

Spring 2008  
Volume 21

# J THE OURNAL

OF JUVENILE COURT, COMMUNITY, AND ALTERNATIVE  
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF CALIFORNIA

## *In this issue:*

"We  
must  
become  
the  
change  
we  
want  
to see."

-Gandhi-

- **Robin Williams and Michael Pritchard:  
Keeping it Real at the YGC**
- **Identifying Best Practices in  
Alternative Education: The Ed.  
Options Research Project**
- **What Works and Why? And What  
Doesn't Work and Why? The Search for  
Best Practices in Correctional  
Education**
- **Within These Walls and Beyond**
- **Alternative Education: How the  
Community Benefits When All Students  
Succeed**
- **Juvenile Court and Community Schools  
- A Literature Review**
- **Innovative Programs**



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Student Programs and Services Steering  
Committee



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**Peter Kostas**  
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My term as your 38<sup>th</sup> JCCASAC President will end at our 2009 Annual Conference at which time Mary Lou Vachet of Orange County will become our 39<sup>th</sup> President. JCCASAC goes back to 1970 when Don Purdy of Santa Clara County was elected the first president of JCSAC- Juvenile Court School Administrators of California. JCSAC morphed into JCCSAC when Community Schools were established and finally into its current configuration as JCCASAC when the "A" was added for Alternative Programs as county offices began serving Pregnant and Parenting Teens.

Thirty-eight years is a long time and when I look at the

# Message from the President

two plaques in my office with the names of prior presidents, I feel honored to be included. Many of our former presidents are currently serving as County Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents, Associate and Assistant Superintendents as they continue providing educational leadership to their communities.

JCCASAC is a professional organization which draws upon 38 years of experience to provide County Office Alternative Education Administrators with conferences, networking, and numerous levels of support. The best way to keep JCCASAC alive and relevant for the next thirty-eight years is to participate. We need new members on the Executive Board with fresh ideas and energy. Nominations for positions are mailed out each spring.

As you are well aware, this has been a challenging year for Alternative Education Programs. The state financial crisis will affect future

funding making next year even more challenging. The Legislative Analyst's Office wrote a scathing report regarding County Office Programs with the recommendation of returning control to local school districts. Based on the LAO's report, we saw several pieces of legislation which could have been detrimental to our students and programs.

Yet, we continue to offer exemplary educational programs and services to our students with dedicated and inspirational teachers, instructional paraprofessionals, and administrators. That is the true work we do.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your president.





**Mary Lou Vachet**  
**Program Administrator**  
**Orange County**  
**Department of Education**

**“A sincere desire to change the course of their futures”**- Austin MacCormick, founder of the Correctional Education Association 1945. That sentiment, written 63 years ago by a leader in the field of education reform, reflects a sustained effort by those of us involved over the past 39 years in the mission of the **Juvenile Court Community and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC)**. Members are tenacious correctional and alternative educators working to build community among all people who want to make a difference in the lives of children, youth, and adults, who need options for change and opportunities to be productive citizens. After all, the purpose of public education in America is to produce a literate citizenry capable of engaging in the necessary work to participate in and sustain the process of democracy.

## Message from the President-Elect

Traditional education works well for most...but *most* is not sufficient to meet our mission to provide a quality education for all students. We believe all students can learn and as administrators responsible for implementing education programs we know that one size does not fit all. We know that providing quality learning opportunities for students requires providing relevant professional development opportunities for those who engage in the most noble of professions—*teaching*. We have high expectations for all students, we utilize evidenced-based practices, and we enthusiastically engage students in relevant learning experiences.

The vision to change the course of *their* futures, which affects the future of the entire global community, requires *intentional acts of unselfishness* (Taubert). Vigilance, perseverance, and a call to serve helps maintain a focus on the vision while building capacity to communicate, influence, persuade, and continuously improve as practitioners implementing programs that challenge the status quo. We must speak to one another; we must lift our voices for those whom we serve and publish our research, and stories of barriers, challenges and successes. We have a professional

history and literature and a responsibility to publish the continuing saga of reformation and transformation.

The **JCCASAC Journal** is a vehicle to express our story. Contained within these pages are articles written by JCCS practitioners and researchers. These stories reflect the heart and soul of our resolute collective capacity to illustrate how we provide performance-based results, demonstrate continuous improvement in student achievement and understand the political complexities of operating alternative education programs.

We seek out partnerships between organizational groups. Cross-sector social purpose collaborations are created, nurtured, and extended by people who are willing to leverage human and fiscal resources to work together in building community. Share our story.



## JUVENILE COURT, COMMUNITY, AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF CALIFORNIA

### VISION

Under the direction of the County Superintendents, and as a sub-committee of the Student Programs and Services Steering Committee (SPSSC), JCCASAC is a professional educational organization dedicated to preparing students who are enrolled in county alternative educational programs to become self-sufficient adults who lead healthy lifestyles, and are competent, caring, and academically prepared for their futures.

### MISSION

The mission of JCCASAC is to support student success by creating a collegial network of County Office administrators who:

- Research and share best practices regarding new and innovative program options for at-risk students
- Provide training, support and assistance to new administrators
- Endorse and support legislation that advocates for the learning needs of all students
- Give input and guidance to the Superintendents relative to the diverse needs of our student population

### Goals

- Improve student achievement through research and sharing best practices
- Support special projects that enhance instructional programs
- Provide regular trainings for new county office administrators
- Conduct successful conferences with statewide representation
- Publish the JCCASAC Journal that informs superintendents, administrators, teachers, and affiliated agencies of the latest research, effective teaching practices, methodologies, and showcases successful programs
- Provide scholarships to eligible graduating seniors in order to encourage lifelong learning
- Represent JCCASAC through participation in statewide committees
- Monitor legislation affecting County Office alternative education programs
- Advocate for legislation and policies that support the unique needs of our student population



# Robin Williams and Michael Pritchard

## Keeping it Real at the YGC

By Brittany Heinrich

**A**somber Robin Williams walked down the gray corridors of the San Francisco Youth Guidance Center. The comic king of improv had been left momentarily speechless by the appreciative crowd as he left the facility's gymnasium and made the short trek to the Maximum Security Unit. There were no jokes, no characters, and no personas. Mr. Williams was stripped of his comic armor as he kept it real with these incarcerated youth who had not been allowed to attend the morning presentation with the other youth. He spoke in a language they understood: rehabilitation, alcohol, drugs, unfortunate decisions, and hopes for a brighter a future.

On April 10<sup>th</sup> City Youth Now sponsored a heart-warming visit by actor Robin Williams and comedian Michael Pritchard to the San Francisco Youth Guidance Center. While it was Williams' first visit to the YGC, he has a long history of involvement with humanitarian organizations such as Comic Relief and U.S.O, most recently visiting U.S. troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Accompanying Mr. Williams was former San Francisco YGC juvenile counselor, former probation officer and comedic motivational speaker, Michael Pritchard.



In classic Williams and Pritchard style, the comic duo exchanged character voices, comic barbs, and gestures as they awaited security clearance in the CYN offices. However, as they walked through the sliding bullet proof steel doors, down the sullen corridor, and past the central control station to the gymnasium—the comic personas faded and reality hit hard.

Michael Pritchard, familiar with the youth sitting on the gymnasium floor, led the way with a series of character impersonations and vocal sounds to warm up the somewhat reluctant crowd. A roar of laughter, smiles, and positive endorphins filled the room as Pritchard expressed his love, care, and concern for the youth. While several youth rolled their eyes, mumbled expletives and shook their heads in disbelief, others cocked their heads interested in what the charismatic, teddy bear of a man before them had to say. The message was clear—Williams and Pritchard were not there to talk about what the youth had done and they did not see the youth for who they were. Rather, they saw the youth for who they were capable of being and the choices they would make in the future. The bottom line was, that while the youth may not have had control of what happened in their lives, they do have control over how they respond.

## The raw truth, the need for human connection, and the ability to take responsibility were key topics of discussion.

The forty-five minute question and answer session entranced the young audience as both Pritchard and Williams talked about their own short comings, substance abuse, and decisions. Williams shared his personal path to fame and career as an actor with the youth. The blunt honesty, openness, and compassion Williams expressed as he discussed his battle with substance abuse and rehab created a safe space for the youth to share their lives with the actor.

Many of the youth were interested in Williams' career, his advice on getting started in the business of performing, his education, where he was born, and why he lives in San Francisco instead of Hollywood. Others were more interested in his personal struggles. When one youth expressed his disdain for rehab and questioned his ability to stick with it, Williams responded that rehab 'sucks' but that it is necessary and important. He expressed

the importance of human connections, and the impossible task of staying clean without the support of others. He urged the youth to attend meetings, make phone calls and reach out for support as they transition from the sober environment of juvenile hall to the world where alcohol and drugs are readily available and present. The raw truth, the need for human connection, and the ability to take responsibility were key topics of discussion. As one incarcerated youth pointed out, "...we need people like you. People who don't throw what we done in our faces 'cuz we know why we're here. We know it's our fault. We need to know people believe in us, support us and care 'bout us." Williams and Pritchard brought that message home in every way with humor, honesty, and heart.



Brittany Heinrich (Program Director of City Youth Now), Meredith Dwyer (Executive Director of City Youth Now), Robin Williams, Michael Pritchard, and Susan Stone (Board Vice President of City Youth Now). For nearly six decades, City Youth Now has dedicated itself to serving youth in the juvenile delinquent and foster care systems in San Francisco. We strive to provide these youth beyond the bare necessities and help them to transition to a successful adulthood.



# Twin Pines Ranch Horse Program



Riverside County Office of Education  
By Christiane Deaton

In January 2007, Twin Pines High School was awarded the Unique Projects Grant by the Riverside County Board of Education to implement a horse program at Twin Pines Ranch, a Riverside County probation facility located in the mountains near Banning. This program, initiated by Twin Pines' Lead Teacher, Christiane Deaton, with the support of its Principal, Art Paz, is an innovative approach which enhances student achievement in and out of the classroom by immersing students into the world of horses.

During several weeks of planning and preparing for the program, student participants built the horse facilities under the guidance of Twin Pines Ranch's vocational instructors, Brad Bower and Walt Wagner. The facilities include a large riding arena, round pen and several other enclosures where all activities can take place in a safe and structured environment. On March 9, 2007, the day had finally come when local ranchers brought up their horses and we began our first horse pro-

gram. During several sessions, the boys are taught basic horsemanship, riding and roping skills. The boys literally learn



from the ground up, starting with feeding and cleaning pens, haltering, grooming and leading to basic groundwork in the round pen. They learn how to rope and finally, ride. It is quite an experience to witness "city boys" transforming into "cowboys", willing and eager to participate to the fullest of their abilities; but, most importantly, they learn about themselves by interacting with the horses, people and situations around them.

This alternative approach to learning provides opportunities for at-risk students to strengthen their self-concept by achieving success and accomplishments in meaningful activities. Working with horses engages them physically, mentally and emotionally. Horses are especially powerful messengers and through natural consequences teach the benefits of work ethic, responsibility, respect, assertiveness and communication.

While most of students instantly develop a connection with the horses, many also enjoy learning how to rope and catch calves - a task more challenging than imagined. The boys learned the importance of staying focused and remaining persistent until the job is done



– one of the many acquired skills which translates into success in the classroom.

At the end of each program, the students have a chance to show off their newly learned skills at a Horse Show and BBQ in front of invited guests, dignitaries and parents. The show features several events to showcase how far the “city boys” have come in such a short time. Even seasoned horsemen have been impressed by their riding skills



and confidence demonstrated in all events including horsemanship, roping, riding skills, and the high-

light of the day, barrel racing!

During the opening ceremony, the boys carry the flags and hold their heads up high with pride and joy. Considering the boys had no horse experience prior to this program, their accomplishments were enormous, and the spectators loved every bit of it. What the boys took away from this experi-



ence is not merely learning how to ride a horse – it is knowing that when you put forth courage and determination to learn something new, success is sure to follow. Our boys learned many life lessons during this program which will help them succeed in and out of the classroom. It has truly been a wonderful ride and put the old cowboy saying to the test: “There’s something about the outside of a horse that’s good for the inside of man.”



We have completed two sessions with excellent results – each time the students surpass our already high expectations and goals in all areas of the program. Working with horses

in structured and purposefully planned activities is an alternative approach to reach and teach students who have often turned a deaf ear to our



“words of wisdom”. What is known as “equine-facilitated learning” has become increasingly recognized to be beneficial and therapeutic for many different populations, especially for those who have not responded well to traditional approaches. We have had a first-hand opportunity to see how students’ success with horses has translated into success in the classroom.

*Christiane Deaton,  
Lead Teacher;  
Dr. Regina Patton-Stell,  
Director,  
Riverside County  
Office of Education,  
Alternative Education  
Division*



# Identifying Best Practices in Alternative Education: The Educational Options Research Project

By Wendell J. Callahan and Stephanie Johnston

In its second year, The Educational Options Best Practices Demonstration Project is a coordinated effort jointly underway with the California Department of Education's Educational Options Office, the San Diego County Office of Education and the El Dorado County Office of Education. Best practices in Court, Community, Community Day Schools, and other alternative education programs throughout California are selected each year through peer review. Information about the practices, the educators and their schools and programs are then disseminated to the field via the project website, professional journals and professional conferences. This article will provide an overview of the Best Practices Project, the review method and present common elements characteristic of the practices selected for 2007-08.

## The Domains of Best Practice

Practices are submitted from one or more of the following broadly defined domains:

- Assessment, Evaluation and Data Management
- Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Technology
- Leadership and Staff Development
- Student Support, Retention and Transition

A narrative describing the practice is submitted for review. The narrative also includes a

description of the school, student population and how the practice has improved student achievement. Submissions are required to include appropriate outcome data (including ASAM indicator data) demonstrating the effectiveness of the practice in improving student achievement.

## Project Calendar

The project operates on a yearlong cycle. Review and compilation of selected practices occurs in the Fall and dissemination activities occur in the Spring of each project year. Planning for the upcoming project year also occurs in the Spring.

