

Española/Los Alamos Joint Youth Leadership Initiative

First Meeting, Monday, April 16, 2007, NNMC Board Room, 8:30-10:30 AM
Minutes

Attendees: Sean Hall, Marcia Brenden, Paul Romero, Joseph Maestas, Sandra Roney, Bruce Hopmeier, Jack Ortega, Leonard Valerio, Min Park, Allen Kirk, Wayne Torpy, Jim Anderson, Lynne Saccaro, Sharon Stover, Robert Gibson, Lori Heimdahl Gibson, Diana Martinez, Janelle Vigil-Maestas, Cedric Page, Donna Schroeder

Sean Hall of *On the Edge Productions* served as facilitator of the meeting. (Sean has been facilitating the Los Alamos Youth Leadership (LAYL) program for the last two years.) After a couple "wild and crazy" ice breaking activities, we went around the room for introductions.

Lori Heimdahl Gibson told how this meeting came to be. She has lived and worked in both Española and Los Alamos, working with youth leadership programs in both areas. Young people in each area expressed strong feelings of discomfort and even fear in visiting the other area. Hearing these views spawned an idea of developing a joint youth leadership program where the young people could get to know and trust each other by working on projects that would benefit both. During the last two years, Lori talked with several adult leaders from both communities about the idea. Everyone responded positively and enthusiastically. When she told Sharon Stover, Sharon said, "Let's do it! How about April 16th? I'll call Sean Hall to see if he can facilitate. . . etc., etc.", and here we are!

Allen Kirk gave background information about LAYL (Los Alamos Youth Leadership), which was founded in 2005. This program is for 9-12 graders who want to learn teamwork and leadership skills, and how to get things done in the adult world. The emphasis is on the good that students can accomplish in the community. Several significant community projects have been completed over last two years and a few are still in progress. This program is funded by LA JJAB (Juvenile Justice Advisory Board), Leadership Los Alamos, LANB, Lou Santoro State Farm, LA County, LA Schools, Kiwanis, and the LA Monitor.

Marcia Brenden gave background information on the ENLACE/GEAR-UP leadership program in Española. It began in 2002 with the implementation of the college-prep program for students functioning in the middle (C-B students) called AVID. It includes summer workshops that teach students how to do community research and needs assessments. (Some student leaders were trained to lead focus groups at the Si Se Puede Conferences held at NNMC. They gathered data from sixth-graders, analyzed the data, and presented policy recommendations to the School Board.) Besides skills and tools, the students are immersed in their culture, doing identity work. They revisit their language, culture, and history. They work on social justice, conflict resolution, and seek to find their "voices" that can be heard by adults. This program is funded by ENLACE and GEAR-UP grants and a collaboration of Española Schools, NNMC, and many other organizations.

Discussion of Outcomes (Names and Outcomes in BOLD)

Jim Anderson discussed the researched-based 40 Developmental Assets. The more "assets" a student has, the more successful he/she is. He suggested that **we focus on why kids are successful rather than why they fail. A goal would be to increase the number of students who are successful.**

Lynn Saccaro said that LAHS now has a concurrent enrollment program with NNMC, but that kids are afraid to come to Española. LAHS now has a NM history class that is required for all 10th graders. She feels that her students really don't understand NM and its unique history. **She would like to see guest speakers come into the history classes.**

Leonard Valerio shared the fact that his wife grew up in LA and graduated from LAHS. She heard horror stories about Española while growing up. **He feels that correcting misperceptions about both communities would be an important goal.**

Bruce Hopmeier shared that they have dropped discipline problems by 70% at EVHS. **He feels that a student exchange program would do much to tear down the myths about the communities.** He named two opportunities in his school for leadership opportunities; AVID and the Student School Improvement group. Bruce feels that the newspapers emphasize the negative, which increases the negative perceptions in the Valley.

Min Park said that there are currently 76 funded programs in Española's schools that often pull kids out of classes. **He would like to see these two communities have one vision for youth. He recommends creating an adult advisory group (champions) to guide this process with no geopolitical boundaries for education, economic development, and environmental stewardship. He suggests a youth summit to let the youth determine the process and projects.**

Diana Martinez said that kids **need to have one caring adult in their lives to make all the difference. They need role-modeling and mentoring.**

Jim asked if **Pojoaque should be at the table.** **Leonard** said that 70% of Pojoaque students live in Española.

Allen said that LA has open gym with Pojoaque where students get to know each other. **Students need more opportunities to get to know each other.**

Wayne Torpy said that kids normally interact in a rivalry setting, e.g., athletics. **We need to bring kids together in non-rivalry settings, like shared school dances. The youth need to build the ideas that will beat away myths and legends.**

Cedric Page said that the two youth leadership programs could focus on understanding how their perceptions of each community are shaped. **We need to go beyond sports as the only contact for young people, maybe focusing on academics. We need a shared vision.**

Donna Schroeder said that she works with a group of young people who raise money for the United Way. **She feels that we need to let kids determine their own outcomes in order to get "buy in."**

Min repeated that this effort needs a strong adult organizing group that will be the "backbone." It would include representatives from K-12, business, government, etc.

Joe Maestas said that government should be strongly at the table. He and his Council are working on improving the quality of life in Española. **He would like to instill a commonality in community programs, like a joint recreation center, community service opportunities (clean-up), Habitat for Humanity projects, and United Way fund raising.** He said that Española has a Youth Advisory Council that is not strong yet. He said that the City Council is concerned about youth and is prepared to make funding available.

Jack Ortega suggested the following:

- **Organize a youth summit**
- **Bring resources to the table that already exist**
- **Native Americans need to be at the table.**
- **Pick all students, not just top students.**

Lori said that AVID targets students in the middle.

Sandra Roney said that AVID students are well- placed to reach other students functioning above and below them in school.

Min said that we need to broaden our conversation beyond youth leadership.

Joe said that we need to invite Española's Chief of Police, Julian Gonzales, to our next meeting. He talked about the negative effects of sensational articles in the Rio Grande Sun.

Sean suggested that we involve adults and parents.

Bruce said that we need to look at a larger scale and get a long-term commitment from all levels; schools, business, government, etc.

Robert Gibson said that he was hearing many commonalities. We need to make a decision soon about involving Pojoaque and Native Americans, adult "champions" will carry this forward for awhile, but youth need to set the direction ASAP.

Paul Romero would like to have mentors from LANL for students. Janelle Vigil-Maestas can assist with mentors.

Sean reviewed the following LAYL outcome ideas:

- **Remove the wedges**
- **Build relationships, trust, and understanding**
- **Build community awareness and familiarity**
- **The solutions may take time**
- **Not just talk; action**
- **Examine assumptions and paradigms; check out and re-evaluate**
- **Identify commonalities**
- **Outdoor activities like camping**

Other Outcome Ideas:

- **Get support from media**
- **Create joint student teams**
- **Exchange information**
- **Adult team partners**
- **Reach out to everyone**
- **Identify current situation**
- **Invite guests for cultural events**
- **Include students at our next meeting.**

Short Term, Specific Outcomes:

- **Next meetings - May 7th at UNM-LA, Student Services Bldg., 8:30-10:30 AM
Cedric Page will host.
June 4th at NNMC, Board Room, 8:30-10:30 AM**
- **Members are charged with considering a vision statement and name for our initiative.**
- **Send contact information of people you would like to participate to Lori ASAP in order to update roster.**
- **Janelle, Lori and Diana will contact media.**
- **Sean may be able to facilitate a session with Española youth leaders. Discuss with ENLACE.**

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