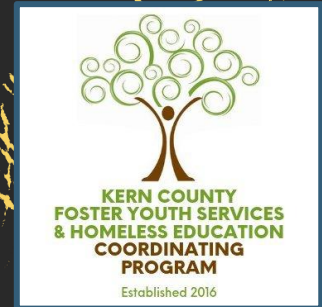


Youth Advisory Boards



Audio By:
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What is a YAB?

Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) are formal student groups that provide feedback for changes that need to happen on school campuses to better serve other students.

YABs are best utilized when all members are part of a subpopulation of students (such as homeless students) who can provide feedback on their real, lived experiences in order to help make systemic change.

YABs need committed, adult allies to help support the work.



YABs vs Student Councils

YABs provide ongoing advice and support to school districts on policies and practices that affect students. YABs are typically focused on one student subgroup that often goes unheard (like homeless students)

VS

Student Councils are student representatives elected by their peers to address school issues & plan school events/ activities.

Student Council representatives are frequently “popular” at their school & often are not diversely represented (i.e. there may be no homeless students, etc.)



Rules for Starting a YAB



01 Know the Purpose

What is the mission of the YAB? What are the intended outcomes?

Knowing the YAB purpose will also help with knowing how to **recruit!**

02 Avoid Tokenism

Creating a YAB to just make it appear like youth are involved in decision-making processes is not OK!

YABs are meant to incorporate **AUTHENTIC** youth voice.

03 Make it Youth Led

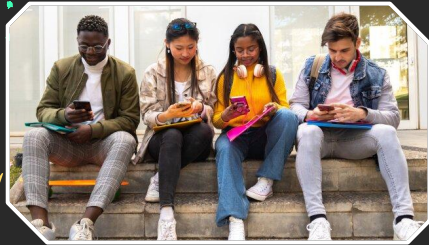
Allow the YAB to work on topics **they believe** are important. Create **safe spaces** for them to discuss these topics. Ensure **leadership opportunities** for YAB members.

04 Keep it Diverse

Open YABs to youth of all gender identities, ethnicities, races, and more.

This allows for more **authentic feedback** on processes that effect more vulnerable student groups.

Check out the “**Steps for Creating a Youth Advisory Board**” handout!



Please utilize these YAB best practices!



Provide **compensation** and/or **incentives** for participation

Schedule meetings when **youth are available**, not hindering work or school hours

Remove barriers to participation, such as providing child care & transportation

Ensure student voice is **authentically heard** & YAB work is not adult-driven

What happens when students have difficulty attending meetings?

Homeless students may have issues attending YAB meetings due to differences in class or transportation schedules.

- Ask staff to give lunch passes to members to get their lunch earlier & therefore get to meeting sooner.
- Stagger meetings for different lunch periods.
- Work with school admin. to gain support for YAB & the time req for students to participate.
- Create sub-committees to meet outside of YAB meetings and complete smaller projects.
- Provide surveys for students to fill out who are interested in having their input known but are unable to attend.



Creative Incentives

(When You Can't Pay a Stipend!)

- Speak with students' teachers about offering **extra credit** for projects/ participating in YAB.
- Connect students with **leadership opportunities** & local leaders.
- Get administration to write **Letters of Recommendation** for students for college/ job applications.
- Offer **free lunch** and snacks during meetings.
- Explain to students that they can recommend changes on their campus & **see their feedback come to life**.
- Provide raffle tickets for meeting attendance & do a **giveaway** at the end of every semester.



YABs can be used for all ages.



YABs are great for middle schools or high schools.

YABs allow for students (who are not usually “heard” by administration) to provide feedback and insight for policy and procedural changes.



HUD defines YABs as being for transitional aged youth.

HUD’s definition of a YAB:

1. *“Have at least 3 youth with voting power on policy decisions of the CoC, particularly on policies that relate to preventing and ending youth homelessness; and*
2. *Be comprised of youth, age 24 and younger, at least two thirds of whom are homeless or formerly homeless.”*

Middle & high school YAB selection process

- Decide whether you will allow students to apply to be a member of YAB or if you will choose students based on staff referrals.
- Decide if you want students with only a certain GPA (2.0+, etc). However, keep in mind that you need to hear from students of all different academic levels, so it is helpful to have students with high and low GPAs on the board.
- Touch base with McKinney-Vento Liaison or Counselor to see if the youth is in a correct mindset to be a member of YAB. (For example, if a student is missing 90% of school days, it may not be the best time for the youth to join YAB.)
- Ensure the youth joining do not pose a physical threat to one another (i.e. make sure you do not have rival gang members, etc. in the YAB).
- Obtain permission slips from parents for the youth to join YAB (or use whatever process your school site would usually use for a youth to join a “club”)