## Review Process

The peer review process is central to the best practice selection method. An expert review panel comprised of representatives from the California Department of Education Educational Options Office, Juvenile Court & Community and Alternative Schools Administrators of California (JCCASAC), California Continuation Education Association (CCEA), California Consortium for Independent Study (CCIS), Community Day Schools Network (CDSNet) and WestEd meets in the Fall and Spring of each project year. The Fall meeting is focused on project review and selection using an evaluation instrument designed to rate each submission on the following dimensions:

**Table 1. 2007-08 Best Practices in Educational Options**

Practice	Contact	School	District
Workplace Learning/ Academy	Ron Baptie	Valley Community School	Merced County Office of Education
Academic Decathlon	Janette Alvarado	Valley Community School	Merced County Office of Education
Community-based Science Instruction	Tony Lederer	Calvine High School	Elk Grove Unified School District

• **Measurable Impact on Student Achievement:**

Defined as the degree to which the practice produces measurable results on indicators of student achievement.

• **Innovation:** Defined as the degree to which the practice breaks new ground or addresses ongoing issues in an original method.

• **Replicability/Generalizability:** Refers to the degree to which a practice is easily transportable to another setting or program. For example, a practice may be highly innovative but so idiosyncratic to a particular teacher or setting that it is virtually ungeneralizable to any other setting and consequently of little value as an *easily replicable* best practice for dissemination to the rest of the field.

• **Program Integration/Coordination:** Defined as the degree to which the practice involves cross-disciplinary or interdepartmental collaboration and integration. For example, Valley Community School’s (see article in this issue) Workplace Learning Academy is a fine example of coordination and program integration between the Merced COE’s Special Education Department and Regional Occupational Program.

• **Teacher/Staff Training:** Defined as the training capacity required for implementation of the practice.

• **Resource Demand/Allocation:** Defined as the cost, both in fiscal and human resources, of implementing the practice.

• **Collaborations/Outreach:** Defined as the degree to which the practice involves school to home, school to community or inter-agency collaboration.

Each reviewer evaluated the submissions received in October 2007 by the project and rank ordered the practices based on their evaluations. The review panel then completed a consensus ranking of all submissions. The top three submissions were selected as Best Practices for 2007-08.

**2007-08 Best Practices Results**

The Best Practice in Educational Options Demonstration Project Review Committee recommended the following submissions for recognition as Best Practices for 2007-08. The practices, educators and programs are presented below in Table 1.

**Disseminating 2007-08 Best Practices**

The Best Practices in Educational Options Project website, [www.sdcoe.net/edoptions](http://www.sdcoe.net/edoptions) (Callahan & Johnston, 2007), is the primary dissemination method for information about identified best practices. Beginning in late Spring 2008, expanded profiles of each practice will be posted to the website. In addition to basic program information and the Portable Document Format (PDF) file of the narrative submitted for review, users will be able to view detailed video presentations filmed on location at the school sites where programs are being implemented. Contact information in the form of phone numbers, website addresses and email links will also be posted.

Best Practices will also be featured at several professional conferences during the Spring of 2008. These include the California

County Superintendents Educational Association (CCSEA)/California School Boards Association (CSBA)/California Parent Teacher Association (CPTA) joint conference, as well as the California Consortium for Independent Study (CCIS) and the Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators (JCCASAC) conferences. Professional publications, such as this article as well as short articles in the WestEd ASAM newsletter will also continue to feature information about the project.

### Common Elements & Outcomes

Based on review of the proposals as well as the corresponding ASAM school reports, several aspects distinguish the practices selected by the review committee. Narrative analysis of the submitted proposals, confirmed by the field evidence compiled for the video profiles, revealed a student-centered element common in each practice. Calvine High School's Community-based Science Program focused on the need to make instruction relevant for students, as Tony Lederer wrote in his proposal:

It is appropriate and essential for high school students to do important work in their communities. While it is never easy to lead authentic civics or economics projects in a classroom, activities in the community are comprehensive, stimulating, fun and experiential. Extensive research, along with our experience indicates at-risk youth will participate to a greater extent in activities giving value and meaning to their lives. Mundane classroom drill leads to student dissatisfaction, behavior problems, lower attendance and higher drop out rates.

This focus is also evident in Janette Alva-

rado's description of Valley Community School's Academic Decathlon Team:

By participating in the Academic Decathlon, the goal of Valley Community School is to promote and recognize learning and achievement by emphasizing the value of academic excellence for all students. By providing an enriching educational experience for at-risk students combined with the relevant study of cultural and critical topics with strong reasoning and interpersonal skills, the value of the competitions, projects, and activities lies in each participant's stretching of his or her capacities and bonding with others. The emphasis is placed upon the personal growth of each student, who, by meeting challenges with honesty and integrity, reaps the rewards of greater self-knowledge and self-confidence in the future.

Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) 2006-07 indicator data from the schools implementing best practices confirms a high level of student engagement. Valley Community School's and Calvine High School's Attendance Rates (ASAM Indicator 6) were 88.3% and 88.7%, respectively, and both exceeded the Sufficient Performance Standard. Calvine's Credit Completion Average (ASAM Indicator 13B) was 9.1 credits per month and exceeded the Sufficient Performance Standard. Valley's Credit Completion Rate was 99.4% and exceeded the Commendable Performance Standard.

Calvine's ASAM High School Graduation Rate (ASAM Indicator 14) of 85.3% also exceeded the Sufficient Performance Standard. Valley Community School reported a majority of students making pre-post gains in

Extensive research, along with our experience indicates at-risk youth will participate to a greater extent in activities giving value and meaning to their lives.

Reading Achievement on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Locally-adopted measures of academic achievement (ASAM Indicator 9) serve as indicators of both student engagement and readiness as well as academic performance. Perhaps the most compelling commonality among Valley Community School and Calvine High School is that their complete set of ASAM indicator data is stable or increasing over the past three school years. This finding suggests that despite the high rate of student mobility, characteristic of ASAM schools, practices have emerged that contribute to sustained improvement in school performance.

### Future Directions

Expansion of the Best Practices in Educational Options Dissemination Project will focus on increasing the number of practices submitted for review. The 2007-08 total of five submissions from a field of over 1000 California alternative schools represents a participation rate of 0.5%, which leaves substantial room for increasing the number of submissions. Expansion of website capabilities is ongoing. For example, an online database has been developed, including an online database to allow users to more efficiently navigate the site to find the specific school, domain or practice they are looking for. Additionally, the project could expand support for best practices throughout the field via the development of professional learning communities. Such communities could be developed using web casting and video conferencing technologies to disseminate best practices to a wider audience of alternative educators.

### References

Callahan, W. J., & Johnston, S. (2007). Web site:<http://www.sdcoe.net/edoptions>.



*Wendell J. Callahan* holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in research methods from the University of California, San Diego and San Diego State University; Master of Science Degree in Counseling and Schools Psychology from San Diego State University; and credentials in school psychology and administrative services. Dr. Callahan is project director for the Best Practices project as well as Director of Assessment, Research and Pupil Services for the San Diego County Office of Education Juvenile Court & Community Schools. Dr. Callahan is an adjunct professor of psychology at San Diego State University. Dr. Callahan can be reached at [callahan@sdcoe.net](mailto:callahan@sdcoe.net).

*Stephanie Johnston* earned her B.A. in Community Psychology with emphasis in cross-cultural psychology from Whittier College in Whittier, CA. Ms. Johnston is the project specialist for the Best Practices project and is also the transition technician for the San Diego County Office of Education Juvenile Court & Community Schools. Ms. Johnston can be reached at [stephj@sdcoe.net](mailto:stephj@sdcoe.net).

***Programs Selected for 'Best Practice' are outlined on the pages 16-22.***

# Academic Decathlon

*Selected as a 2007-08 Best Practice in Educational Options*

Valley Community School  
Merced County Office of Education

By Janette Alvarado

The mission of Valley Community School (VCS) is to provide a safe and encouraging atmosphere where staff, students, family, and community members work collaboratively to create a learning environment where all participants develop a desire for personal growth and life-long learning. All students acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes to reach their full potential as citizens who can successfully meet the challenges of a changing global society. Valley Community School programs are offered through the Merced County Office of Education (MCOE) for students who have been (1) expelled from a school, (2) referred by a school district or as a result of a School Attendance Review Board—SARB—recommendation, or (3) placed on probation pursuant to Sections 300, 601, 602, or 654 of the Welfare and Institutions Code—and are not in attendance at any other school.

The majority of students attending Valley Community School (VCS) come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with approximately 70% qualifying for the free lunch program. Most students have been referred to VCS due to truancy, poor academic performance, substance abuse, gang activity and poor life choices. These factors influence both the scheduling and development of the programs we offer in order to include other government and community agencies (such as Mental Health Services, Police and Probation Departments) which support a comprehensive program.



Our Alternative Education program, VCS, reports to the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) under six separate CDS codes. For the 2005-2006 school year, the ASAM report indicated (inclusive) total unduplicated count of students enrolled as 3,708. The total number of long-term students enrolled (inclusive) was 815. Attendance (average) was reported as 87.38% and credit completion (average) was 81.79% of possible credits. Previously, VCS collected and reported data utilizing Renaissance STAR for the reading indicator but switched to NWEA/Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) for the 2006-2007 school year.

The **California Academic Decathlon** partners with the education community and California County/District Offices of Education to provide an effective co-ed academic enrichment program in which ninth through twelfth grade students compete as individuals and as

team members in a series of ten academic tests and demonstrations which are based on an advanced curriculum. The purpose is to encourage, acknowledge and reward academic excellence by preparing and motivating high school students to achieve at a significantly advanced level through highly competitive cross-disciplined scholastic events. The competition components are Art, Music, Language & Literature, Social Science, Science, Mathematics, Economics, Speech, Interview, and Essay. The Academic Decathlon embodies a partnership of businesses, foundations and individuals in cooperation with the education community and county office of education.

Valley Community School (VCS) has participated in the countywide Academic Decathlon competition each year since 1995. It is the only alternative education school participating in such an event. A nine-member team is comprised of three Varsity (2.99 GPA and below), Scholastic (3.00-3.74 GPA) and Honor (3.75 and above) students. During the 2006-2007 academic school year, both the Merced and Los Banos Valley Community School Academic Decathlon teams earned a combined eight medals in competition.

By participating in the Academic Decathlon, the goal of VCS is to promote and recognize learning and achievement by emphasizing the value of academic excellence for all students and fostering a fair and challenging competition. By providing an enriching educational experience for at-risk students combined with the relevant study of cultural and critical topics with strong reasoning and interpersonal skills, the value of the competitions, projects, and activities lies in each participant's stretching of his or her capacities and bonding with others. The emphasis is placed upon the personal growth of each student, who, by meeting the challenges with honesty and integrity, reaps the rewards of greater self-knowledge and self-confidence for the future.

The Merced County Office of Education



provides opportunities for students to experience the challenges of rigorous team and individual competition. VCS teachers/coaches provide the opportunity for at-risk students to develop a greater respect for knowledge, promote inter-school academic competition, emphasize the need for increased communication skills, stimulate intellectual growth and achievement and develop a sense of teamwork.

The VCS alternative education program challenges students to push themselves beyond what they thought academically possible, motivating and recapturing their interest in academics. The program rewards the heroes of the academic arena. It encourages "C" students to excel beyond their current achievement level and teaches other students they have strengths they can contribute to the team. The team environment offers an opportunity for belonging, for participation and leadership to students who might otherwise not be involved with student activities.

This team concept creates a positive school image and academic role models, changes students' attitudes and encourages public interest and awareness of an outstanding opportunity provided to VCS students. VCS teachers/coaches and students spend months preparing for this demanding competition. In addition to mastering the extensive academic content, students learn about collaboration, goal setting, and planning.

VCS students participating in the Academic Decathlon regularly improve classroom performance in other areas of their high school experience. Evidence indicates that many students with decathlon experience score higher

on assessment tests than their peers. Students are accountable for themselves but also responsible to the group and have to perform at a higher level to be competitive. Internal motivation is increased, as is self-esteem. VCS Students learn they can gain the knowledge, ability and skill to be competitive regardless of the size of school they attend or their grade point average. They also meet new people, learn interpersonal and sportsmanship skills and gain an understanding of a larger world outside the walls of Valley Community School and their community.

For VCS students, the Academic Decathlon program opens doors and creates pathways for success. Students directly benefit by participating through the acquisition of new learning, competition, recognition for academic excellence, and earning college scholarships. Participation also offers one more way of honoring those students who choose to set high standards for themselves academically and sends a positive message to the school community about the value placed upon academic success. In addition, the Academic Decathlon involves members of the business/industry as active supporters of a program promoting academic excellence. Long-term relationships, developed through joint participation, benefit VCS students and the community. Given the opportunity to highlight their talents in a team-orientated competitive format, VCS students have grown academically and have gained the confidence that will help them in future endeavors after high school.



Janette Alvarado, and decathlon coaches Laura Andrews, Mark Pintor and Claudine Zuspan

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# Best Practices in Community-based Science Instruction *Selected as a 2007-08 Best Practice in Educational Options*

Calvine High School  
 Elk Grove Unified School District

By Tony Lederer

Using the sequence of preparation, experience, and reflection, Calvine High students take part in numerous service learning activities that result in genuine community improvements. It is appropriate and essential for high school students to do important work in their communities. While it is never easy to lead authentic civics or economics projects in a classroom, activities in the community are comprehensive, stimulating, fun and experiential. Extensive research, along with our experience indicates at-risk youth will participate to a greater extent in activities giving value and meaning to their lives. Mundane classroom drill leads to student dissatisfaction, behavior problems, lower attendance and higher drop out rates.

Calvine High is a suburban alternative high school serving the educational needs of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students pursuing high school diplomas or career training. Student population is multicultural with 14 different languages spoken in student homes. They are credit deficient due to personal or family issues affecting regular school attendance, transitional family settings, work/school time conflicts, incarceration, or difficulties learning at comprehensive high school pace. Students come from the attendance area of seven local comprehensive high schools, greatly enhancing and diversifying the student community. Students attend morning or afternoon sessions taught by twelve fully credentialed

teachers, with the assistance of two administrators, two counselors, one aide, and five classified personnel who support daily school activities.

