

The Bridge of Hope and Equity for Long Branch teen research group began meeting virtually in May 2021 and has transitioned into small group in-person meetings. Youth have collaborated on the vision, name, logo, and mission of the group, while also providing insight into existing LBCAY materials. The group decided on the topic of College and Career information accessibility for the Long Branch Community with the two guiding questions of

- How can we connect youth and families to meaningful information about post HS pathways?
- What are the experiences of youth and families in Long Branch with accessing information about post HS pathways?
 - 3 virtual Teen Leadership Meetings in May
 - 2 virtual Teen Leadership Meetings in June
 - 1 in-person socially distanced Teen Leadership meeting in July
 - 3 in-person YPAR trainings led by partner, Clara Parker
 - 5 youth have consistently been participating in meetings, representing both the Latinx and Ethiopian communities

The group completed a training in the YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research) process led by training specialist, Clara Parker. Clara spent the summer serving as support for the group as they follow the process to develop, research, and analyze data for their community project. They have begun collecting qualitative data through interviews and journaling and have found:

- Not being helped in the most effective and comfortable way
- Parent involvement and providing information to them
- Language and cultural barriers to accessing post-secondary information
- Making students feel more comfortable
- Stigma around college and changing the way people view different paths (careers/majors/etc)
 - What other options are there?
- Not having to wait until you get to college to find out about different career paths
- Counselors should focus on student interests and passions when looking for colleges
- Not knowing where to start/who to talk to specifically
- Need for a sense of community

- The community seems concerned/confused but also hopeful/interested
- Where/who to ask for information and what exactly you need to know
 - Guidance/Mentorship