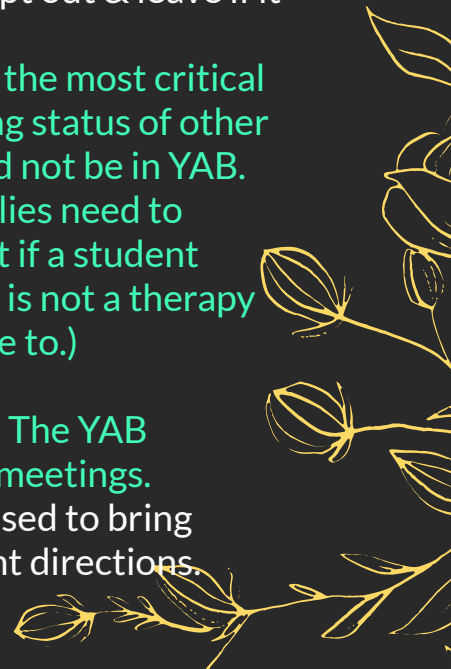


Establish Rules!

Meeting Rules are Critical— Especially at the Middle & High School Levels

- At the very first YAB meeting, review what YAB is. Allow for youth to opt out & leave if it is not something they feel comfortable being a part of.
- After reviewing YAB, create baseline rules with all who remain. One of the most critical rules is that of confidentiality. Youth that are unable to keep the housing status of other youth to themselves & not spread rumors about the other youth should not be in YAB. YAB should be a safe space. (The only caveat to this is that the Adult Allies need to explain they are mandated reporters & have a legal obligation to report if a student discloses child abuse/ neglect. Adult Allies should also reflect that YAB is not a therapy group, but that youth are free to share their experiences as they choose to.)
- Other rules should include attendance and behavioral expectations.
- Revisit the rules every few months & update with the youth as needed. The YAB members should ultimately determine which rules they want for their meetings.
- Create a Mission & Vision statement with the students. Those can be used to bring students back to the purpose of the YAB when the group takes different directions.

Check out
the example
BKRHC YAB
Mission,
Vision &
Rules on
kern.org/hip



Projects the BKRHC YAB has Completed

BKRHC YAB is Kern Co's HUD defined YAB

Meet with local organization CEOs to provide feedback on services for homeless youth in Kern.

Write letter to food banks/ emergency shelters in Kern on how to improve services for homeless youth.

Speak to media outlets/ do press on the impacts of homelessness on youth & ways to help.

Putting together outreach bags for orgs to hand out to homeless youth.

Creating "Tips for Surviving the Streets" card for homeless youth.

Present to the City Council & Board of Supervisors on Homeless Youth Awareness Month.

Assist with writing federal grants for homeless youth funds.

Create the "Through Our Eyes" photojournalism project.

Create the "Shining a Light on Youth Homelessness" fact sheet for service providers.

PLACES TO SHOWER OR GET HYGIENE KITS:

- Truck Stops, Showers.
- Planned Parenthood (www.plannedparenthood.org): Hygiene Kits.
- Gyms: Some have cheap memberships and have showers.
- Church Without Walls (861) 832-2628: Showers.

SHELTERS:

- Bakersfield Homeless Center (women/kids) (861) 322-9198: Must call and reserve a spot.
- The Mission (Men): Walk-up check-ins from 5:30pm-7:30pm at 816 East 21st St. Bakersfield.
- Call 211 for all other shelters.

PLACES TO GET WIFI/ CHARGE YOUR PHONE:

- The Mall.
- Bus Stations and on some buses.
- The Library.

Were you in foster care, adopted, or in a legal guardianship? Come to the Dream Center: Showers, laundry, hygiene, clothes, wi-fi, and food. 1801 19th St. in downtown Bakersfield, call (861) 636-4488.

TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE STREETS

Created by BKRHC Youth Action Board 2022



Asking for help is a sign of strength.

Shining a Spotlight on Youth Homelessness

CREATED BY 2021 BKRHC YOUTH ACTION BOARD


Signs of a Homeless Youth

- Evading eye contact
- Carrying a backpack all the time
- Avoiding social environments
- Poor hygiene—but cleaner than many older adults experiencing homelessness
- Spending a lot of time lingering
- Potential addiction issues
- Secluding themselves
- Wearing the same clothes/ outfit all the time—but are usually cleaner than those of older homeless adults' clothes
- Appearing sleepy or lethargic
- Being in a state of hunger

STRATEGIES FOR APPROACHING A HOMELESS YOUTH UNDER AGE 25

- Try to engage them with an activity they might enjoy (like sports, etc.)
- Offer them food or take them to lunch
- Don't use the word 'homeless'! Instead, ask if they need help or resources or ask "What are your plans for the rest of the day?"
- Don't threaten them with a CPS call
- Build a relationship with them & then follow-up
- Have a peer talk to the youth
- Give them some leeway
- Try & relate to them

IT IS HARD TO IDENTIFY YOUTH HOMELESSNESS, DESPITE HOW COMMON IT IS



How Homeless Youth Feel

BELITTLED	DISTRICTING
DISTRESSED	ALONE
EMBARRASSED	HELPLESS
AWKWARD	HOPELESS
IN SURVIVAL MODE	EXTREME EMOTIONS
DISCARDED	STRESSED
ANGRY	FEARFUL
SUICIDAL	INVISIBLE

KNOW A HOMELESS YOUTH WHO NEEDS HELP? CALL THE DREAM CENTER AT: 661-636-4488

ALWAYS A JOURNEY



YABs Need Adult Allies!