Students participate in cross-curricular service learning activities at nearby Strawberry Creek and at Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Activities at Strawberry Creek are two-fold; October students work with sixth grade students from Herman Leimbach Elementary School testing the water conditions at Strawberry Creek. Results are then added to a global database containing local community water quality results. The second round of service learning at Strawberry Creek takes place in April, in conjunction with Earth Day/Creek Week activities. During this four-day effort, students compare two local watersheds, grid the local watershed using GPS devices and catalogue flora and fauna per each grid, test water quality and cleanup litter and garbage. Back in the classroom, students reflect in multimedia, video, or by blogging their findings with conclusions of how important it is to protect the environment.

The science curriculum includes activities in which students scientifically test water quality of Strawberry Creek and analyze the results. Students write well-planned essays discussing the importance of their participation for English credit. During math assignments, students calculate project area, and work force figures of student involvement sup-

porting the community with this school effort. Supporting social science curricular areas, students use aerial photography views of the Strawberry Creek area to compare land use policies used in the development of two local neighborhoods. Comparisons explore the role of personal preferences in individual economic choices weighed against the need for watershed protection, flood control, and natural areas for flora and fauna to live and thrive.

During visits to Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in collaboration with the California Waterfowl Association Marsh Madness, Calvine students take on the leadership role of 'naturalists' as they guide and teach elementary school students on the flora and fauna of the refuge. When they are involved as leaders in Marsh Madness, they take on the unconventional role of a continuation high school student teacher. The success of our program hinges on these recalcitrant students first performing leadership roles, and experiencing out of class learning to support their academic achievement. Overall, these projects engage students while improving community knowledge on environmental issues concerning the local support of a clean watershed at Strawberry Creek and a regional habitat restoration/protection at Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

Forty-one percent of Calvine students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program, a general indicator of poverty. They are a diverse population; African-American 34.4%, Hispanic or Latino 26.9%, White (Not Hispanic) 21.8%, Asian 8.8%, Filipino 2.9%, and American Indian or Alaska Native 0.6%. 17.8% of the students are English Learners and 8.6% of the student population are identified as eligible under IDEA.

Many Calvine students live on the verge of poverty surrounded by a prosperous and rapidly growing city. Although many of these students are willing to work, they lack job skills and see little or no opportunity for life success. Although students feel that in-

adequate opportunities exist for them, they actively engage in these projects with higher levels of motivation, supporting their learning in healthy, outdoor settings. Our service learning projects stress work skills tied to outdoor activities aimed at improving the community. Upon completion of field activities, students participate in a variety of reflective assignments in the curricular areas of English, Science, American Government, Math and Economics. Examples of recent student work are available at [www.calvinehigh.edublogs.org](http://www.calvinehigh.edublogs.org), and <http://www.egusd.k12.ca.us/calvine/student%20work/index.htm>.

The empowerment of young people by developing useful roles in the community is central to the success of our school. On and off campus recognition programs contribute to students feeling valued by the community they serve. Parents, neighbors, and members of the business community all take interest in creating learning experiences pointing our students towards successful academic outcomes. Former students routinely return to campus to relate their successes in life to current students, showing struggling students it can be done. Since instituting the service-learning curriculum, the attendance of our students has increased from 84% in 2003-2004 to 86% in 2005-2006 to over 90% half way through the first quarter of 2007-2008. During this same period, the average number of credits earned has risen 12%. The Calvine High School percentage of credit eligible long-term students graduating from the school has increased from 75% in 2003-2004 to 81% in 2005-2006.



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# The Workplace Learning Academy

## *Selected as a 2007-08 Best Practice in Educational Options*

Valley Community School  
 Merced County Office of Education

By Rob Baptie

Valley Community School is a court and community school that serves over 1500 at-risk youth throughout Merced County each year. Over 90% of Valley Community School students come from families living below the poverty line, and 70% are on probation. The students experience poverty on a daily basis, and many of the consequences include violence, alcohol and drug abuse, gang affiliation and criminal activity. The lack of effective parental supervision and appropriate role models has effected students' development of personal and social values, decision-making and goal setting techniques, and methods of establishing interpersonal relationships

This year, the Merced County Office of Education has joined in partnership with the Merced Union High School District (MUHSD) in creating a 3-hour block schedule for students with disabilities in order to provide job training skills in the areas of Landscaping, Industrial Technologies, and Construction trade skills. In our Workplace Learning Academy (WLA) program, fifteen of these partnership students are currently enrolled alongside Valley Community School students. This program is designed to develop and promote



entry level skills for learning-disabled students. The direct result of this collaborative effort is mainstreaming at its finest with both an academic and vocational

focus, fostering a sense of our district's mission, "Every Student a Success".

Vocationally centered students are those students who have not passed the

CAHSEE and are not on track for a diploma. They are placed into one of two apprenticeship programs: the Associated Builders and Contractors (non-union) or the Carpenters Local #25 Apprenticeship (union). As highlighted in last year's Best Practices in Educational Options, this partnership in cooperation with local industry leaders, has allowed many of our students to find quality jobs immediately following graduation from high

school. These students are also able to continue their learning though a partnership with Merced Junior College, placing them on a pathway of continued education.

The Regional Occupational Program (ROP) is another partnership which benefits our students. Although a variety of ROP vocational classes are available to our students, they often do not do well in this traditionally structured format. To meet the needs of our students, the Merced County Office of Education and Valley Community School have part-



nered with ROP to provide learning opportunities to our students via such classes as Fine Arts, Marketing, and Computers. As these classes are customized to our needs, we pay an apportionment of the salary for the number of periods used. This allows our students a fuller curriculum experience while cost sharing the teacher.



Within our Juvenile Court School, our alternative education program has created a four period course that involves construction and landscaping delivered via the aforementioned WLA model. This program is called the Bear Creek Academy. A Career Planning and Job Portfolio component has been developed which assists our students entering the workforce.

In August 2006, our relationship with ROP expanded to include the Automotive Technology Center located at the now defunct Castle Air Force Base. Essentially an abandoned building, it took approximately 3 years to refurbish the facility with the majority of the work done by students in the Valley Community School Construction Trades Program through the Workplace Learning Academy. The Automotive Technology Center sustains a fully functioning NAPA Auto Parts Store and state of the art tools and equipment including electronic Mitchell-on-Demand as well as electronic invoicing & work order systems that replicate those used in the industry.

The Automotive Program currently provides services to thirteen schools from five school districts. Enrollment includes 135 high school students, four adults and twenty-four evening ROP students. There are three Automotive Instructors on site to provide hands-on-training



and instruction. Valley Community School utilizes this partnership and facility to maintain the Career and Alternative Education (CAE) Department vehicles, thus lowering our operating and maintenance costs with all work performed by students! As a direct result of the concerted effort of the Merced County Office of Education and various programs, the Automotive Technology Center has established 140 local business partnerships to assist with the on-the-job training component of this program.

The real payoff in these partnerships is the growth both socially and emotionally that these students demonstrate. Self-confidence, teamwork, and responsibility are just a few of the attributes that shine forth highlighting our students' successes. The students involved in these partnerships have shown marked academic improvement with decreased behavioral problems. The effort that students put into testing and assessments, and their work in general, is much greater. On average, students directly involved in the Regional Occupational Programs have a 10 to 15% higher attendance rate, earn 15 more credits per semester, and their performance on academic assessments such as the NWEA and the California High School Exit Exam have consistently improved.



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# What Works and Why? And What Doesn't Work and Why? The Search for Best Practices in Correctional Education

by Thom Gehring and Scott Rennie

## Introduction

Correctional educators frequently ask “What works?” because they have not had access to the literature of their field and the history of what has been proven to work. It has not been the subject of preservice courses or degree programs, or on the job inservice training; it has not been a requirement for qualification in correctional education jobs; it has not been a concern of leaders in the education and criminal or juvenile justice systems; nor has it been included in the standards that are applied for the accreditation of correctional education programs. Our literature is commonly discussed as the “hidden heritage.” This essay outlines the four best documented versions of what has been proven to work, and the nine program elements that they share. The literature’s answer to the “What works?” question is not mysterious. Indeed, there has been a program that has worked since the 1840s – and it is the one program that has repeatedly been successful.

## Nine Shared Elements of the One Program

The elements of the one program have been stable over time and place—despite local emphases among those elements, terminology to describe them, and technologies that support them. In this essay most of the terminology used to describe the elements will be from MacCormick (1931); when other terms are required it

will be because of social or legal changes that accrued in the decades since MacCormick’s writings (1969) stabilized Brockway’s original work (1912). The nine elements follow.

The first element is the pedagogy/andragogy continuum. This continuum is absolutely central to all forms of correctional education, including literacy, special education instruction, English as a second language, and math instruction. In this context pedagogy relates to the conditions of education for juveniles and andragogy to the education of adults. The terminology is important because there has been a general confusion about the issue. However, adult education principles do not always fit well with the needs of confined juveniles, and in adult prisons maturation is inconsistent. Some juveniles have experienced warlike hostility in their lives for years and often make decisions like adults; some adults are incarcerated because they behave emotionally like children. For a host of reasons successful correctional educators should respond to each student’s needs individually. Choice and flexibility in this area are so salient that this element is prerequisite to all subsequent elements.

The second element is vocational education. Many correctional educators believe correctional education is vocational education. This belief is found in each of these nine elements – and each element has advocates ready to reduce the entirety of the field to a particular

Some children grow up in neighborhoods where violence is evident daily, abuse in many forms is always expected and intermittently experienced, the accoutrements of learning are insufficient, and where poverty, racism, sexism, drugs, etc. define everyday life.

part. Balance between these parts can be enhanced by access to the literature on best practices; without access, reductionism dominates with an overemphasis on one or a few parts. Vocational education can be structured to include related theory, as in apprenticeships and whenever the links between academic and vocational learning are emphasized.

The third element is social education. Most correctional educators recognize that resources are distributed so unequally in society that some people are almost pushed into criminal activity. Some children grow up in neighborhoods where violence is evident daily, abuse in many forms is always expected and intermittently experienced, the accoutrements of learning are insufficient, and where poverty, racism, sexism, drugs, etc. define everyday life. These differences are not susceptible to being overcome by correctional educators' interventions or outreach. Therefore, correctional educators tend to focus on problems that individual students face which could be mitigated through education—and especially on the attitudes which were often the causes of particular crimes.

MacCormick wrote of social education in unabashed terms. By this we mean that he recommended all institutional programs should bend to the purpose of social education: housing, security, prison industries, chaplainry and counseling, as well as school, vocational shops, and library. MacCormick posited that nearly every prisoner needed education, and that attitudes and dispositions

should be prioritized—indeed, he saw social education as the main purpose of the prison. Today we frequently refer to these as pre-release programs, life skills, or coping skills.

The fourth element is cultural education. In 1931 MacCormick wrote,

“The term ‘cultural education’ is an unfortunate one; it is likely to be sniffed at by both prisoners and officials. It is difficult to think of a better term for education which is unrelated to vocational advancement, but which is entered into for intellectual or aesthetic satisfaction or for ‘the enrichment of self.’” (p. 189)

European prison education, with its emphasis on adult education, is noted for its success in this area. In the U.S., most correctional educators are not savvy about the difference between Adult Basic Education (ABE) and adult education. Sometimes, if they hear the term adult education, their minds immediately shift to ABE, which is so prominent in their everyday work. This reductionist approach neglects the courses that have proven so useful in many European prison schools: drama, poetry, music, photography, and art, as well as handicrafts and, increasingly, computer applications and video production. By contrast, ABE focuses on basic academic skills only, and is often justified by its direct link to marketable skills. Nevertheless, cultural education is frequently important in the program aspirations of correctional educators in the U.S., despite the reductionist policies of institutional systems.

The fifth element is shared responsibility. It is

the one that may appear most anomalous to correctional educators, especially those employed in harsh confinement systems. Shared responsibility is a euphemism for democracy; it has alternatively been called the principle of community organization or participatory management. Through the history and literature of prison reform and correctional education it is easy to document at least 22 democratic prison programs. Most were at the institutional level, but a few were in school enclaves. Of the 22 known programs, the overwhelming majority were successful by any standard: educational achievements; industrial production; reduction of drug offenses, escapes, and homosexual rapes; and in most cases, improved and more regularized relations between prisons and the outside communities. These programs were implemented with administrative support in at least seven nations over the last 200 years; there may be additional examples in other times and places about which the current authors are ignorant. The point is that the evidence has not been and cannot be refuted. Democracy happened in prisons, over and over again, in a wide range of situations, security levels, and places; it does not need to be defended, or even justified; it is a fact.

The sixth element is inclusion. It is an area in which our understanding has changed over the decades. Today the term usually means special education for disabled learners, and language courses typically (but not only) for persons whose native language was different from the language spoken in the place where they reside. The inclusion element can be used to help equalize educational opportunities for the oppressed, as well as to promote multiculturalism, tolerance, and diversity.

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The element of inclusion designates recognition of the need to desegregate. As in other fields, correctional education needs to move toward shared multicultural aspirations, to contribute to the evolving movement to phase out such restrictions.

The seventh element is technology. This pertains to the application of technology which helps facilitate teaching and learning—not because instruction is impossible without the newest, high technology accoutrements. Sometimes it is pursued simply because many students find technological applications motivational. Properly used, these applications foster learning by individuals and groups. They can also bring outside communities inside; their impact can be analogous to “breaking down the walls,” a step which is aligned to the European aspiration for normalization and the North American aspiration for equal access to educational opportunity.

The eighth element is library. Savvy observers of correctional education often recommend that, if there are resources sufficient for only one program element, it should be the library. This is because when prisoners are ready to learn they can always seek out the library. However, it would be a mistake to reduce the entire program to library services and exclude the other eight identified elements of the one program. Each of the four one program versions had a strong, though slightly different, library component.

