

# Youth in the Middle

*at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities*

*"The creative individual is particularly gifted in seeing the gap between what is and what could be (which means, of course, that he has achieved a certain measure of detachment from what is)."*

*– John W. Gardner*



## What is Youth in the Middle?

Youth in the Middle approaches the challenges that schools and youth are facing amid a culture of high stakes accountability while trying to implement a community youth development approach to teaching and learning. Youth in the Middle involves teachers, community based organizations, administrators, youth, and city and county institutional leaders to develop an effective system-wide approach to support positive youth development (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive) across in-school and out-of-school settings. At the heart of this initiative is the question: *How can schools, youth-serving community organizations, and local institutions best work together to promote a shared youth development approach to learning, and provide every child with the opportunities and resources he or she needs to succeed?* This question is particularly salient in the current educational climate, in which academic performance is stressed above all else.

## Building on Community Relationships: Reaching More Youth in More Settings

Two Redwood City Schools - Hoover Magnet School (K-8) and Kennedy Middle School (6-8) are implementing JGC's Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) curriculum and are committed to the community school model (combining rigorous academics, quality youth development practices, and a wide range of services and opportunities for youth and families). Individual student data from these schools are also being contributed to the Youth Data Archive (YDA). These sites will work with JGC to explore the possibilities for integration of high quality youth development principles and practices into and across the school structure and school district systems.

Through Youth in the Middle, JGC will leverage its partnerships with Stanford, Redwood City schools, city leaders, county institutions, and youth development intermediaries in the Bay Area toward the following long-term outcomes benefiting San Mateo County youth:

- Leaders and staff in schools and community based organizations will have increased knowledge of, access to, and use of high quality youth development training tools, processes, and resources.
- Stakeholders and institutions will have an efficient and effective system-wide approach to supporting high quality youth development environments and opportunities in the public school setting.
- Youth-serving practitioners, policy makers, scholars and researchers will have increased knowledge of the processes, tools, and environments that facilitate high quality youth development environments across in school and out of school settings.
- Youth will have increased access to and greater involvement in positive developmental activities and will be participating as leaders in schools and programs.

## Key Strategies:

- Starting in June 2007 JGC will undertake a three-year research and development effort to design a Community Youth Development Tool Kit.
- JGC will work closely with the following partners in Youth in the Middle development and implementation: Community Network for Youth Development, Redwood City 2020, Redwood City School District, Youth Development Initiative; and Youth Leadership Institute. JGC also plans to work with Redwood City Parks and Recreation, Cleo Eulau Center, the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula, and others.

