PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE of LEARNING CALIFORNIA

Transformational Community Schools: Peer Mentoring at Oakland High

What are transformational community schools?

In 2021-22, California made a historic investment of $4.1 billion in seed funding to expand community schools across the state as a transformational, place-based strategy for reimagining public education. Community schools are a holistic approach to how we do school rooted in trust, shared leadership, and deep partnership with students, families, educators, and community members. By organizing in- and out-of-school supports around the strengths and needs of each local community, they create culturally-rooted, inclusive environments that promote academic success, social-emotional wellbeing, and meaningful engagement from cradle to career.

Tangible Results of Peer Mentoring

According to 2024-2025 surveys:

- 100% of Peer Mentors have mostly or significantly improved their sense of preparedness for life after high school as a result of the peer mentor workshops.
- 95% of Peer Mentors have mostly or significantly improved their ability to manage and support mentee's mental health.
- 86% of mentees agree or strongly agree that being a mentee in the SHOP 55 Wellness Center Peer Mentoring Program has improved their mental health.
- 83% of mentees achieved at least one social, emotional, or academic goal with their mentor.
- Every 12th grade mentor graduated from high school.

A Program Built By and For Students

Oakland High's peer mentoring program is a student-designed, community-run initiative that helps young people feel seen, supported, and ready to lead. While it includes elements of an internship and social-emotional learning, its design reflects the priorities and lived experiences of students themselves.

"Students were the ones who said, we should have a peer mentor program," said Rany Ath, EBAYC's Managing Director. "They named what they were going through and came up with real solutions."

The peer mentoring program emerged from a 2020 Culture and Climate Student Team retreat, co-organized by students, school staff, EBAYC, and Californians for Justice (CFJ). Alongside a wellness survey with over 600 student responses, participants surfaced three priorities: more individual mental health providers, more jobs and internships, and a peer mentoring program.

The program allows for mentees to have a bridge to resources and relationships that can make a difference early in their high school journey.

The People of Peer Mentoring

30

Peer Mentors Per Year

Paid $20 an hour for up to 300 hours a year. They attend trainings twice a month and are supported by staff who also serve as case managers.

90

Mentees Per Year

Receive support and also become sources of support for others as they grow in confidence, learn how to navigate systems, and see themselves as leaders.

1

Peer Mentor Counselor

Provides oversight for program through outreach, train, and case management of mentors full time.

1

EBAYC Social Worker

Helps with mental health training series and provided individual therapy to those who needed it.

30+

Community Partners with Wellness Center

Staffed by EBAYC alongside over 30 community partners and provides mental health services, academic support, and space for care coordination.

In the Words of Peer Mentors

"Not being given these resources, it made me want to give back to my community. It made me want to teach the younger kids how to be a high schooler, what's offered at Oakland High School, and how you can succeed. It really just showed me how impactful this peer mentoring internship can be. It's taught me how to be a better person overall."

— Aaron-Anthony Boulware, a senior and peer mentor

"I found other Latino people in peer mentoring, and that made me feel that there was a place where I can belong, where I can speak my native language and everything," she said. "So I feel like if other schools start improving their diversity and making inclusion with different people of cultures, students are gonna feel like they belong to a place."

— Maria Fernanda Garay Archaga, also a senior and mentor

Read more quotes from youth here.

The program is currently sustained through a mix of funding:

- Community Schools Partnership Program
- City of Oakland's Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY) grant
- Alameda County school health center funds & youth & family opportunity grant
- 21st Century afterschool funds
- EBAYC's fund development efforts for SHOP 55
- Individual donors and grants

Trusting Students to Lead

The peer mentoring program reflects a long-term investment in student well-being, leadership, and connection. It has become part of the fabric of Oakland High, filling gaps that neither academic schedules nor traditional services are equipped to address alone. Its strength lies in the shared vision behind it that is shaped and sustained by students, educators, and community partners working together.

Along the way, students grow in confidence, learn how to navigate systems, and see themselves as leaders. One student and mentee, a newcomer who struggled with attendance and engagement, slowly began re-engaging with school after becoming a youth educator. Staff supported him with home visits and helped him stay connected even when he wasn't showing up consistently. Another student, a football player who became a peer mentor, built a strong bond with three mentees from a different cultural backgrounds. All three mentees are now interested in becoming mentors themselves.

Looking ahead, Oakland High leaders are exploring ways to integrate the peer mentoring program more fully into their Linked Learning strategy. This could include logging hours as work-based learning, increasing alignment within pathways, and sharing mentor lists with pathway teams and families.

School staff do not have the capacity to do it alone, even when they have great ideas. This is what makes community schools work: when you include people in the decisions that impact them, they own and help do the work to implement them. With stable funding and deeper coordination across systems, the program can continue to grow as a trusted, student-centered resource that supports not only success in school, but a lasting sense of belonging and purpose beyond it.

Additional Resources

Community Schools Toolkit: Center Mental Health and Wellness for Students, Families, and Staff

Shared Learning Series: Partnering to Advance Expanded, Culturally Sustaining, and Enriched Learning Time

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OAKLAND HIGH SCHOOL

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