The ninth element is the configuration of administrative services. In another manuscript one of the current authors wrote,

“Historically, five systems have existed [in North America] for the delivery of

correctional education: Sabbath schools, the traditional or decentralized pattern, correctional education bureaus, correctional school districts (CSDs), and integral education. Of these, the first (Sabbath schools) are officially defunct because they violate the Constitutional aspiration to separate church and state. The last (integral education) is personality based; it cannot be implemented throughout an entire jurisdiction (county, state, etc.). The middle three delivery patterns (traditional or decentralized, bureaus, and CSDs) . . . are the three modern, generic models of jurisdiction wide organizations that deliver correctional education services to confined students. They emerged historically to increase educator authority over educational decisions... ” (Gehring, 2007, pp. 2-3)

There is a universe of useful information about the administrative configuration of correctional education services, though most correctional educators do not have information about how correctional education is structured, sometimes even in nearby institutions within their own system. This dimension of our field directly impacts all the other dimensions. For example, it is entirely possible for a system to be staffed by good teachers who are also good people, with students who are willing and able to learn—but with a terrible education program in which very little teaching and learning actually takes place—simply because of a flawed administrative configuration. The historical trend toward having educators assigned to make educational decisions (in the areas of education curriculum, budget, and personnel) has proceeded from minimal authority to maximal authority in the following order: Sabbath school, traditional or decentralized, bureau, CSD, and integral. This ninth element helps regulate all the others, and it will be defined with greater clarity in the subsequent sections of the essay.

#### Four Historical Versions of the One Program

From a big picture, perspective historical episodes coalesce into at least four discernable versions, all slight variations on the one program that works. These can be attributed to the following: (a) Brockway and MacCormick (about 1880-1941, with important antecedents), (b) Ayers; Duguid; Ross and Fabiano (1970s to the 1990s), (c) the Council of Europe’s Prison Recommendations, especially as expressed by the Nordic Council of Ministers (1989-present), and (d) what has been identified as the integral education model (intermittently since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century). This section introduces the versions of this one program and puts them in context.

#### The Brockway/MacCormick Model

Zebulon Brockway is most famous for his application of Reformatory Prison Discipline (RPD) at New York’s Elmira Reformatory during his superintendency from 1876-1900. In his 1912 autobiography, *Fifty Years of Prison Service*, he wrote of the Elmira education program in ways that correspond to eight of the nine elements discussed above. The one program element that Brockway never implemented was shared responsibility, although one might make a case that the RPD parole system encouraged inmates to take control of their own behavior if they wanted to be released.

MacCormick’s later work relied heavily on Brockway’s, however, he wrote about shared responsibility using the principle of community organization. It was his readiness for the correctional education bureau configuration that is most revealing about MacCormick’s approach—he was ahead of his time. His influence in New York State led governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt to implement the first statewide correctional education bureau. It consisted of a cadre of education consultants in the department of corrections central office, with authority to recommend on issues related to curriculum, the education budget, and edu-

cational personnel matters. In sum, MacCormick built upon Brockway's good ideas to create a highly effective model.

### The Ayers/Duguid/Ross and Fabiano Model

The Canadian model began under Doug Ayers' leadership at the University of Victoria in the early 1970s and was continued by Stephen Duguid at Simon Fraser University in the early 1980s. Robert Ross and Elizabeth Fabiano's definitive correctional education book *Time to Think* (1985) was largely rooted in British Columbia; where traditional university based, postsecondary education programs funded by the Canadian Government dominated. It can be referred to as the "Ayers/ Duguid/Ross and Fabiano" version of the one program. With political changes in the Ottawa government in 1993, this exemplary program was phased out. Nevertheless, this Canadian model was a beacon to informed correctional educators all over the world, and its descriptive literature continues to be received enthusiastically.

In addition, Ayers anticipated the correctional school district (CSD) model, much as MacCormick before him anticipated the bureau model. A CSD exists when the state department of education recognizes schools "inside" as having all the rights and obligations of the local K-12 schools. With an exemplary reputation based on positive results, news of the British Columbia model spread throughout North America and Europe and helped to influence subsequent programs/models.

### The Council of Europe/Nordic Model

The Council of Europe's Recommendations on Prison Education have been closely allied with the European Prison Education Association (EPEA). These recommendations do

not carry the force of law—they are recommendations—but most European nations seek to diminish the gap between current correctional education capabilities and the Council's Recommendations. Some nations have further to go in this than others. It appears those which have been most successful in applying the Recommendations have been the Nordic nations, Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Two of the nine elements warrant special recognition because they are on the leading edge of European correctional education: shared responsibility and administrative configuration. The European aspiration for normalization is central with regard to shared responsibility.

...the Nordic countries are united in the aspiration of 'normalizing' prison education—by that they mean consistency between services 'inside' and 'outside.' They believe inmates should participate in the same community education programs that are not in the prison, and they frequently make good on that belief. (Gehring, 2005, p. 1)

The Council of Europe's Recommendations do not advocate specifically for any particular system of administrative configuration. However, Recommendation 4 states explicitly all prison administrators "should facilitate and support education as much as possible." The same provisions have been addressed sporadically in North America, as shown in the next section.

### Integral Correctional Education Models

Integral organizations overcome institutional constraints not by implementing a more advanced, efficacious, or powerful administrative structure, but through personal intervention by the leader.... The effect is much like when teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to help students learn simultaneously in several academic disciplines, but even more profound. Integral denotes a deep system of confluence (subjective, objective, social, and



cultural), a synthesis that transcends constraints.... (Gehring, 2007, p. 10)

Integral correctional education has been experienced in the great democratic experiments in our field. For example, it was operational at William George's Junior Republic (beginning in 1895); at Thomas Mott Osborne's Mutual Welfare League in the U.S. (1913-1926); at Anton Makarenko's Gorky Colonies in the Soviet Union (1922-1938); it was also part of the institutional milieu in Herr Von Obermaier's jail in Bavaria, Germany, in Colonel Montesino's Valencia Prison in Spain (1850s), and at Frederick A. Demetz's famous Mettray juvenile facility in France (1840-1937), as well as at other institutions (Gehring & Eggleston, 2006).

Administrative configuration has not been controversial since integral leaders operate on a higher or deeper threshold than suggested by many of the routine dimensions of everyday management. The role of personality is emphasized to the point that integral education cannot—or has not—been implemented systematically throughout a system. Close study of the 22 integral education versions indicates that the personality who led each version overcame, negotiated, or transcended the obstacles normally experienced in anti-education institutions.

### Conclusion

The stark alignment of these nine elements is especially interesting, despite minor situational differences that accrued as a result of space and time. All nine elements apply over and over again, to each of the one program's versions or models. Once correctional educators feel confident about what works, the focus should shift to implementing what 'works where we work', and on obtaining adequate resources. A bit of confidence might help us shift our professional paths from simple curiosity to a more secure focus on feasibility and planning. It would be timely for the correctional education commu-

nities to shed the old hidden heritage of vulnerability and to live up to our noble calling: to help students who are ready to improve their lives.

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## Educational Services

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UROK provides instruction in advanced and basic skill building programs in reading, writing and math. We use programs that are research based and are proven effective for at risk student populations. We also develop customized skill building instructional materials and programs that are aligned with the California State Standards and Curriculums (K-12)

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UROK's instructional staff undergoes complete training on the instruction and delivery on all of our programs. The training doesn't just "stop" there; Instructors are continually improving themselves through professional development, behavior modification training, and assessment training. UROK runs on-going evaluations of its programs and instructional staff to insure the best quality instruction and outcomes. We are committed to results.

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At UROK our commitment to education does not have any limitations. We believe in a collaborative effort between schools, teachers, parents and the community. UROK is always working with students, parents and the staff to have a positive effect on a child's learning process.

### Our Clients

UROK has provided training and services to many teachers and schools in California and the United States. Some of UROK's clients are as follows: California Schools and Districts: Anaheim City School District, Azusa Unified School District, Chino Valley Unified School District, Compton Unified School District, Darnell Elementary School, East Whittier City School District, El Monte City School District, Escondido Union School District Francis Parker, Fontana Unified School District, Garvey School District, La Mesa Spring Valley Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Lynwood Unified School District, Memorial Academy, Montebello Unified School District, Moreno Valley Mountain View School District, Nubia Leadership Academy, Newport Mesa Unified School District, Oceanside School District, O'Farrell Community School, Ontario-Montclair School District, Orange Unified School District, Pasadena Unified School District, Perris Elementary School District, Placentia- Yorba Linda Unified School District, Pomona Unified School District, Rialto Unified School District, Riverside Unified School District, San Bernardino City Unified School District, San Diego City Schools, San Diego County Office of Education, San Pasqual Academy, San Pasqual Union School, Santa Ana Unified School District, South Bay Union School District, Sweetwater Union High School District, Winston Academy, Westminster School District, Whittier City School District. Amistad Academy, New Haven Connecticut; Laingsburg Community Schools, Laingsburg, MI

### For more information, contact...

UROK Learning Institute, 4283 El Cajon Blvd. Ste. 200, San Diego, CA 92105. Phone: 619-889-4961 Fax: 619-491-3198. Visit our website at [www.uroklearning.com](http://www.uroklearning.com) e-mail inquiries to: [bdiskin@uroklearning.com](mailto:bdiskin@uroklearning.com)

UROK Learning Institute provides reading, writing and math intervention services in a highly professional, clinic like setting. Our programs feature one-on-one, small group and whole class instruction with well trained, instructors.

### Staff

UROK currently maintains a highly professional and well trained staff to meet the needs of all skill difficulties. We utilize our specialists and assessment experts for implementation/design of educational skill building modification plans for each student.

### Qualifications

All of our employees (not just instructional staff) go through a rigorous employment screening process. Before working with students, Instructional staff must pass background checks through the FBI and State Departments of Justice; as well as TB (tuberculin) screening. UROK is a State Board Approved as a Supplemental Service Provider by the California Department of Education (CDE). We meet CDE and State Board of Education requirements for providing services to at risk populations.

### Population Served

UROK has been providing high quality one-on-one, small group and whole class instruction in California and around the nation since 2001. We service a broad spectrum of clients/students. Our clients come from a multitude of socio-economic backgrounds and educational settings. Students range in age from kindergarten through adult. UROK is uniquely qualified to provide skill building services (Reading, Writing & Math) to anyone who struggles with academics.

### Assessment

At UROK we believe that instruction is driven by assessment. Understanding each student's particular learning needs is essential for successful outcomes. We use norm referenced standardized assessments to understand and determine each student's academic level to ensure the proper course of action.



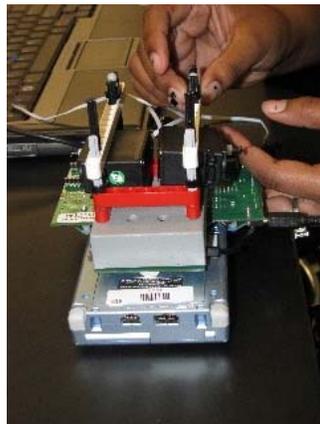
# JCCS Botball Team Wows Judges

San Diego County Office of Education  
By Theresa Fox

This spring five students from the San Diego County Office of Education's Juvenile Court and Community School (JCCS) received the Judge's Choice Award in the 2008 Southern California Botball Tournament. Botball is an educational and public outreach program for middle and high school students which capitalizes on the fascination of robots and technology. The students from the Toussaint Academy of Arts and Sciences (TAAS) experienced the excitement of designing, building, and programming robots.

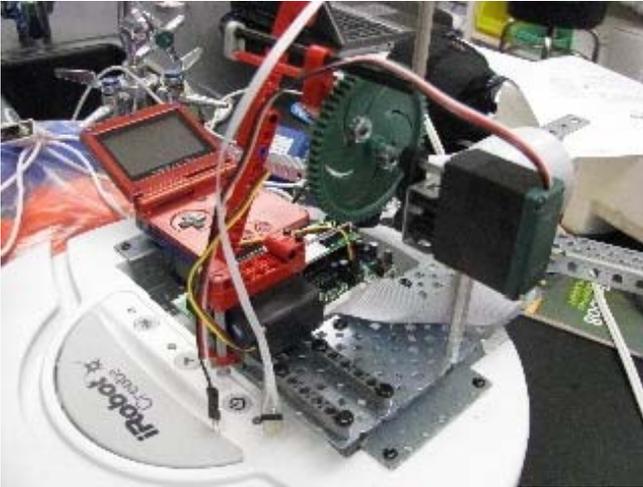
The Southern California Botball Tournament is sponsored by the San Diego Science Alliance. This year 28 teams from around Southern California participated in the tournament held at the University of San Diego on Saturday, March 15. Teams came from all over San Diego, Riverside and Imperial Counties.

The Juvenile County Court School (JCCS) Mathematics Coordinator, Theresa Fox worked in tandem with the Technology Resource Teacher, Mark Starr, and the teacher from TAAS, Sara Matthews, on this seven week program in which the students were responsible for the creation of two robots. The program began with two-day training at the end of

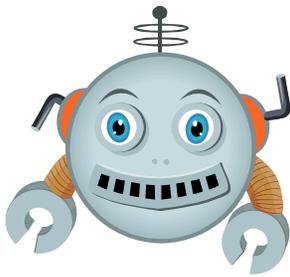


January where teachers were given kits of motors, sensors, Legos, XBC controllers (Gameboys), and circuit boards. The items in the kits provided the supplies to be used to build the two robots. The finished robots had to be completely autonomous and programmed using Interactive C to earn points while maneuvering around on a game board. "This process has been a huge learning experience for both my students and me," said Ms. Matthews. The SDCOE's Science Coordinator, Nancy Taylor, provided additional support for the JCCS Botball team by finding a volunteer from the community, an engineer familiar with the robotics, to help mentor the team.

The Botball Educational Robotics Program describes its program as a way to "integrate science, technology, engineering, and math with robotics to keep your students on the cutting edge of technology." Some



additional skills students learned were time and project management, leadership, organizational skills, and problem solving. Watching the students collaborate and strategize on how to build and program their robots to earn the most points was extremely rewarding.



