

# Youth Development in School Health Centers

## School Health Centers in Alameda County

School health centers (SHCs) are both clinics and also places for students to experience positive youth development opportunities. Successful SHCs go beyond co-locating services on a school site; they have trusting and collaborative relationships with youth, families, schools, health providers, and the community.

Our network of 29 SHCs approach young people holistically, offering integrated health and wellness services that include medical, dental, behavioral health, health education, and youth development. In the SHCs, youth experience authentic relationships with health providers and develop agency over their own health and life-style decisions.

## Why Youth Development in School Health Centers?

When young people thrive, communities thrive. School health centers (SHCs) play a vital role in supporting a student's healthy development by providing a safe environment with caring adults and opportunities for participation in authentic leadership and skill-building experiences.

The extensive research around positive youth development pulls from fields of resiliency, human ecology, prevention, developmental assets, and, more recently, expanded

learning.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that engaging youth in planning and leading programs is a best practice because it not only supports positive development, but also improves programs and increases participation. Our experience working with youth in the school health centers echoes these findings – authentic engagement strengthens SHCs while enhancing the personal growth of the youth involved.

## Our Approach

Our school health centers support the healing, capacity, and action of youth to promote positive, youth-driven change through research-based services, opportunities, and supports for:

- Emotional and physical safety
- Supportive relationships with adults and peers
- Meaningful youth involvement
- Skill building and mastery
- Community Involvement

SHCs are very intentional about incorporating the ideas and experiences of youth themselves in shaping programs and services to meet their needs. Within this approach, the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities has developed a model to guide SHCs in designing programming that provides multiple opportunities for students to engage based on their needs and capacity at the time.



SHC programs help youth develop critical thinking skills and enhance their capacity to advocate for their own health and the health of their schools and communities, specific programs include:

- Youth Advisory Boards
- Youth leadership and advocacy programs, for example, youth action research teams and civic engagement
- Peer Health Education programs where students learn about an individual, community or environmental health topic and conduct outreach to their peers
- Mentorships and internships

