

# Influencing Positive Youth Development by Activating Youth as Community Leaders



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# Agenda



- Overview of the youth organizing model used by the University of Denver in Denver Public Schools;
- Experiential activity in which workshop participants can become familiar with the youth engagement model;
- Student participants' voices;
- Leadership development outcomes;
- Discussion of strategies for implementing successful youth leadership development.

# Basic aims of Public Achievement



- Emphasizes public work, “the idea that an important component of democracy is the ‘work of the people’ and an important component of citizenship is being a co-creator of our public world (in contrast to being a consumer, client, or volunteer)” (Hildreth, 2000, p. 627).
- Seeks to enhance participants’ understanding of institutional and personal power by providing experiences of “power *with* and power *to*, rather than power *over*” (McCauley et al., 2011, p. 151).
- Seeks to develop civic skills, including the uses of power and collaboration which are integral to the positive social development and community attachment of young people (Nicotera, 2008).

# Overview of model for Public Achievement (PA)



## PA youth

- Develop cross generational relationships with teachers, DU coaches, and community members;
- Learn to map power relations and negotiate power with peers and adults;
- Develop a public voice;
- Conduct community-based research;
- Co-create civic projects on an issue that is meaningful to them.

# PA curriculum strategies



- **Phase One: Relationship Building**
  - **Phase Two: Issue Selection**
  - **Phase Three: Community-Based Research**
  - **Phase Four: Action and “Story Telling”**
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- **Throughout the process, students engage in self-assessment and reflection.**

# Goal

# Program Components (Inputs)

# Outputs

# Outcomes

Participants in Public Achievement will develop public skills and learn to participate in community problem-solving.

**Relationship Building:**  
-Students will learn to conduct one-to-one interviews.  
-Students will identify their own and others' self interest

**Community Issue Identification:**  
-Students will identify a community issue together

**Community-Based Research:**  
-Students will conduct research in their community.  
-Students will analyze the data they collect to make decisions about their community project.

**Community Action Project:**  
-Students will design and implement a community project that addresses the community issue they chose.  
-Students will engage community members in their project.

**Assessment and Reflection:**  
-Students will evaluate the success of their project and generate lessons learned.  
-Students will critically reflect on their experiences and learning.  
-Students will tell others about their project through community presentations or writings.

**Skill of dialogue:**  
•One-to-ones  
•Across diversity

**Knowledge** of self-interest, collective interest, and community impacts

**Knowledge and skill** to apply research methods, including interviews, surveys, hosting meetings, and making phone calls and letters.

Transfer research into action:  
**Skills** including public speaking, collaboration and partnership formation, disposition, sense of leadership, sense of agency.

**Disposition:** Recognition of personal development and transformation; sense of accomplishment;  
**Skill:** public expression of process/product (ability to tell story of action taken)

**Students:**  
•Understand the power of relationship and civic life and responsibility (knowledge).  
•Understand personal and community self-interest and the process of democracy and negotiation (knowledge).  
•View themselves as informed citizens (disposition)  
•Understand the systemic causes and context of issues (knowledge).  
•Participate in a community action project (skills).  
•Have a sense of community membership and civic responsibility (disposition).

**Impact:** Students who participate in Public Achievement continue to practice public skills and participate in community problem-solving.

# Experiential Activity



- **One to ones**
  - Model
  - Practice
  - Reflect

# Previous Student Projects



Changes youth have advocated for under this model include:

- Improved adherence and training in restorative justice;
- Neighborhood immigration policy awareness campaigns; and,
- Creation of and funding for AP courses to support college preparation for high school students.



## Leadership development outcomes

Mean at pre-test = 28.98

Mean at post-test = 32.27

$t(113) = -6.69, p < .001$

suggesting improved perception of their skills and knowledge for engaging with the community

### **Skills-knowledge** ( $\alpha = 0.859$ )

- I can work with adults.
- I know how to interview my classmates.
- I can do research on issues that matter to me.
- I know how to ask for help when I need it.
- It is easy for me to speak in front of my classmates.
- I know how to interview members of my community.
- I know how to take care of people who need help.
- I can work on a team with others in my community.
- I know how to contact community leaders to work on a community project.
- I can talk with teachers and adults about issues that affect my community.

1 never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 always



## Leadership development outcomes

Mean at pre-test = 31.45

Mean at post-test = 33.78

$t(121) = -5.173, p < .000$

suggesting improved perception of their willingness to make a difference, comfort with diversity, and school community connection.

### **Attitudes-dispositions** ( $\alpha = .841$ )

- I feel like I belong to my school community.
- I think it is important to come to school every day.
- Adults listen to my ideas and concerns.
- I have ideas to share with my school or community.
- By working with others I can make change in my community.
- I should to help solve problems in my community.
- Kids like me can take action to help my community become a better place.
- I believe that kids like me have ideas to share with their communities.
- I can learn from people who are different from me.
- I am comfortable around people who look different from me.

1 never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 always



## Leadership development outcomes

Qualitative  
theme:

Responsibility-  
accountability

- “There’s always going to be problems in the world, but you need to look for them and you need to find a way...or your personal way to try and fix them...and you’re not going to do that if you’re just gonna sit on your butt and not do anything.”



## Leadership development outcomes

Qualitative  
theme:

Confidence-  
empowerment

- “At first, I didn’t really want to join this club because I was scared that I might do bad or these people are smart and I feel kind of dumb, but once I got more outgoing I actually got the hang of this and now I feel comfortable and now I see that I can do other things at school...like...teaching.”



## Leadership development outcomes

Qualitative  
theme:

Perseverance

- “I mean even as you look around this room like we’re not the typical um...group that would kind of come together and bring about change. I’m not going to mention specifics but...we all came from very different backgrounds, we all have very different views, but we found a way to kind of push that aside and find a commonality between us and you know fight this issue...which is teen pregnancy at [names school].”



## Leadership development outcomes

Qualitative  
theme:

Leadership

- “I think having a purpose...we kind of found our um issue that we thought was important at [names school] and then we executed a way to help it...or to fix it. So, that’s something that not a lot of high school students can say that they do. A lot of people in their careers do that kind of stuff...so...to say that we’re doing it on our own time, um...is...I think it’s something to be mentioned.”

# Strategies for implementing successful youth leadership development.



## Do

- See your students as change agents.
- Help your students engage with power, their own and others'.
- Be candid and real with them.
- Help your students become a team (with each other and with you).
- Engage in critical reflection.

## Don't

- Underestimate your students and their abilities.
- Do for them what they can do for themselves.
- Try to become “one of them.”
- Avoid conflict.

# Improving your Youth Leadership Development Programs



- How do your current programs activate youth as community leaders?
- What can you change to better activate the youth you work with?
- What action steps do you take with you today to improve your work with youth leaders?

# More Information



- For more information on Community Organizing, including tools like a guide to critical reflection and one-to-ones, visit our Community Organizing Handbook:
  - <http://www.du.edu/ccesl/CommunityOrganizing.html>
  - [http://www.du.edu/ccesl/docs/co\\_handbook\\_2010\\_11\\_print\\_protected.pdf](http://www.du.edu/ccesl/docs/co_handbook_2010_11_print_protected.pdf)
- For more information on Public Achievement, including a PA curriculum and previous student reflections:
  - <http://www.du.edu/ccesl/publicachievement.html>

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