All of the completed robots were quite impressive. Although JCCS robots struggled at the competition, our team wowed the judges with our spirit and enthusiasm. The students made a formal presentation to the judges and provided them with the documentation of the entire process. Their successful completion of these requirements, and maybe the matching striped knee socks, helped Team TAAS win the 2008 Judges Choice Award. "It was inspiring to see the girls succeed on such an innovative project," said Mark Starr.



Botball events are currently held in 14 regions across the nation as well as 3 international events in the Middle East: Arkansas

- Florida
- Georgia
- Greater DC
- Greater St. Louis
- Hawaii
- Midwest
- New England
- New York/New Jersey
- Northern California
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- Southern California
- Texas
- Qatar
- Kuwait
- United Arab Emirates



# Building Skills at Bob Murphy Community Day School

San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools  
By Donald Nute

In San Bernardino County we felt that our students needed much more than the minimum required program. Community Day Schools (CDS) offered us the opportunity to operate our programs for six full instructional hours daily and when the option became available we decided to go in that direction. This is great!

So, now we have our students for six hours and we want to provide a program that offers rigor, relevance and relationships. What we needed was a good career technical education component and we know our ROP would really like to help. But, we are a CDS and we cannot include ROP in our six hours. What are we to do?

We start making the rounds for grant opportunities to find help in building a career and technical education (CTE) component for our program. Everyone likes our ideas, but our kids and our programs just don't seem to fit into the available grants. We hear it over and over, "You folks are doing some wonderful work and your kids are a real area of need. Unfortunately, this is not what we are authorized to fund." We are getting desperate!



In the meantime, one of our veteran social studies teachers came to us with a long face and a heavy heart. He was facing the crisis that

so many of our teachers encounter. How could he come to work and excite his kids about world history on a daily basis when so many of them lacked even the most rudimentary understanding about how they were going to make a living when they left school.

Finally, our ROP Administrator came to us and said "Take a look at this program. It doesn't fit the requirements for an ROP class, but it looks like something that would help you." He was talking about Building Skills from Paxton/Patterson. Although this entry level construction skills program is too general to meet ROP requirements, it is a quality entry level career vocational program that is ideally suited as an introductory vocational education class.

Bob Murphy County Community Day School is a ten classroom facility. Principal George Bowser knew what his kids needed and recognized the value of the project. With ten classes, we had enough students to operate a vocational class all day. Hey, we have kids at school, we have a teacher and now we have a program. Let's make it happen. Our ROP agreed and recognized that this was a tremendous opportunity to help kids. Fortunately, they were able to support us by purchasing some of the basic equipment for the program and in January of this year we opened our doors. Bob Murphy County Community Day School now offers a Building Skills vocational class with Phil Turner as the teacher. On a daily basis you can see our CDS kids working on their construction skills projects.

Building skills is a menu of 17 activities from the construction industry disciplines including plumbing, blueprint reading, painting, masonry, HVAC, concrete, tile work, framing and electrical. Each skill is completed at an individual workstation that includes a workbench, appropriate tools and the necessary materials. Student instruction is supported by an integrated TV/DVD player and a student text. The teacher needs to be a mentor, classroom monitor and motivator of students. The teacher does not need to be a master builder or tradesperson. The instructional materials provide the support for the student to complete an authentic project that entails the essential introductory skills of the discipline. Everything is done with real world tools and materials. The



only modification is that some of the projects are done on a smaller scale. After all, a three foot tall door has all the same elements as its full size cousin! And while they are working they are applying critical academic skills from their other classes including reading, math and science.

Each project is designed to take two weeks to complete. We have begun with projects that can be done inside our slightly modified classroom (we took out the desks and put in the workbenches) and we are in the process of construct-



ing a small outdoor instructional area which will be used for the “messy” projects such as masonry and painting. When fully operational we will have a full two semester program.

And our students love it! This class is on their A-list. They look forward to spending part of their day up and moving while they learn something that they can truly see themselves



using. The skills they learn are not only an entry to a possible career, they are skills they can take home to help their families.

One of our next steps will be our advisory committee. We are in the process of recruiting education and industry advisors to help us plan and implement the future of the class. We are contacting builders, building supply retailers, college technical and career programs and related employers from the community in order to solicit guidance for our program and provide assistance to our students. We feel that this will be a critical component for this class.

Career and technical education for our students is critical. We are helping connect our students to the ROP offerings in their district and we



hope to see our students return to district schools prepared and interested in the available ROP classes. This program has rekindled a positive relationship between a teacher and his students as well as fostering a positive relationship between the student and the school.

We feel that this program has a level of rigor that appropriately introduces our students to career and technical education and connects academic requirements to real world skills.

# Innovative Practice in San Luis Obispo County: TEEN HEALTH CONNECTIONS

By Jeanne Dukes and Diane Donalies

**S**an Luis Obispo County Community Schools has developed an innovative program, Teen Health Connections, that targets the unmet health needs of our at-risk youth. It is common knowledge that at-risk youth have a higher percentage of neglected medical conditions that lead to many days of missed school.

In 2005, SLOCOE was awarded a grant by the California Endowment in order to meet these unmet health needs and connect Community School students to insurance and a medical home. Family Health Advocates and licensed nurses were hired to fill these positions. As each student enrolls at Community School, they complete a detailed health questionnaire which is then reviewed by the school nurse. When unmet medical conditions are identified, the student is referred to a family health advocate who walks the students and their families through the process of obtaining insurance and addressing any health concerns.

Many families do not maintain a home calendar. Simple interventions like helping them to remember appointments and assisting with securing needed transportation have gone a long way towards reducing the number of no-show appointments. Many at-risk students have been the victims of long-standing medical neglect by their families



Teen Health Council

and fallen through the cracks of the health care system. Teen Health Connection's goal is to meet those needs, as the family health advocates make referrals, and follow up on the student until the health care need is properly addressed.

Annual Health Fairs, in partnership with the local health clinic, are held at each school site where students are evaluated for an array of medical conditions including diabetes, anemia, mental health disorders, drug/alcohol/ tobacco addictions, nutritional deficits, dental decay, reproductive health, and the mandated health screenings for vision, hearing and scoliosis. The last Health Fair series identified 228 unmet medical conditions in the 163 students screened. It is no wonder that these students have a hard time concentrating in school and

have histories of truancy. Could anybody be expected to sit still for a day long class if they had back pain, dental pain, could not read small print, or could not hear the teacher?

The Community School Health Council meets quarterly and consists of students, staff, parents and community providers. A collaborative effort has addressed issues such as school meals, reproductive health issues and smoking cessation. This council has increased awareness of the health challenges facing the teens.

San Luis Obispo County Community Schools have made significant progress towards the goal of providing comprehensive health care services available to students. In addition, solid support has been obtained from school staff, parents, and community health providers. A recent student, teacher and parent questionnaire developed by the health council

was completed and based upon that data, health care priorities are being determined. In time, we hope to have comprehensive health care available directly on campus.



For more information contact Diane Donalies , School Nurse, Court/Community Schools or Jeanne Dukes, Assistant Superintendent, San Luis Obispo County Office of Education [jdukes@slococ.org](mailto:jdukes@slococ.org)



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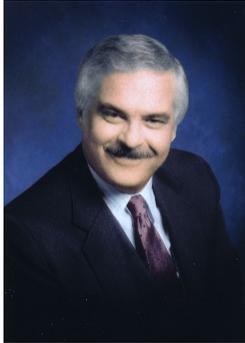
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**This is an opportunity for you to tell others about the successes or innovative programs you, your students, staff, and programs have had in your schools, districts, and counties.**

# John Peshkoff Award

## Congratulations to the 2008 award recipients



John Peshkoff (1935-2006) was one of the founding fathers of JCCASAC (then known as Juvenile Court School Administrators of California or JCSAC). John served as the JCCASAC president from 1977-78 and again from 1990-91. He advocated for legislation and practices which support quality educational services for students in alternative education programs. He also served as a mentor, friend, and cheerleader to his peers and colleagues in the field.

The John Peshkoff Award is presented annually for memorable vision, service, leadership and commitment to JCCASAC students and programs.



Charles (Chuck) Lee started his career in education in 1957 as a fourth grade teacher in Ojai, California. After earning his Bachelor of Arts degree and teaching credentials at Long Beach State, he received his Masters degree at the Clairemont Graduate School and his administrative credential at University of Southern California.

Chuck's first administrative position was as superintendent/principal/teacher/bus driver (as needed) in the small Alber Hill School District in Riverside, California. This "do whatever is necessary for kids" attitude was great preparation for becoming a Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS) administrator! Chuck came to the San Diego County Office of Education in 1965 as principal of the Juvenile Court Schools and rose to the position of Executive Director. For the next 37 years, Chuck's vision and leadership was instrumental in building the Court and Community School System for San Diego County. His dedication and hard work have created an educational program that benefits thousands of students every year.

Chuck worked with John Peshkoff and other JCCS state leaders on legislation for all schools and in developing the current Education Code language that governs court and community schools. He has been involved in the leadership of JCCASAC since the beginning, serving as its second president in 1971-72 and again in 1988-89. He remained active with the Board of Directors until his retirement in 2002.

For this kind and thoughtful man, family is his focus. Chuck and his wife, Geri (a retired JCCS teacher), have three daughters and two sons, eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren. When he is not busy volunteering at his grandson's school, Chuck loves to read and play poker. Look out celebrity poker, here comes Chuck Lee!



Janet began her career journey as an educator at Dominguez High School where she taught music. During her nine years with Compton Unified School District she also taught extended education classes and ESL at Compton and Pasadena Community colleges.

Janet embarked on a new teaching adventure in Correctional Education with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, Division of Court and Community Schools in 1979. She excelled because of her strong principles, positive work ethic and insistence on excellence. Her first principalship was with the Orange County Office of Education, Juvenile Court and Community Schools. Having worked with both counties, she had an opportunity to blend her community organizational skills with educational reforms to produce the "Hope Centre Academy" in Compton, California. The Centre progressed through collaboration with community partners in order to provide after school programs and 'wrap around' services. She was committed to Principle-Centered Leadership coupled with personal and professional development. She was invited to be a Senior Fellow at the California School Leadership Academy; the Educational Policy Fellowship Program; and a Fellow at the Center for the Study of Correctional Education at California State University, San Bernardino. She was also President of JCCASAC in 2000-2001.

Janet is known for her extraordinary musical talent and her stories of Ghana where she and her husband of 25 years, Kpakpo Addo, built the home of their dreams and established "The Addo Group", a foundation for the Highlife Hall of Fame Museum in Ghana.

Sadly, Janet passed away this year. She celebrated her life to the fullest while touching the hearts and souls of all she encountered. She will surely be missed as she joyfully continues her journey with God.

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***Congratulations  
to the County Office Alternative Education  
2007-2008  
Teachers of the Year***



**Darlene Gonzalez**  
Kern County Office of Education

**Darlene Gonzalez** has been a classroom teacher at CLC Tech for eleven years, teaching fine arts to high school students, along with routinely serving as a mentor to newer teachers. Mrs. Gonzalez began her career in alternative education as an instructional aide with the court school program before completing her degree and credential.

During her senior year in college she was recognized for her extraordinary talents and received the Outstanding Art Senior Award. She was also a participating artist for Christo's Umbrella Project. Darlene was a member of the WASC Team, spearheaded the development of the art curriculum and was one of the founding teachers at the Kelly F. Blanton Student Education Center. Darlene is involved in creating art activities for children at the Bakersfield Women's Shelter through the Alliance for Family Violence and acts as facilitator/ chairperson for decorations committees for open house and graduation.

Darlene has the reputation among administration as being the "Go To" teacher. She is highly respected among her peers due to her approachability and enthusiasm regarding lesson plan ideas and routine guidance. Darlene's extensive art knowledge and creativity is contagious to her students...she teaches them to love art. Darlene is a true role model of dedication to students and art education and we are proud to proclaim her as Kern County's "Teacher of the Year!"



**Jennifer Meler-Rupp**  
Orange County Dept. of Education

**Jennifer Meler-Rupp** has worked in education for over 20 years and as teacher for with OCDE ACCESS for the last ten. It is here that she brought her passion and enthusiasm for teaching and service to the Phoenix Academy as a teacher and Site Liaison. Bringing her special education, general education, administrative and collaborative strengths to her work, she has created a noteworthy educational program which reflects her high standards in the areas of academics,

social-emotional development, career exploration and transition. She believes that when students are treated with dignity and respect amazing results can be achieved. One step inside her classroom and it is evident that her commitment to serving students and their families is her first priority. When asked, "How can you work with these kids? Why do you care so much?" She'll reply, "How can you not?"

Outside the classroom you'll find Jennifer representing her administration on a wide variety of committees ranging from Physical Education and Character Based Literacy, to WASC leadership. She currently serves as the English Learner Liaison for her region. Her passions include the development of literacy skills and research, and has conducted four Action Research projects with alternative populations. She hopes to continue exploring these avenues as she completes her Ed.D at Azusa Pacific University.



**Al Perez**  
San Bernardino County Office of Ed.

**Al Perez** was chosen as the 2007 San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Countywide Teacher of the Year and ROP Teacher of the Year. After 23 years of teaching adjudicated and incarcerated youth, Al Perez still loves his job. Al is the SBCOE Court School ROP Horticulture and Landscape Maintenance

teacher the Regional Youth Educational Facility, a residential treatment program in San Bernardino. As part of the Juvenile Court School program he serves the young men and women who have been placed at RYEF for a term of six months. The self-titled Diamondback Conservation Crew members learn skills in their classroom and worksite, then move into the community to apply them as members of the enterprise work crews who maintain grounds for the Dept. of Behavioral Health and picnic sites for the U. S. Forest Service.



**Jacqueline Rosig**  
Contra Costa County Office of Ed.

**Jacqueline Rosig**, the Contra Costa County Office of Education

Teacher of the Year is currently the Resource Specialist for students at Mt. McKinley School in the Contra Costa Count Juvenile Hall. She has served the students in this program for the past eight years. In addition this year Ms. Rosig began serving the 18-22 year old adults incarcerated at the Martinez Jail Facility. Prior to coming to this position Ms. Rosig has experience teaching Spanish, English and English Language Development. Ms. Rosig has been instrumental in setting up our Response to Intervention REACH Reading Program for the entire JCCS Program as well as an accountability measure so we can maintain the program's effectiveness.