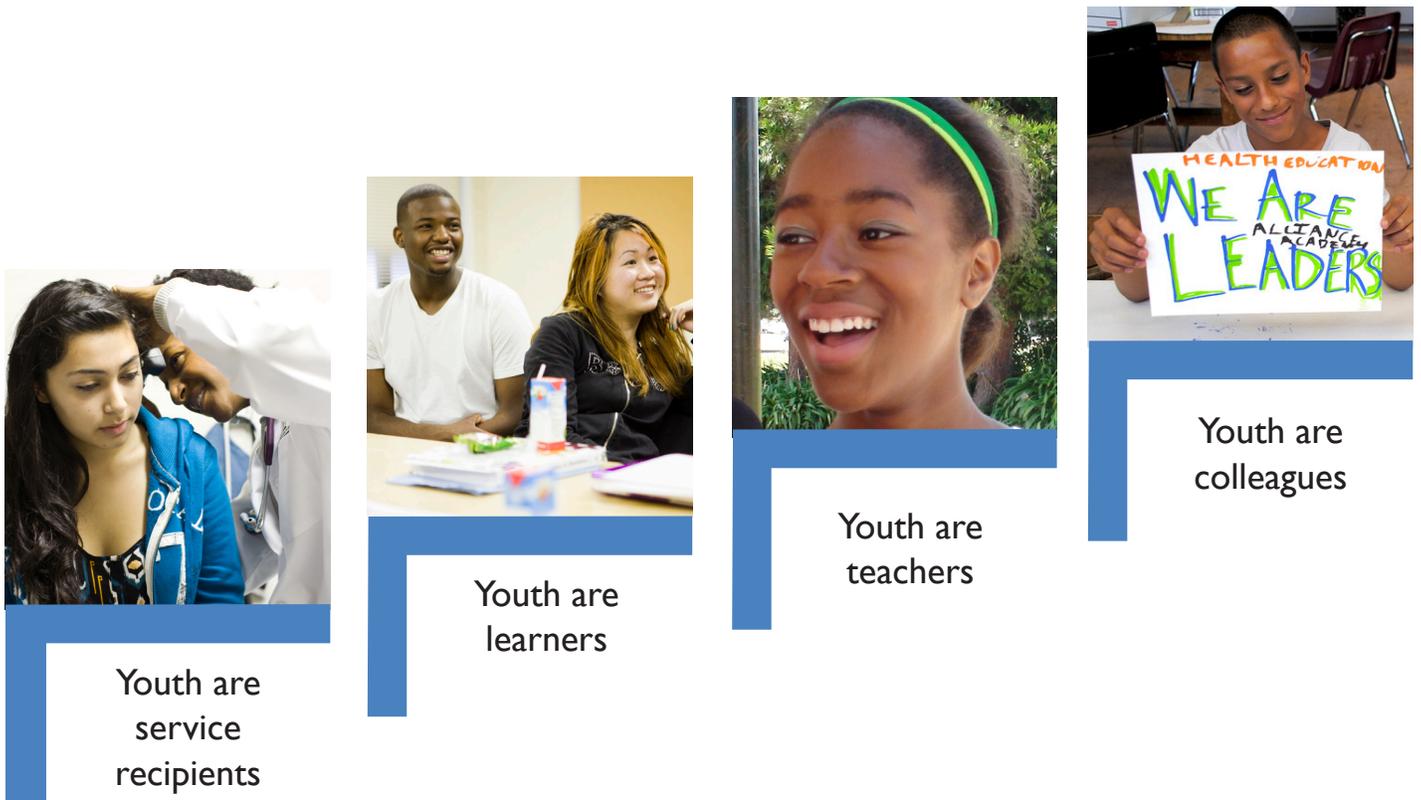
## Highlights

At McClymonds High School, the Chappell Hayes School Health Center is part of a larger McClymonds Youth and Family Center (MYFC), run by the lead agency Alternatives in Action. In addition to the comprehensive SHC run by Children’s Hospital Oakland, MYFC has a learning center with new computers, a dance studio, a digital recording studio, and spaces for meetings, recreation, and informal gatherings. According to Kharyshi Wiginton, the MYFC’s Youth Leadership Coordinator, “One of the cool things about youth in our programs and at

McClymonds is that they get so much more than just a basic education. They’re really going to gain life skills, and they’re going to get extra love and support.”

MYFC’s commitment to youth leadership is apparent everywhere – from the youth-designed spaces, to the peer mentors, to the leadership group Youth Organizing and Leadership Opportunities, better known as YOLO (which is also a play on the hip-hop motto “you only live once”). YOLO nurtures a student’s leadership and creativity to tackle challenges in their school and surrounding neighborhood.

**Figure I. Student Engagement Continuum**



In 2012, YOLO youth designed and launched the “It Stops With Me” campaign to end violence, drug abuse, and family dysfunction in their community. They opened the campaign with a rally in the community. Students marched alongside school board members and local politicians, carrying signs and wearing T-shirts colored orange for personal power and blue for truth. YOLO youth and McClymonds’ alumni addressed several hundred people at the rally, sharing their personal stories and pledging “It Stops With Me.” The rally launched a week of activities, including a dinner with community leaders, a candlelight vigil for family members lost to violence, and an election forum. YOLO and their campaign to end violence continues today, with creative youth-run activities such as a photo campaign, peace festivals, and a “mock tale” party to talk about the negative effects of drugs and alcohol and how to party safely with alternatives for having fun.

## Youth-Led Planning

Youth engagement was an important piece of the planning of a new comprehensive health and wellness center being built by San Leandro Unified School District in partnership with the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC).

With the guidance of CHSC staff, a group of San Leandro high school youth learned about and administered



a health needs assessment. Over the course of a semester, the group created and collected surveys from 932 students, 319 families, and 104 school staff, and facilitated classroom discussions and focus groups with peers. They analyzed the data, wrote reports, and created a PowerPoint presentation with their findings and recommendations, which they presented to the Planning Committee and School Board. Their findings and recommendations have been incorporated into the architectural design and program plan of the San Leandro Health and Wellness Center.

Opening in 2015, the Center will include a state-of-the-art health clinic, youth development and leadership programs, health education opportunities, academic supports, behavioral health services, and family support services.

1 Jacquelynne S. Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, “Community Programs to Promote Youth Development,” National Research Council (U.S.). Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth, National Research Council (U.S.). Board on Children Youth and Families, and Institute of Medicine (U.S.), (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002).

Karen Johnson Pittman, Merita Irby, Joel Tolman, Nicole Yohalem, and Thaddeus Ferber, “Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?” The Forum for Youth Investment, 2001.

Jutta Dotterweich, “Positive Youth Development Resource Manual,” Cornell University, 2006. Also see ACT for Youth Center of Excellence website: <http://www.actforyouth.net/publications/manual.cfm>.