

Youth Leadership Development



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America's Rising Stars - A life process preparing students for a future of success

The Rising Stars Process was designed to help today's youth develop their personal leadership skills. Leadership is essential in enabling youth to develop character, confidence, and values that promote the goal of healthy behavior. Research shows a majority of American youth engage in health compromising behavior. In her pioneering book, *Adolescents at Risk*, Joy Dryfoos concludes that half of all ten to seventeen year olds are at high or moderate risk of undermining their chances for a healthy life because of substance abuse, unsafe sex, teen pregnancy, school failure and delinquency, crime, or violence. More importantly, a recent report from the American Medical Association captures the importance of this goal: "For the first time in the history of this country, young people are less healthy and less prepared to take their places in society than their parents. Moreover, this is happening at a time when our society is more complex, more challenging, and more competitive than ever before."

In addition, a recent research report, *Workforce 2020: Work & Workers in the 21st Century*, Carol D'Amico found that employers grouped leadership as one of the essential skills entry-level workers lacked. This group of skills included strong work ethic, problem solving, and creativity, along with organizational and interpersonal skills. These skills were ranked ahead of writing, math, and reading. Educators, parents, government officials, and business people have all realized the importance of helping our youth develop their personal leadership skills. Empowered youth grow up feeling confident with themselves and with their ability to achieve goals.

Rising Stars is in part based on recognizing the Search Institute's forty developmental assets, experiences, opportunities, and internal capacities essential for health and success in our complex society. Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, whose mission is to advance the well being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. Search Institute and Rising Stars believe if our society would invest more in positive attributes young people need, then we could expect high yields (in terms of healthier youth) as young people become healthy, contributing members of families, communities, workplaces, and society.

The Rising Stars Program is an innovative and unique inside-out development program that focuses on three critical elements that promote personal leadership, healthy behaviors, and the skills employers identify as essential. These elements are: developing attitudes, developing interpersonal skills, and developing goal-achievement skills. The development process typically begins by developing positive attitudes among the participants about themselves and about the possibilities that exist for them. Attitudes will directly determine in many cases whether a student turns a problem into an opportunity or succumbs to it; whether they behave in healthy ways that benefit from the educational process. Goal achieving and interpersonal skills then enhance their ability to assess the impact of their present behavior on their present and future success.

The program has been field tested in an urban comprehensive high school, a middle school, a non-public special education program, a church youth club, and a community based program for adjudicated youth. Through trial and error, since spring of 1996, invaluable information was gained on how to structure a Youth Leadership Program and what essential ingredients were needed to make it a measurable success.

These necessary ingredients include: relevancy (taken from need analysis), Action Plans (goals based on measurable objectives), reinforcement (the action plan and alumni to share experiences and help overcome obstacles) and most importantly, repetition (consistent, positive reinforcement).

The Rising Stars Program contains all of these ingredients along with the innovative learning methods of: self directed learning where students take responsibility for their own personal improvement; constructivism, where facilitation recognizes how to shorten the learning curve; and collaborative/team learning activities that support educational research. To conclude, developing personal leadership is a critical component to bringing today's youth into society and the workforce as healthy, productive contributors. Rising Stars proven process instills these behaviors along with an additional return on investment through prevention and reduction of risk behavior.

“Helping youth tap hidden potential, develop a positive self-image, develop good habits and a good attitude, and become leaders for the future success”