**Tammy Reina**  
San Diego County Office of Ed.

**Tammy Reina** received the esteemed award of **California Teacher of the Year** as well as the San Diego County Teacher of the Year award.. She has been working as a teacher in the San Diego County Office of Education's Juvenile Court and Community Schools since 1998. She has garnered much experience in both Court and Community School settings. Her current classroom placement is in a Living Unit at the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility and her student population is comprised of young men, 17-18 years of age, many of whom are

facing long-term detention placements. Tammy earned her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from San Diego State University and her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential and Masters in Education from National University in San Diego. She has been recognized as a California Teacher of the Year for 2008. In her own words, she is "Passionate" about her work.



**Theresa Swickla-Ring**  
Riverside County Office of Ed.

**Theresa Swickla-Ring** was awarded the Milo P. Johnson Award of Distinction. She is a teacher in Adult Education in the Val Verde Home Education Program where she has worked for 10 years. She teaches all subjects, and is in charge of all events, including the Home Education Science Fair (six students have gone to the state competitions), fund raising, the Student Body Fund, and organizing graduation ceremonies, Grad Night, and the Prom.

Theresa obtained her bachelor's degree in biology from Old Dominion University in Virginia, her master's degree in arts and management from the University of Redlands, and last week her administrative credential from Chapman University.

Theresa always takes extra steps in planning events, works patiently with students and colleagues, takes special training in enrolling, monitoring and reporting student progress. She is cheerful, positive, thoughtful and creative. "Theresa's commitment providing all Alternative Education students an enriched school experience has changed the way we do business with our kids," nominators said. "She is a source of encouragement and inspiration to all who work with her."



**Jan Valine**  
Sacramento County Office of Education

**Jan Valine** has been with the Sacramento County Office of Education for 29 years. She has been with the Community School since its conception in the early 1980's. She has also assisted in the development of the initial course of study for SCOE programs, as well as established the Independent Study Program for Community Schools. She has been a mentor teacher and a PAR team member and continues to assist other teachers and support staff whenever possible. Her involvement with technology, as a past tech cadre member and currently a CTAP trainer, allows her to help her peers and students utilize technology effectively and creatively. She believes that schools have the opportunity to make the world a better place, child by child; that teachers have the ability to touch a child's life in a meaningful way by establishing a healthy rapport with students, getting to know them, being respectful, and creating a positive environment that is conducive to learning. She views her job as helping students develop the desire to better understand the world in which they live and give them a strong foundation of academic and social skills. In her classroom she engages students by providing meaningful learning experiences which connects the classroom with the world around them.

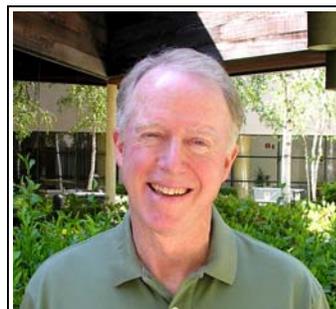


**Lynette Eisley**  
San Bernardino County Office of Ed.

**Lynette Eisley** is an extraordinary alternative education teacher. She leads her students to explore literature in depth and perform at higher levels of thought and understanding. Her students predict, complete mind maps, construct posters, and write essays to illustrate what they have learned. She is able to get many reluctant learners to achieve in ways they didn't think possible. She is a wonderful role model for students and understands the challenges faced by our students having

overcome her own childhood obstacles. She serves as an inspiration to students and encourages them to confront the problems which

prevent them from excelling. She not only assists students in performing at higher academic levels but also supports them as they learn to define themselves as people with bright and wonderful futures.



**Tom Scullion** has been teaching for 34 years with the **Santa Clara County Office of Education**. He currently serves as the independent study teacher for the Alternative Schools Department (ASD). Tom has held various teaching positions for the COE including juvenile hall, ranches, community schools and independent study programs. He

has been recognized as a master teacher in Character Education by the Markkula Ethics Center of Santa Clara University and is an active participant in curriculum development and ASD Leadership Team. He also serves as the district coordinator for the California High School Exit Exam, teacher-in-charge at his school site and grievance representative for the Association of County Educators. Tom believes that his goal as an educator is to serve students and recognizes that this frequently involves supporting his teaching colleagues and administrators. Tom's commitment, compassion for our youth and the quality of his service exemplify his love and dedication for teaching in Alternative Schools.

# Within These Walls and Beyond

San Diego County Office of Education

By Tammy Reina

**A**s a teacher for San Diego County Office of Education's Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS), I have the option of working with a wide variety of student populations: pregnant and parenting minors, those that have been expelled from traditional school districts, probationers and long term foster youth. I have, instead, chosen to work with students in juvenile institutions. East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility houses young men ranging from 13 to 19 years old. Some come to us for minor offenses and for probation violations. My students are the more serious offenders. My work is a study in contrasts. The facility is new, having only been in operation for three years, and very sterile. You are greeted with razor wire, sliding steel doors, faces peering from cell windows. Two classrooms are located in each living unit. However, as I enter the unit each morning I am invariably welcomed by warm greetings from students sweeping floors. Some students ask me about the plan for the day and when the visiting poets are coming. Others knock on their windows, smile and wave.

East Mesa can be an intimidating place for new students, and I have worked hard to establish a nurturing environment and a culture of trust in which these young men feel safe taking academic risks. A new student walking into my classroom would observe student poetry, social studies projects, high-scoring exams and college recruitment information on the walls. He would see bookshelves filled with literature that relates to his culture and experiences, and plants placed throughout the room. Most impor-

tantly, a new student entering my classroom would watch his peers take their seats comfortably and look up at the board to see the plan for the day. He would hear someone ask when the extra credit book club essays were due and maybe hear another student catch himself and apologize for the profanity that he had accidentally let slip. As class begins, he would hear a student summarize what we had learned the day before and explain why we learned it. He would observe students safely taking risks. He would see a young man volunteer to read and then begin with halting sentences while struggling with words. He would notice that the young man is supported by his peers rather than ridiculed. In this environment the new student would settle in, and with a little encouragement, join in the educational process.

The young men in my unit are, for the most part, 17 and 18 years old. Some have been sentenced to various youth camps, but most are in the middle of the court process. Those within the juvenile system will serve their time and be home in a year or two; others will be tried within the adult system. These students may serve anywhere from ten years to life in an adult prison. Academically, my students cover the full spectrum. Some are very advanced, while others read at the second grade level. East Mesa was designed to be self-contained, so all of my students who receive special education services remain in the mainstream classroom and receive services there. In addition, I frequently have students who speak very little English. Many students, regardless of their academic proficiency, are angry and disengaged upon entering my classroom. They often

have not experienced much success in the traditional classroom, and do not trust easily. My class, just as any other in my district is comprised predominantly of students of color. My classroom, bookshelves, academic materials and curriculum both reflect and respect the diversity of my students. My initial goal is to build trust and confidence, because without this critical combination meaningful learning can not take place.

Most mornings as I make my way through the living unit on the way to my classroom, I am stopped by students for one reason or another. On an ideal day, a student will tell me that he is skipping kitchen duty because he wants to attend class. On such a day one student will tell me about a passage he read the night before in the book assigned for book club and then admit that this is the first book he has ever read. Another hands me his journal to show me a poem he has written outside of class. On an ideal day, when I explain to students how reading aloud helps to improve their reading ability, I will have almost every hand shoot into the air when I ask for volunteers. After I call on a student to read who has not volunteered before, knowing the text will be difficult for him, I see the relief and incredible pride on his face when he finishes the passage. On this kind of a day students will ask questions and offer insightful opinions, then tap their feet impatiently waiting for me to come and read what they have written in response to the lesson. As the young men are being taken back to their rooms by the officers, a student will hang back and ask to speak with me. He will tell me that he has spoken with his mother about college and he wants to know if I will help him with the enrollment process. On days like this, I feel like the luckiest person alive.

Then there are the days when I enter the unit and note that one of my star students has been placed on suicide watch. Any

number of students may walk into the classroom sinking into their desks with scowls on their faces because a particular officer is ‘messing’ with them and they are ready to “knock her out.” On a less than ideal day I will be informed by a student that court did not go well and his sentence will be steep. On days such as these, I have found that dealing with the issue at hand is imperative before learning can take place. On some occasions, I will seat a student in the back corner and allow him to write in his journal about whatever is going on in his life rather than joining in the lesson. If he is willing, we will discuss what he has written after class and, almost without fail, he will return to class the next day in a healthier place, ready to learn.



I have found that art, music, and most importantly poetry are gateways to the more traditional academic skills that we require of our students. If I ask a student in turmoil who has never written an essay in his life to compare and contrast elements of a story on his first day of class, the results will most likely be disastrous. But when a new student begins with a poetry workshop where he is not bound to structure or form and need only express what is going on inside of him, that student will experience success, and in most instances will bring that sense of accomplishment with him to class the next day. I have found that this same student will then begin the process of reengaging in a curriculum that he felt so separated from only one day before. As his confidence increases, so does his willingness to take academic risks, and so does his proficiency.

My students are frequently going through some of the most difficult ordeals of their lives. Oftentimes life in the unit and court dates are reminders of the mistakes they have made. My classroom is a place where they can not only escape the stress of their current situation, but can feel a sense of pride, academic accomplishment and hope in their future.



# ***ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION: How the Community Benefits When All Students Succeed***

By Ted Price

**I**n a 1994 speech, Václav Havel, former president of Czechoslovakia and president of the Czech Republic since 1993, said, “We live in the postmodern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain.” That may have been true years ago, but today, in the world of education, at least one thing *is* certain: alternative education (alt ed) programs are growing, in terms of increased student populations, the number of programs offered, and resulting economic benefits to society. The first segment of this article will focus on what alternative education is all about. The second part will focus on how alternative education programs successfully educate alt ed students resulting in an increase in the participation of students in the economic engine of our society; and how substantial increases in economic benefits to individuals and society come with the growth and subsequent educational success of these students.

## **WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION?**

Dr. Lynn Hartzler, formerly with the California Department of Education and now an alternative education programs consultant, says that the legal definition of alt ed requires that students and teachers participate voluntarily, previous classroom performance cannot be the sole determining factor as to whether a student belongs in this type of program, and students don’t have to be failing or at risk of failing in order to participate. How-

ever, alt ed programs, as most of us know them, are mostly for students who are unsuccessful in traditional schools, for academic or behavioral reasons, and who may not have had a choice in participating in alternative school programs (in cases of court referral or incarceration) (Posnic-Goodwin, 2003).

Alternative education programs serving mostly at-risk youth consist of structurally separate schools, learning centers, “schools within schools,” charter schools, and other options; most are public, and some are private. Along with new program options have come new strategies for learning and educating at-risk students who continue to flounder in a one-size-fits-all educational environment. New programs and learning strategies (i.e., contract learning, independent study, a personalized system of instruction [PSI], case management when employed) are ensuring academic and social school success for many alt ed students.

Robert Barr of Boise State University has stated that increasing numbers of students are being excluded from traditional education programs in the wake of reforms such as zero tolerance, safe school policies, pressure to increase graduation rates, standards-based accountability, and state and federal testing requirements (Thomas, 2003). Prior to the 1990s, continuation high schools (CHSs) were the school of choice for at-risk students within a school district but CHSs have limited enrollment capacities and many programs are limited by traditional approaches and methodolo-

gies requiring districts to seek out-of-district placements.

Alt ed programs provide critical elements that traditional education cannot or do not provide. Some of these critical elements are flexible attendance options, individualized learning and daily assessment, intensive behavioral or specialized academic support, and offering materials at the level keyed to ensuring daily progress. Other important elements include flexibility to work at the student's own pace, a focus on utilizing multiple learning strategies, and smaller learning communities. These lower student-teacher ratios foster an increased sense of connection with caring adults and committed, experienced teachers who are dedicated to working with the hardest to teach, resulting in a greater commitment and a feeling of belonging on the part of students. Increased counseling and support services to deal with emotional and behavioral issues while also building students' expectations of academic success also help make alt ed programs viable alternatives for many at-risk students (Hartzler, 2002). Many of these services are so costly they are deemed unnecessary or unaffordable for the mainstream student in a traditional program.

In addition to the previously listed characteristics of alt ed programs, there are three specific instruction-based components that also serve to distinguish alt ed programs from mainstream programs and help to ensure learning success for all students. First is *student programming that considers the learning needs of the "whole" student*. Research (Caine, 1994) has shown that long-term meaningful learning encompasses the following:

It is actively creative; meaning is constantly constructed and reconstructed by the learner. It is experiential and interactive in nature. It is always



linked to emotions—there is always an emotional component to learning. It occurs directly and indirectly. It is maximized by challenge and inhibited by threat. It is handicapped by overemphasis on rote memory. It is enhanced by meaningful, relevant, and interesting real-life experiences and activities (Caine, 1994) that consider the needs and interests of the whole person.

Educators know that very young students need small schools to develop a sense of self-confidence, yet, for some reason, we seem to think that once a student gets to the middle grades and beyond – a time that encompasses all the confusion and turbulence of adolescence – that older students do not need as much support. This myth gets perpetuated in our high schools. Dropouts confirm that a lack of understanding on the part of teachers and the traditional school environment they find themselves in often leads to a feeling of alienation. Students who feel alienated in the education process usually remain that way through high school, if they do not drop out altogether (DeBlois, 2000). Alt ed programs, on the other hand, involve students in every aspect of their own learning process, thus helping to ensure that students stay in school.

The second component is that *student needs drive the learning and teaching process*. Because each learner is unique, we need many shapes, sizes, formats, and packages of curriculum to successfully appeal to each one (Jensen, 2000). Effective alt ed programs also meet student needs by: (1) ensuring low rates of violence, vandalism, and antisocial behavior on campus (regulating student: staff ratios); (2) being responsive to learning and instructional style differences (tailored education to students' interests and abilities = greater likelihood of success); and (3) promoting the positive advantages of being a school of

“choice” (choosing to attend as opposed to having to attend = better attendance and participation). Alt ed programs must also be relationship-based, which means that the school program is led by a teacher who is able to connect with students. Often the key characteristic of the alt ed school is that students want to be in the school, if not on “Day One,” certainly within a few weeks. Making alternative schools attractive and engaging to students results in safer and better schools throughout the school district.

