

The Oakland Alliance

Overview Brief for the Grad Nation Action Forum

September 2009

Collaborative Overview

Statement of Purpose

The Oakland Alliance began as a loose network of initiatives, many proposed by 41 mayor-initiated task forces in 2006. Our relationship with America's Promise began upon receipt of our America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Summit grant and was subsequently strengthened at the APA Featured Community Action Forum in September 2008, where 12 Summit grantee cities were identified as target communities for increased Alliance support. APA's support has provided Oakland with an incentive to strengthen and align a multitude of important initiatives and projects currently underway in Oakland, such as our work on dropout recovery, teacher diversity, school-based health centers, and many other initiatives.

Structure & Governance

- The Office of the Mayor is the designated lead of the Dropout Prevention Summit, and Oakland Alliance efforts and is strongly supported by the United Way of the Bay Area.
- The Alliance is a very broad collaborative that includes the Mayor, the school district, the Community Task Forces, State Farm, United Way, the Youth Council, Youth Together, All City Council, Emiliano Zapata Street Academy, Teach Tomorrow in Oakland, Oakland Parks and Recreation, parent organizations, businesses, Oakland Natives Give Back, representatives from various higher education institutions, adult education, and others.
- The mayor's office is beginning regular meetings with youth service providers that are funded through Measure Y, Healthy Families, Alameda County First 5, the Oakland Unified School District, Restorative Justice, the Office of Parks and Recreation, REACH Learning Center, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other Oakland's Promise participants.

About Our Work

The Oakland Alliance's strategic goals are:

- Ensure schools are utilized as centers of community life
- Increase recruitment, support and retention of permanent, diverse and effective local teachers
- Improve high school graduation rates and reduce truancy
- Ensure that parents and adult mentors are engaged in the education system
- Ensure school learning environments are positive for and respond to the needs of all students
- Provide every young person opportunities for civic engagement and promote youth leadership on policy development
- Change federal, state, and local policies that are contrary to the goals of "Grad Nation"

The focus areas for our work include:

- Involving many community organizations in providing recognition and rewards for perfect attendance.
- Reducing teacher turnover through local, diverse recruitment and support.
- Youth voice and policy leadership: The Oakland Alliance is ensuring youth voice through the Youth Task Force, the Youth Commission, Youth Radio, Youth Together, Libre, Leadership Excellence, All-City Council, and many other formal and informal networks. Youth will have a leadership role in the upcoming Dropout Prevention Summit.
- National, state and local policy change to improve the city and state's capacity to increase high school retention and graduation and post-secondary readiness rates.

Key initiatives and programs include:

- **Oakland Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit** (November 14, 2009): The summit is intended to highlight the initiatives we have already undertaken, combat several deep issues that affect dropout, including policies that have the unintended consequence of encouraging students to cut school and/or drop out, and expand our initiatives and our coordination of them.
- **Health Care and Family Support:** Elev8 is funded by Atlantic Philanthropies to provide integrated services in middle schools; currently the initiative is opening school health clinics and family support centers at most of the middle schools in the city.
- **Small Schools Initiative:** This includes the model provided by the Oakland Street Academy and the more recent initiative supported by the Gates Foundation, Oakland Community Organizations, BACES, and others to create many smaller, more personalized schools.
- **Attend and Achieve Campaign:** This campaign is focused on inviting young people who are not attending school to return. There is a special focus on young people reentering from juvenile hall. Activities include calling non-attending students; truancy walks; rewards and recognition for perfect attendance; Back to School Rallies; and workshops cosponsored by Oakland Natives Give Back, the mayor, school districts, and others.
- **Community Schools and Community as a School:** We are working to expand the "schools as hubs" approach by expanding afterschool, summer enrichment, college prep, and career prep programs. With \$83 million from the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY), this initiative leveraged state funds to support community non-profit agency services at school sites during the after-school hours and summer months. We are linking this to education and service learning programs in the parks and other venues.
- **Parent Engagement Summit:** Oakland is one of seven cities receiving support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (through APA) to host a parent engagement summit.

- **Other Initiatives:**
 - Teach Tomorrow in Oakland: The goal is to recruit, prepare and support diverse, permanent, and local teachers (2.1 million dollar federal grant received recently).
 - HOPE Program: The goal is to ensure that every high school graduate enters college or the workforce upon graduation.
 - Youth leadership to end gang conflict, promote college prep curriculum for all, and encourage teacher evaluations
 - Policy leadership on such issues as grade retention and grading policies, ending barriers to a diverse teaching force, inappropriate early grade education, and others

Resources Needed to Bring Our Work to Scale

- Staff: One FTE to serve as the convener for the Oakland Alliance; one FTE to organize the “Rewards and Recognitions” Campaign to encourage perfect attendance; one FTE to expand innovative youth-led engagement strategies such as Libre.
- Informational Resources: Resources to prepare a comprehensive guide of services, so that young people and adults can take advantage of more that is available; information regarding a modern curriculum that is tailored and relevant to urban communities – Oakland in particular.
- Other Resources: Office space for the Oakland Promise Alliance; resources for a larger space for the Summit; transportation/ bus tokens and incentives to assist with school attendance; support for a mini-Danish Learning Lab process to allow local research on developmentally appropriate educational practices.

Questions & Challenges for Consideration

1. To what extent have other cities eliminated some of the policy barriers noted in “Grad Nation,” such as grade retention and grading policies?
2. Are there other cities that are successfully working on creating genuine teacher diversity, in spite of the barriers created by credentialing laws?
3. Have other cities been successful in graduating students with the most serious practical problems, such as homeless youth, foster youth, incarcerated youth, and so on?
4. Are there success stories for retention of students in traditional school settings? Is there a way to ensure that students who are moved from traditional schools are still able to receive a high school diploma on time?
5. Have people found successful tracking systems to ensure that children do not fall through the cracks?
6. How are other cities creating “community schools” or “schools as hubs?”



Appendix A: Oakland Alliance Member List

Convener: Kitty Kelly Epstein, Office of the Mayor (Mayor Ron V. Dellums)

Member Organizations

All-City Council (youth council)
American Academy of Pediatrics
Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bay Area
Catholic Charities of the East Bay
Department of Human Services (Oakland)
Full Vision Arts Foundation
Holy Names University
Jumpers R Us
Laney College
Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute
Oakland Alliance of Community Partnerships
Oakland Moving Forward Education Task Force
Oakland Unified School District
Port of Oakland
State Farm
UC Davis (local 4-H affiliate)
United Way of the Bay Area
West Oakland Project Area Committee (WOPAC)
Youth Together
Oakland Department of Park and Recreation
Oakland Natives Give Back
Teel Family Foundation
Oakland Emiliano Zapata Street Academy
Teach Tomorrow in Oakland

Appendix B: Demographics & Statistics, Oakland Unified School District

- 38,852 students in approximately 138 schools (2007-08)ⁱ
- 67% of students are economically disadvantaged
- 31% are English Language Learners
- Ethnicities: 37% African American; 34% Hispanic/Latino; 16% Asian; 7% White
- Graduation rate: 50.5% in 2004-05ⁱⁱ

ⁱ 2008-2009 OUSD Parent Guide, <http://webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us/docs/30850.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Swanson, Christopher B., *Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap* (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center)