



Georgetown Divide, California

# Building a Broad Partnership to Improve Results

*See how a community bringing together a wide range of organizations to improve services and results for youth. Community leaders on the Georgetown Divide gathered a broad coalition to improve youth outcomes.*

“**A**ll students will be healthy, responsible, productive citizens, skilled workers, lifelong learners, and contributors to their local and world communities.” That was the stated goal for young people in the Black Oak Mine Unified School District. And in 2005, Black Oak leaders saw that they were falling short.

Youth in this rural mountainous area near Sacramento seemed to be doing well. Yet, close examination and youth surveys uncovered a lack of afterschool opportunities for middle and high school youth, unacceptable rates of teen use of drugs and alcohol, and academic potential which was not being reached. The close look provided warning signs that youth didn’t see a bright future on the Georgetown Divide. It was time for action.

School leaders knew making improvements required commitment. Not just from the schools — from all organizations focused on youth in the community. And not just one time. The future for the Georgetown Divide’s youth depended on engaging a wide range of community leaders in a sustainable way.

## Setting the Table for Collaboration

Federal funding under the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant program allowed the Black Oak Mine Unified School District to host a community convening in April 2006. The Forum for Youth Investment facilitated the event using Ready by 21 tools and strategies.

Over 100 community members assembled representing the schools, community based service

providers, churches, social service agencies, local business owners, parents, community leaders and youth. They explored how they were fulfilling their commitment to children and youth. The session generated energy and a desire to do things differently.

## Youth surveys uncovered a lack of after school opportunities for middle and high school youth.

### Sustaining Buy-In

Converting community energy and ideas to long-term engagement and commitment requires structure and a framework. The group formed the Georgetown Divide Ready by 21 Coalition. The coalition, with over 100 active members, formed work groups

to focus on the needs of different ages. A core team shared information and resources, and worked to make sure crosscutting issues (transportation, safety) were addressed by all groups.

### Improving Quality in School and out

Children don’t grow up in a program or a classroom. They grow up in families and communities. Across the work groups, improving all the settings where youth spend their time emerged as a key theme. The coalition determined to use the principles of positive youth development (PYD), advised by the Forum for Youth Investment, to accomplish this task. Promoting positive relationships, emphasizing youth strengths and empowering youth to assume leadership roles exemplify these principles.

The Georgetown Divide participated in the Ready by 21 Quality Counts Challenge, an initiative to guide communities to implement PYD principles in afterschool programs. The Challenge helped the Coalition assess current capacity, introduce a



strategy for improving programs and workforce skills and increase understanding of the afterschool sector.

Lessons learned through the Challenge spread to the classroom. Teachers encourage youth participation and leadership. Schools partner with parents and the community to foster supportive relationships and engagement.

**A core team worked to make sure crosscutting issues were addressed by all groups.**

The Coalition partnered with the Youth Development Network to expand the already rich menu of professional development opportunities promoting common language, norms and research-based practices across all the settings where youth spend time. Parents, teachers, principals, youth workers, and others involved (storekeepers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, etc.) use the ideas when they work with youth.

## Efforts Bear Fruit

Several California Distinguished School recognitions, a Federal Title I Academic Achievement Award, the California Exemplary Career Technical Education Award and three America's Promise Alliance 100 Best Communities for Young People nods demonstrate the regional and national attention the Georgetown Divide receives for its efforts to bring the whole community together to make a difference for kids.

Debbi Herr, the District's Director of School Health and Safety, stated "The partnerships that have flowed from that first 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."

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**For more information, visit [www.readyby21.org](http://www.readyby21.org)**