Lastly, *students experience educational success*. Experts suggest that few educators are utilizing research to change the way they teach (Hoff, 2000), but because they are working with the most challenging students to teach, alt ed teachers are apt to be more motivated, eager, and able to engage in “best practices” in their work with students. They make learning “student-centered” by considering the student’s interests and concerns. Much of their teaching practice is experiential, involving hands-on activity, which research has shown to be more effective than traditional methods with at-risk students; and holistic, where students work in thematic, connected units. Learning is also balanced with reflection and integration of learning time, the time set aside for the student and teacher to consider how learning applies to life

(Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 1998). Students who have had difficulty in traditional education programs begin to re-engage, to learn, to achieve greater academic and behavioral success, and to enjoy the learning environment and process because they see and understand the relevance of the curriculum and methodology offered. Students who formerly failed in traditional school environments often succeed in alt ed programs.

**HOW DOES ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE?**

When students succeed in alt ed programs, the community benefits because an educated student makes a “better” citizen. Alternative education programs, utilizing individualized learning plans, smaller class size, and access to support services reach the hardest to teach and enable students in these programs to succeed, many for the first time. The benefit of student success for the community and taxpayers is dramatic.

2004 U.S. Census figures show that an average person without a high school diploma earned \$21,645. A high school graduate’s income jumped to \$30,766. And the more college work a person completed, salaries increased proportionately. The U.S. Census numbers below clearly show that the higher the level of educational attainment, the higher the salary earned and the more taxes paid. Therefore, taxpayer dollars spent on alt ed programs result in long-term sav-

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	TOTAL MEDIAN EARNINGS	ESTIMATED INCOME TAXES
Professional degree	\$95,699	\$11,793
Doctorate degree	\$79,403	\$8,790
Master’s degree	\$59,500	\$5,531
Bachelor’s degree	\$49,889	\$4,072
Associate degree	\$37,605	\$2,657
Some college, no degree	\$35,714	\$2,434
High school graduate	\$30,766	\$1,810
Not a high school graduate	\$21,645	\$844

*Table 1. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004*

**Table 2**  
**1991 Social Insurance Program Consumption Rates**  
**Among Adults by Educational Attainment**

<u>Program Use Percentage/ Educational Attainment</u>	<u>&lt;H.S.</u>	<u>H.S. Diploma</u>	<u>Some College</u>	<u>College Degree+</u>
AFDC/Welfare	7.6%	3.8%	2.4%	0.5%
Food Stamps/WIC	16.4	7.4	4.2	0.9
Fed./State Unemployment Ins.	6.5	7.3	5.6	3.7
Fed/State Supp. Security Ins.	8.4	2.0	1.0	0.4
School Breakfast/Lunch	21.2	14.2	10.3	4.3
Social Security	42.3	20.8	12.6	10.6
Medicare	38.8	17.6	11.0	10.0
Medicaid	18.5	7.0	4.1	1.0
In Jail or Prison	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.1

ings and cost reduction in social supportive programs (Table 1).

Unemployment rates also correspond to the level of educational attainment. Workers without a high school education have a much more difficult time finding employment because of their limited marketable skills. The more education acquired, the lower the unemployment rate. Employed workers pay taxes; they don't consume taxes in the form of supportive social services to the degree that unemployed workers do.

In Table 2 above, a correlation appears between a lack of educational attainment in the labor force and the consumption of costly social insurance programs. More specifically, individuals with a high school diploma or higher education have a substantially re-

duced need for the social services safety net paid for with taxpayer dollars.

Among Adults, by Educational Attainment Rand Corporation researchers found that educational attainment leads to savings in state-run social insurance programs "throughout a person's lifetime," concluding that "the amount of public expenditures per person declines dramatically as educational attainment increases for all ages up to retirement age" (Vemez, 1999).

More highly educated individuals are also more likely to have a stake in their communities and actively participate in the societies in which they live. For instance, U.S. Census Bureau figures also show a strong correlation between educational attainment and voting rates, as indicated in table 3.

More educated individuals contribute

<b>AGE</b>	<b>NOT A H.S. GRADUATE</b>	<b>H.S. GRADUATE</b>	<b>SOME COL- LEGE</b>	<b>BACHELOR DEGREE OR HIGHER</b>
18-24	18%	28%	45%	61%
25-44	25%	45%	59%	74%
45-64	42%	61%	73%	82%
65-74	56%	72%	82%	86%

**Table 3. U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, Voting Rates**

more to society in other ways as well. For instance, many agencies and organizations rely heavily on volunteers to operate. Bureau of Labor statistics from 2003 indicate that the number of volunteer hours and percentage of those volunteering their time, talent, or energy increases with educational attainment. Approximately 10% of non-high school graduates volunteer in some capacity, while the percentage rises to nearly 46% of those with a Bachelor's degree or higher (Baum and Payea, 2005). Regular blood donation is also tied to educational attainment: donation is approximately 6% among those who do not have a high school diploma, and the rate rises with higher levels of education to 17% of the population who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (Baum and Payea, 2005).

Education also has a beneficial effect upon keeping people out of correctional institutions. Overall, "the incarceration rate of adults with some college education is about one-quarter that for high school graduates. Almost 2% of adults who had not graduated were incarcerated in 1997, compared to 1.2% of those with a high school diploma, but only 0.3% of adults with some college experience and 0.1% of college graduates were incarcerated" (Baum and Payea, 2005). Tuition for most state universities runs less than \$20,000 per year, compared to the \$40,000+ annual cost to maintain someone in a correctional institution; society certainly benefits from educating as many at-risk students as possible. Education is also a key component in juvenile institutions, where it is common knowledge among juvenile justice and detention education professionals that traditional public school strategies have not been successful with many in the juvenile justice population (Brooks, 2002). Because most detention center programs are largely understaffed and underfunded, effective strategies such as those available through alt ed programs are even more critical in the effort to

make education meaningful, relevant, and important to incarcerated youth.

"Education adds structure to the confinement experience, strengthens self-esteem and confidence, builds usable skills and abilities, and moves programs and services away from an adult-oriented custodial approach. Education increases and improves the interaction between staff and youth, while reducing boredom and idleness, and it is an effective bridge to community reintegration following the youth's release from incarceration" (Wolford, 1980).

In a recent key study on recidivism in penal institutions, participants in alternative education programs had statistically significant lower rates of re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration (Steurer, 2003). The study data also revealed that wages were higher for correctional education participants compared to non-participants for every year of post-release follow-up. The higher the wages incarcerated students earned the better their ability to independently support their families with less reliance on social insurance programs. Education lowers recidivism more effectively than currently supported programs (Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, 1997), giving participants a second chance to create a successful life outside of prison walls.

Alt ed programs serve a vital social function by providing second-chance opportunities for marginal and at-risk students. As important as this social function is, it may pale in comparison to the economic function an educated alternative education student provides to the culture when it helps students to achieve upward mobility through educational attainment. Alt ed pro-

grams are positioned to help empower students to become independent producers and to save the tax-paying public thousands of dollars per student, per diploma, or per GED. Estimating the annualized benefits to the economy from data compiled by Vemez, et al., Table 4 below shows the savings in social insurance programs and increases to public revenues for an average native-born Mexican woman who has attained a high school diploma. These figures are not intended to be precise declarations of actual economic facts, but the potential economic ripple effect, when extended to a million similarly situated women, causes the savings and benefits to society to become substantial (Vemez, 1999).

Alt ed programs function as proactive prevention (of educational failure and subsequent economic handicap) strategies, stimulating students to “be all they can be” in the world of education and, ultimately, the world of work. Learning in a safe environment with student accountability and achievement are ensured. In line with the national “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) program, alt ed’s successes in dealing with at-risk students could

help strengthen the traditional education program and create an additional NCLB program option for all students.

Educational attainment has been correlated with successful health management, thereby reducing their dependency on community health care agencies. An educated populace is generally more cognizant of the benefits of a healthful diet and the long-term dangers of smoking, for example. “Smoking rates declined much more rapidly among college graduates than among others when information about the risks of smoking became public” (Baum and Payea, 2005).

Alt ed programs also reduce the number of students dropping out before earning a high school diploma or a GED. In California, a two-year study conducted by the Orange County Department of Education’s Alternative Education Division showed evidence of decreased dropout rates. In 2000-2001, 1,262 students dropped out, or 8.3% of the total enrollment of 7-12 grade students. By 2001-2002, 1,138 dropped out, or 7.4%, because of the increased program interventions designed to keep kids in school (OCDE, 2002). *Extend public education*

**Table 4**

Estimated Long-term Increases in Social Insurance Savings/Public Revenues/Disposable Income For a Native-Born Mexican Woman Attaining a H. S. Diploma (Vemez, 1999)

		<u>Savings in Social Insurance Programs</u>	<u>Increases to Public Revenues</u>	<u>Increases in Private Disposable Income</u>
Age	25-29	\$12,190	\$9,215	\$12,940
	30	\$2,438	\$1,843	\$2,588
	31-39	<u>\$21,942</u>	<u>\$16,587</u>	<u>\$23,292</u>
Total 15 Year Benefits:		\$36,570	\$27,645	\$38,820
15 Year Benefits Multiplied by One Million Similarly Situated Women:		\$36.6 Billion	\$27.6 Billion	\$38.8 Billion

options to serve all students effectively – “no one drops out” is the goal.

### CONCLUSION:

Alternative education programs differ from traditional or mainstream programs based on focus (student centered), methodology (instructional approaches), delivery (individualized and group) and support options (enlist community partners and social support systems).

Ultimately, employers want trustworthy employees who care about the work they do. They want employees who finish tasks, are self-starters, who show initiative, can define problems, are able to write and think clearly, who work cooperatively in teams. Past problems from the educational and cultural arenas become insignificant. (Murnane, 2000) Because of their size and structure, alternative programs are able to focus on socialization skills: behavior management and acquisition of appropriate interpersonal skills along with the academic skills required of a standards-based curriculum. When we rescue the educationally at-risk student, we open the door to an unlimited future, where anything is possible. “The nation would reap more than twice the cost of wide-scale adoption of effective pre-K-12 educational interventions, resulting in a gain of \$45 billion from increased tax revenues and reduced social costs over the lifetime of high school graduates.” (Murnane, p. 36, 2000) One study (Hoff, 2000) estimates that spending an extra \$82,000 per student over the span of a pre-K-12 career for effective education programs would save the tax payer over \$200,000.

When students succeed, they contribute more to the economic and social fabric of the community. Alternative education programs are good public policy, because they provide alternatives and second chances, and also because they are economically “good business.”

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# Prose, Poetry and Art

Kern County Office of Education  
By Wendy Durham

Students at Kern County Office of Education’s Crossroads Redwood High School, a juvenile court school with average enrollment of five months, have been participating in enriching, subject infused, writing and art programs. Student work has been of such superior quality that their work was entered in county-wide contests.

In February 2008, three Redwood students grabbed three of the top prizes, with \$100, \$50, and \$25 and an honorable mention in the Kern County Grand Jury Essay Contest. The contest was open to schools throughout Kern County. Redwood students, under the direction of Corrie Raub, the social studies teacher, wrote a two-page essay on how the civil functions of the Grand Jury contribute to “Transparency in Government.” For their essays, Redwood students researched the functions of the Grand Jury, the responsibilities and powers of the Grand Jurors, and the areas of government that are subject to investigation by the civil grand jury.

In October 2007, five students received awards in the Kern County Fair prose and poetry contest under the direction of Wendy Durham, the English language-arts teacher. Several of these poems as well as many others, have been published in a student poetry book called Celebrate! Young People Speak Out, by Creative Communications, Inc.. Eleven students had poems published this year in the anthology under the direction of Mrs. Durham. Titles of the winner’s work included:

- Darling Baby Girl, poem*
- A New Beginning, poem*
- I Still Haven’t Found Him, poem*
- Pain, poem*
- Day of Rapture, poem*
- What I Regret in My Life, prose*

In the Kern County Fair art contest in the 14-17 year-old division, Redwood also had five winners under the direction of Lyle Williams, the art teacher. Four students won awards in the Colored Pencil division, and one in the Painting division. The students credited their success to the opportunity they are given to take an art class at Redwood. One student commented that he had always wanted to take an art class but never had the opportunity before now. He said he was surprised by his own ability.

The biggest benefit, according to their principal, Carl Stice, is the positive effect that even entering a contest and completing a project or piece of writing, something many of them have never done before, can have on the students’ self-confidence and belief that they can graduate if they put forth the effort. Students at Redwood report they will often speak up and write more creatively than they have in the past, which can be challenging for young males to do. Students state that the smaller, structured environment of the Court School helps them to focus on setting and accomplishing goals for themselves.

The following poems were written by students attending Crossroads Redwood High School:



### Darling Baby Girl

My darling baby girl, your daddy loves you so,  
He wishes so much he didn't have to go,  
He made a mistake and now he has to pay,  
But don't you dare think for a second it's your fault in any way.

I wish I could go back to that one stupid night,  
I wish I could go back and make it right,  
But do me a favor and take care of your mommy,  
Let her know deep down in his heart daddy is truly sorry,  
He is truly sorry for everything, for all that he did,  
He just wants to be home taking care of his kid.

I hope you both forgive me for my stupid mistake,  
I promise to fix the hearts I never meant to break,  
You both are number one at the top of my list,  
I love you both so much and wish you a Merry  
Christmas.



### Pain

I have so much pain in my heart  
To tell someone, I don't know  
where to start.

They say you have to be strong,  
But I say you could only be strong  
for so long.

I wonder if I made it this way,  
But I refuse to be somebody's  
slave.

All I wanted was a mother  
And that strong bond like no other.

Even a Dad would be nice,  
But to notice me, he would have to  
look twice.

