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"The FYI team has been so helpful and supportive in what we are doing...your input, passion, direction, and mentoring has been a big part of leading the way with us."

Debbi Herr, Black Oak Mine Unified District

A FORWARD-LOOKING CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DISTRICT MOBILIZES COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR YOUTH

GEORGETOWN DIVIDE READY BY 21 COALITION

Black Oak Mine, California

"The partnerships that have flowed from that meeting have been creative and broad. The resources we bring in are not just for the schools; they are for children and families. And other sectors are bringing in matching funds—it has truly been amazing."

Debbi Herr
Director, School Health and Safety
Black Oak Mine Unified School District



Students and adults participate in forums to discuss the needs of youth in Georgetown Divide.

Case Study #1 in the Ready by 21™ Change Makers in Action Series
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August, 2006

Activating the Community Vision:

“All students will be healthy, responsible, productive citizens, skilled workers, lifelong learners, and contributors to their local and world communities.”

The California Gold Rush of 1849 provides the historic claim to fame for the towns of Georgetown, Cool, Garden Valley, Kelsey, Greenwood, Pilot Hill, and Volcanoville that are spread across the craggy hills above the middle and south forks of the American River. But this cluster of former mining towns known as the Georgetown Divide is working to launch a reputation of another kind. They want to be known as one of the best places to raise healthy, successful and connected children.

In the fall of 2005, the leaders of the consolidated school district known as the Black Oak Mine Unified School District reviewed data on their students and concluded that they were not fulfilling the broad vision they and the broader Georgetown Divide community had set for their students. They decided that it was time for action. District leaders knew they would need to develop strong, cross-sector partnerships and collaborations. But they also knew that they lacked the traditional “deep pocket” partners that are found in large cities.

This is the story about how key movers in a rural community pushed beyond stereotypes to engage a *broad base of stakeholders* in order to activate their vision and leverage a range of previously untapped resources. Georgetown Divide’s Gold Rush past provides a useful analogy for describing the concerns of the district.

The Georgetown Divide is a middle class bedroom community, boasting high graduation and standardized testing pass rates. Unsurprisingly, a solid core of Divide youth have struck “gold” in terms of their educational, social and developmental supports, and firmly look to be on a path to success. Still, for a significant portion of young people, prospects have not panned out. They seem to be experiencing trouble in one or more key areas.

Case in point. While many Georgetown Divide youth report feeling supported by caring adults, the percentage of youth reporting support decreases as youth get older (from seven out of ten 5th graders to less than half of 11th graders). Only one in ten 11th graders report having meaningful opportunities to participate in their school and community. One-third, on the other hand report experiencing

harassment, including bullying and harassment based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

The district wanted to change these and other youth indicators by defining two terms—“safe” and “healthy”—under the broadest tent possible, and by rallying the broadest group of community stakeholders possible.

“At first our response to the Ready by 21TM Challenge was, ‘build the broader capacity of the community?’ Given our rural community, an initial scan yielded few partners. But broadening our thinking about who the stakeholders are made us realize we have all the horsepower we need.”

*Rob Schamberg, Superintendent,
Black Oak Mine USD*

A \$3 Million Opportunity to Leverage Big Picture Change for Children & Youth

In the fall of 2005, the Black Oak Mine USD was awarded a 3-year federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant set at \$1 million per year. Guided by the vision statement developed in 2001, the district knew they could not build on that vision alone and wanted to build a broad-based set of stakeholders to put that vision into action. The Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant created an opportunity to set a large table that could connect various efforts in the community.

To do that, district leaders engaged a range of stakeholders—school and non-school based, local business owners and parents, district staff and community leaders—in strategic planning around how to best deliver the vision.

In April 2006, nearly 100 individuals participated in an intensive 2-day strategic planning session called the *Making It Happen* conference. The group examined the existing vision against their own perceptions and first-pass data estimating how well young people on the Divide—across age groups and

“The evolution of the coalition thus far has resulted in a stronger community. The process has allowed us to all work together quickly, strongly, effectively, and in a way that is ultimately sustainable.”

*Kyleen Cornell, Community Member,
Georgetown Divide Ready by 21 Coalition*

broad outcomes—are doing. From there, stakeholders fine-tuned the big picture goal, divided into working groups, and made plans to build partnerships and target additional resources to fill in the gaps toward actualizing the big picture goals.

Moving Beyond Single Event Buzz to Create Long-Term Change

The work begun at the *Making It Happen* conference netted strong results that have reached beyond single event buzz. The work done over the course of those two days—affirming the vision, assessing existing activities against key outcomes, and identifying working groups to address specific issues—laid the foundation for several new efforts and provided renewed energy for existing initiatives. The District credits the rallying of a broad base of community stakeholders as a critical piece of the momentum since April. Debbi Herr, the District's Director of School Health and Safety, says, "The partnerships that have flowed from that meeting have been creative and broad. The resources we bring in are not just for the schools; they are for children and families. And other sectors are bringing in matching funds—it has truly been amazing."

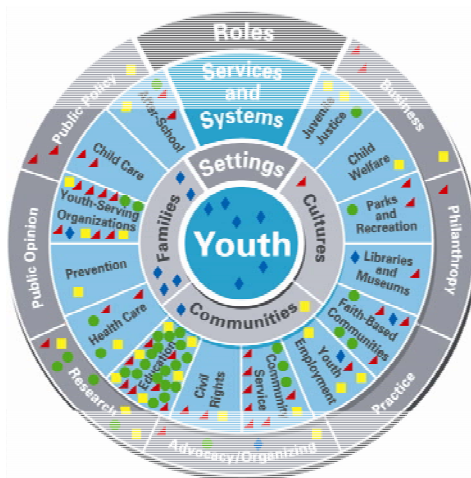
Community stakeholders have emerged from all corners—the local business sector, churches, social service agencies, school district staff, parents and youth themselves—to rally around an actionable vision for youth. A vision that could have been championed and owned if only the school district was embraced by the entire community—for every young person at every stage of development. Taking the time to build a deep bench of players and engage them as the strategic planning process moves forward has given the Georgetown Divide Ready by 21 Coalition the currency it needs to leverage key opportunities and incubate creative partnerships.