Figure 2. Youth-Adult Partnership Promotes Thriving Youth, Programs, and Communities



Source: Petrokubi, 2014.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

The YAB Advisors need to be true Adult Allies, who care about student voice work.

1. Be **intentional** about the decision-making power that youth have.
2. Youth are the **experts** of their own truth.
3. When asking youth to be involved in your work, **honor their experiences**, allowing their experiences and ideas to inform the process.



Youth-Adult partnerships are critical in making systemic change; however, YABs are youth run & youth focused. It is important to know the YAB members do not have to agree with the ideas of the adult allies in order to make their own recommendations.



Watch out for adultism!

Adultism is driven by behaviors and attitudes that are based on the assumption that adults are better than young people and therefore entitles them to act upon or on behalf of young people without their agreement.

Adult Ally (Advisor) Obligations

Adult YAB Advisors are responsible for ensuring that the YAB is a safe place for youth, the YAB policy recommendations are heard, YAB members get leadership development opportunities & YAB members are not exploited.

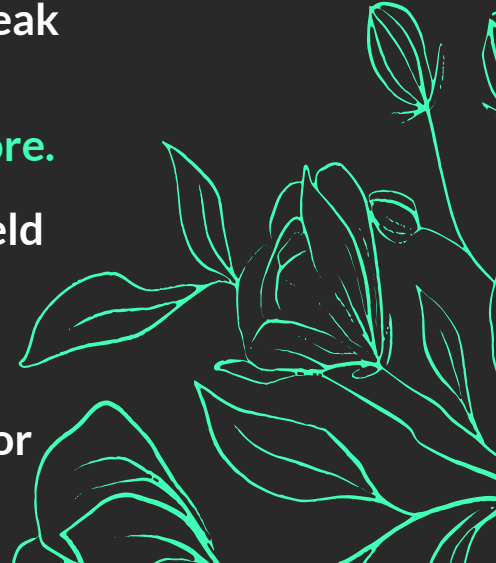
YAB Advisors need to be Adult Allies who truly care about the mission of student voice work. YAB Advisors should not be forced into the position.

YAB Advisors will be responsible for connecting with administrators to determine the best way for policy recommendations to be provided.



Options for YAB Member Leadership Development

- Bring in local leaders (the Mayor, the Superintendent, non-profit leaders, private business owners, etc) to speak with the YAB members about how they got where they are. Have the youth also provide feedback to those local leaders on service improvements that could be made that the leader has some effect over.
- Give trainings to the youth on networking, LinkedIn, how to speak publicly, etc.
- Invite youth to trainings with other professionals on public speaking, advocacy, leadership skills, media interviews, and more.
- Help the YAB members create a vision board & future goals for themselves. Help connect them to other professionals in the field they are interested in for them to shadow.
- Bring YAB members to conferences with you. Also, show them appropriate work/ conference attire & how to network with others.
- When youth are ready, invite them to speak publicly at events or on the media about YAB-related topics.



Lessons Learned from a YAB Advisor

1. Frequently look for funding opportunities– to pay for incentives, field trips, projects, equipment, lunches, and more.
2. Look for mini grants the YAB can apply for to assist with their mission. (For example: some nonprofits will provide mini grants for homeless outreach bags, etc. YAB can apply for those funds, put the bags together, and then hand them out to homeless youth themselves.)
3. Be aware YAB members will all have very different personalities, perspectives & backgrounds, even if they all share homelessness as a common factor. It is critical as an Advisor to keep the YAB meeting a safe space for all.
4. Publicly share that YAB is a group of youth who recommend policy decisions and were selected for YAB due to their leadership abilities. Do not publicly share that YAB is comprised of all homeless youth, in order not to “out them” to their peers.
5. Learn how to take a back seat. You are not leading the discussions. You are facilitating them. Realize that sometimes YAB recommendations may not align with your personal opinions.
6. Celebrate the successes of the YAB & individual members! Openly share with them that you are proud of them & their hard work.



Check out
Lessons
Learned
from a YAB
Chair on
kern.org/hip



Need more individual coaching on creating a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) at your school site or LEA?

Email: fosteredcoordinator@kern.org