by doing this he had “won” the battle, even though he received an F and now has to repeat the already remedial course as a sophomore.”

Following this, Mendy talked to a group of juniors and seniors at Menlo Atherton High School about their experiences their freshman year. “The kids had been moderately successful in high school, but were not on track to go to college. But they hadn’t dropped out so their input was valuable” Mendy said. “We talked about what would have made their first day, week, quarter, and semester run more smoothly” he continued. “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 schedules.”

They also talked about supporting the skills development such as learning how to study or properly taking notes. At one point, Mendy asked them if, as rising 9th graders, they would have been open to attending some workshops to help them develop these skills. They’re response was an enthusiastic “yes!” Mendy recruited his colleagues and brought it to reality.

During the August conference, 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. Jumpstart helped me know what to expect when I start high school” said participant Jerry Coneal. Coneal 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.

Mendy was pleased. “Jumpstart was a great success for our organization. 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,” he said. “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.” Mendy continued.

“This is an extremely important initiative” said Fortenbaugh. Many of the children from the neighborhoods we serve are failing in school and not graduating from high school. A recent study by the California Department of Education found that far more youth than anticipated are dropping out of school. They said about 25% - but we know that between 60-70% of the kids from the Peninsula’s low-income areas are not graduating which results in multitude of societal problems that affect all of us. We are committed to helping to address this, and the Club’s new College Bound program and Jumpstart are part of this commitment.” .