The working groups that have emerged from the *Making It Happen* conference have been meeting ever since April, identifying critical areas for engaging parents and youth, attracting new resources while leveraging existing ones, and bringing in more capacity to address out-of-school time. The strength of these working groups is that they are intentionally cross-sector, and benefit from the diverse perspectives to be found across arenas.

While working groups have been divided by age group focus (0-5; 5-10; 11-14; 15 and up), Debbi Herr and a cross-sector steering committee are there to make sure that these teams address

cross-cutting issues such as transportation and communicate overlapping efforts with each other. A deeper look inside the working groups demonstrates the positive energy around the vision that has swept the community. The 0-5 group, known as Divide Ready by 5, has focused on increasing parent training in advocacy, and has also sparked the formation of a cooperative pre-school. The Ready by Ten (focused on ages 6-10) working group has directed its energies toward creating a matrix for all the services available for this age group and promoting family literacy opportunities in their community.

The 11-15 workgroup—self-named Future Inspiration—is also making great strides towards their ultimate goal, originally articulated by a Georgetown Divide student, that "students will feel safe and socially and academically confident." In their last workgroup meeting, a panel of local high school students joined the discussion to help the group define their goals more specifically, determine what their goals mean to students, and identify specific steps that would help them achieve their goals. At this meeting and in other steps along the way, young people's participation has been critical.



Engaging the Full Spectrum of Stakeholders

While educators were the most heavily represented group, they were intentional in targeting a wide range of partners and pleased with the breadth of the response. The Coalition has brought faith-based organizations, community services, juvenile justice and recreation programs together with families, policy makers and businesses and has engaged all levels of leaders:

executives ■ managers front-line workers
youth and families

Challenge

- *When the school district is the biggest employer in a community with few other institutions to serve children and youth, is it possible to build sustained community capacity to activate a common vision?*

Solutions

- *Use new dollars to bring diverse players under one big tent.*
- *Invite unusual players to the table- from realtors to retirees*
- *Build in structures to move beyond single events to engage ongoing work groups from the beginning*

Results

- *Renewed energy around the vision has sparked creative partnerships*
- *New cross-sector partnerships have netted new dollars and leveraged existing ones*

Additionally, this subgroup is working towards building more out-of-school time capacity through planning for a Boys & Girls Club in the area—an effort to leverage the pending after-school funding coming from California's Proposition 49 legislation.

The Coalition's initial outreach work to get the community taking a common vision has made it easier to ensure that students and parents are engaged in the discussions about the design of the new Club—a critical component of successful, sustained change for children and youth.

The efforts and accomplishments of these working groups are a testament to the coordination and cooperation of services and supports from across the entire Divide community. Since April, the horsepower of the Georgetown Divide is increasing rapidly, and positive results are beginning to roll in.

The energy around having everyone from the realtor to the parent, the service agency director to the principal, the retiree to the student come up with creative solutions to long-term problems is helping the Divide reach its goal of increasing long-term change capacity in the school district, and among families and community groups.

What are the Next Steps for the Divide?

The Coalition will continue to leverage existing resources and find new ones to spark changes in the landscape of what's available for children and youth on the Divide. As next steps, parent and youth engagement will be critical. To build on this essential element for change, the community has invested in training cohorts of youth and adults in the Youth Development Institute training—a 4-day training and coaching model that provides community members with the tools and framework for increasing opportunities for positive youth development in school and in the community. Site-based teams will be rolling out action plans to increase these opportunities and positively shape the environments in which students live and learn.

Community collaboration will be critical to the future prospects of the Divide as it builds an infrastructure to support its youngest generation.

Debbi Herr reflects on the challenge: "It has become very clear to me that, while our school district has been very successful at getting funding to support our students, ongoing collaboration with community partners is essential for sustaining our efforts."

Behind the Scenes Partnership with the Forum

The Forum works with cities and states around the country that are undertaking the Ready by 21™ Challenge to ensure that all youth are ready for college, work and life by age 21. To support these efforts, the Forum provides a range of supports. Key supports provided to the Georgetown Divide (Black Oak Mine) Ready by 21 Coalition:

Idea Immersion. Sensing a good fit, the Georgetown Divide team applied to be a part of a Ready by 21™ Learning Group and attended a 2-day meeting that introduced them to the menu of Ready by 21™ ideas, tools and strategies as well as to other change makers.

Fundraising support. The Forum team helped the BOM district write the proposal that funded their coalition building work and offset the Forum's costs.

Coaching. The Forum provided intensive coaching to the coordinator as she came on board, supporting her as she made the ideas her own. The coordination team continues to use regular check-in calls as a way to keep their tools sharp and their thinking out-of-the box.

Customized capacity-building tools. The Forum prepared a customized training guide for the strategic planning facilitators that allowed them to engage unconventional champions.

On-site facilitation. The Forum trained a local team to assist in facilitating the kick off event and worked side by side with the community coordinator and facilitators to make the *Making It Happen* planning meeting a success.

Want to Learn More?

Contact The Ready by 21™ Team at the Forum: youth@forumfyi.org or Debbi Herr, Black Oak Mine Unified School District: dherr@bomusd.k12.ca.us
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