It's okay I tell myself.  
I came in this world with nobody  
else,

But it would feel good to have  
somebody there,  
But I have to face the facts.....  
nobody cares.

### I Still Haven't Found Him

I still haven't found him,  
But for some odd reason it doesn't hurt.

All I remember is his voice,  
The sweet sound of it was moist.

Why did I have to go through this?  
All I can do is pray and wish.

It's been 15 years that passed,  
Ever since then my life has been a crash.

In and out of jail,  
With no letter to come in the mail.

Without him it's been hell,  
But on this I should not dwell.

As you read these words of sorrow,  
I hope I can find him tomorrow.

# Service Learning: Alternative Education Students Gain a New Perspective of Community Involvement

San Joaquin County Office of Education  
By Claudia Danielsen

**M**any students view community service as a condition of their probation or a requirement rather than a choice to become an involved community member. Students are typically required to complete dreaded tasks such as picking up litter along the road while wearing an orange vest or other menial job. San Joaquin County Office of Education takes a different approach to community service through the implementation of a variety of Service Learning projects throughout the community. Not only do students earn credits but the greatest benefit has been the bridge it has built to the community that was previously absent. Service Learning connects relevant classroom academic instruction to service in the community by providing a variety of experiences in “one.Program” throughout the County. Service Learning encourages students to see themselves as productive members of the business community and agency partners see the our kids as more than alternative education students.

Our “**one. Program**” is implemented in classrooms for students in: juvenile hall, a court-mandated drug recovery program, a homeless shelter, an emergency shelter for abused children, and a program for expelled youth from grades K-12. During our first year of participation in a collaborative grant, Cal-Serve Developmental Partnership ex-

panded our existing Service Learning projects to include more schools and training for our teachers. Our program has depended on the guidance and resources offered by Veray Wickham, our county’s Service Learning expert. This relationship has enabled us to offer a variety of experiences that help our youth see themselves as vital members of their community. We hope to continue to grow and develop more high quality projects and strengthen our students’ ties with the community as we move forward.

Service Learning components include a needed **service** linked to **academics**, which is directed by **student voice** and assisted by **community collaboration**. **Civic engagement** is fostered through a variety of on-going **reflection** and **evaluation**. Through student voice the students complete a needs assessment as they define and reflect upon their community and decide on a project. The teacher connects components of the service project to standards and frameworks in order to provide high quality lessons. Our projects vary in their length and number of participants.

Through literature-based art activities, **One. Expressions**, an art, music and drama focus site, has mentored our homeless K-6 students. During the reflective process, the students learned about a segment of the commu-

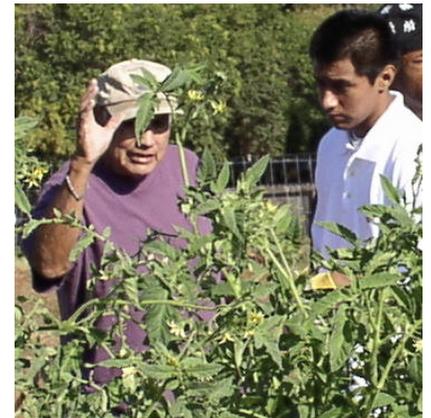
nity they hadn't been aware of and were able to offer support and act as role models. Students also understood the creation and development of lesson plans as they learned how to read aloud to younger students and establish an objective for the lesson. This experience helps them understand our objectives as teachers and the importance of a sense of responsibility to others. Different groups have embarked on other journeys including violence against women, drunk driving, and a school-wide effort to look at our global footprints on the environment. Students have started a school-wide recycling center. Presentations to other **one.Schools** include educating others about the importance of recycling. Posters are distributed to advertise the impact we have on our environment. Projects focus on individual school sites as a community need or go beyond to other schools with identified needs for service.

**One. Odyssey**, our 7th-9th grade site has mentored our homeless youth through a thematic science and art project that taught students about animal habitats. The younger students visited the middle school site regularly and learned about animal habitats using art activities and science lessons. The middle school students became aware of the patience they needed, what it meant to be a positive role model, and how important giving instructions are to achieve an objective. In addition, through an energy grant, they have also been able to create an informative calendar that educated others about alternative energy resources and have distributed it throughout the community. The class also wrote letters to the owners of the building leased for their classroom, noting wasted energy practices and how changes could be made to better save energy resources. The most recent project started with a **Project Citizen** idea of studying the attendance issue, which affects our program's budget. Students learned about current possible budget



cuts and how they may affect our program. They added a fifth panel to the Project Citizen process and share the ideas to implement a change in our program to a four-day week. This experience has helped them understand the importance of attendance and the issues it involves not only with students and their education but also with staffing, substitutes, and budgets that affect hiring of teachers to buying materials for sites. Students developed questions for interviews and accessed information regarding attendance issues with other schools. They became aware of public policy and how it governs everyday life and as well as the democratic process of bringing about change.

**One. Achievement**, a business focus site, has been working on a community garden that was featured in the Spring 2007, *JCCASAC Journal* publication. The project connected science and economic curriculum's with real life experiences while also addressing standards. Their extensive outreach and



service to the local food bank and other community members has set into motion the idea that school curriculum is relevant to not only their own community but can reach beyond to another country. Some students traveled to Chiapas, Mexico and were able to study sustainable agriculture and learn of its importance and use in the economy. Their direct service has helped many people in the community receive healthy food to add to their daily diet. Connecting the project to other communities in another country has established an awareness of the larger global community and our responsibility to one another.

Transitional Learning Center (TLC), a school for homeless K-6 youth has also been involved in a project. The students learned about the problems that occur for animals when balloons are let go in the atmosphere. Through a variety of activities, they wrote informative letters and decided to send them to realtors who typically attach helium balloons to signs in order to advertise Open Houses. Realtors responded positively and agreed to comply that they would discard the balloons in another manner that wasn't harmful to animals. Because of the process and positive responses, they will now target another sector of the community that uses balloons and extend their service of educating others. This act of civic responsibility for such a young age group of our community helps to instill hope for a sense of responsibility and action for the future.

In January of 2008 a new site opened, Helping Other People Everywhere (**one.H.O.P.E.**), which is a service-learning site. Students were able to author books based on personal experiences that could be shared with 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders at nearby Pittman School, which is also a Service Learning site. A peer tutor relationship has been established which helps offer positive role models, literacy op-

portunities and other thematic lessons that will be shared. The high school students at **one.H.O.P.E.** now look at themselves as being able to offer knowledge and strategies to help students read and value education. Field trips to workshops and conferences are laying a foundation to help students use language and create relationships with other members of the community. Emphasis on applying educational skills toward job interests, searches and resumes present a different side of our students. Curriculum connects guest speakers and outside community agencies in order to bridge awareness of resources and opportunities. This process helps everyone, including students and community members, gain a new perspective regarding our students.

Another site, **one. Discover**, stumbled upon a Service Learning project idea when reading a novel in class. The discussion centered on women's rights and abuses in other countries. The lively and heated discussions sparked an interest in abuse suffered by women in other countries and also a search for resources and support for women who reside in the United States. Ideas developed regarding statistics including domestic violence and the support systems that are in place to offer assistance. An informational pamphlet and posters are being created to help educate others about helping women not feel hopeless and alone. Educating others is just one of the methods of providing service to the community.

**One. Eclipse**, an environmental focus site has been studying our local deltas and the clean up that is needed to help maintain a healthy environment through an integrated science project. The students have been visiting other **one. schools** to share what they have learned and have gained an understanding of relevancy to curriculum. Our San Joaquin Valley is an agricultural community that depends greatly on its water and trans-

portation from those deltas to other communities. The students now have a scientific knowledge base and can see themselves as researchers offering valuable insights.

As our grant continues during the next four years, we will enhance projects and involve more sites and students in a variety of projects. Service Learning is an integral part of our program and is already strengthening community ties and offering rigorous curriculum that is relevant to students as they see themselves in the future, working side by side among their own community members. Not only are they alternative education students, but also they are researchers, mentors, trainers, tutors, and viable perspective employees as well as civic-minded community members. We are anxious to see what the future holds for our youth as they are empowered to contribute their ideas and dreams for our local and global communities.

For more information regarding Service Learning:

The Center for Civic Education's website located at: [www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org).

Learn and Serve America's website: [www.learnandserve.org](http://www.learnandserve.org)

**About the Author:**

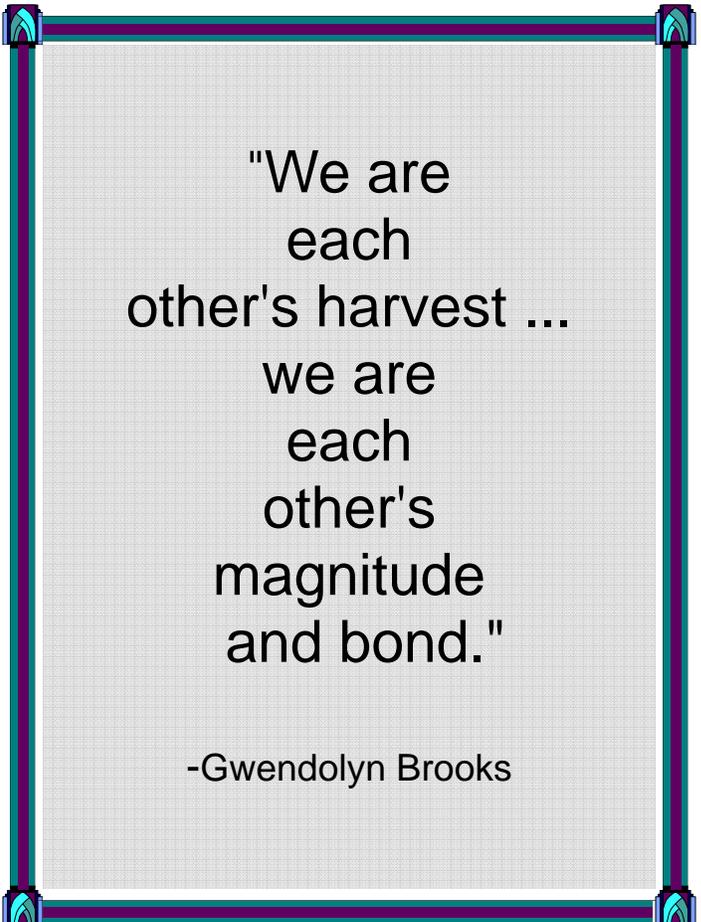
**Claudia Danielsen** is a high school teacher at the Service Learning site, one. H.O.P.E. She has worked with the one. Program for four years. She has included Service Learning projects during the last 11 years throughout the various grade levels including projects focusing on homelessness, animals, the environment, and personal strength to overcome obstacles and challenges. She has also been an adjunct faculty member for the last 8 years for California State University, Stanislaus in the teacher credential program.



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-Gwendolyn Brooks

# *Literature Review: Characteristics of Successful Alternative School Settings*

Contra Costa County Office of Education  
By Lindy Khan

This literature review examines the characteristics found in alternative school settings that are known to help at-risk students remain positively engaged in school so that they transition successfully or graduate. High priority was given to articles and studies that specifically pertain to alternative school settings that serve at-risk adolescents, rather than those describing alternative schools that serve a different population or traditional schools that may serve a small minority of at-risk students. A review of the literature pertaining to specific dropout prevention strategies is also included because the alternative to successful transition for alternative education students is very likely to be dropping out; therefore, these strategies have the potential to positively impact students' likelihood to either graduate or successfully transition to the next appropriate placement in their educational or vocational journey.

## **Alternative Schools**

Although the term *alternative schools* is often used today to describe a variety of educational programs, those referenced in this review refer to those alternative school programs whose mission is to serve students who have been unsuccessful in the traditional school environment.

In describing the history of the alternative schools movement, Raywid (1998) noted that alternative schools began to emerge in the 1960s. It began in the private sector and

spread to public schools across the nation, in mostly urban and suburban communities. The mission of the urban alternative schools was to serve the population who were not succeeding in school. The students referred to these schools were primarily minority youth and the poor. Although Raywid described three purposes for these early alternative schools (to change the student, to change the school, or to change the educational system), most of those geared towards serving unsuccessful students embraced a "change-the-student" orientation. In fact, it was said, "the ideal is to 'beef 'em up and send 'em back'" (p. 2).

In the last 10 years, there has been a significant rise in the number of alternative education programs serving at-risk youth (Foley, 2006). Foley and Pang (2006) conducted a study of alternative school programs in Illinois. They determined that the three most frequently reported admission criteria were a history of social-emotional problems, truancy problems, and home-school referral. This is consistent with the findings of a national study of public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students conducted by Kleiner, Porch and Farris in 2001, in which they found: "Roughly half of all districts with alternative schools and programs reported that each of the following was a sufficient reason for transferring at-risk students from a regular school: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs (52%); physical attacks or fights (52%); chronic truancy (51%); pos-

session or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50%); continual academic failure (50%); disruptive verbal behavior (45%); and possession or use of a firearm (44%).“(pg.2)

Most districts reported a policy that allowed students to return to their original schools once the student exhibited an improved attitude and behavior and expressed motivation to return. This study also pointed out that “student enrollment in the nation’s public alternative schools and programs is highly fluid” (p. 2). This reflects the high mobility rate of students in Alternative Education programs.

Following a dramatic rise in school violence between 1980 and 2000, several federal laws were passed to ensure school safety. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) was originally authorized by the 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) under Title IV as part of the federal government’s effort to compel states receiving federal funding to promote safe learning environments on all school sites. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 was part of Public Law 103-882, and required states to ensure that schools receiving federal funds expel a student for one year if he/she brought a gun to school. Both of these laws were later incorporated into and authorized by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation enacted in 2001.

These legislative mandates resulted in the onset of zero-tolerance policies, which in turn led to significant increases in school suspensions and expulsions. Consequently, school districts needing to ensure safe school environments increasingly looked to alternative schools to become the educational venue for students who displayed antisocial, aggressive, and violent behavior (Van Acker, 2007). The US Department of Justice (2001) published a framework for violence-prevention

strategies which stated greater results would be gleaned from programs that were carefully planned and implemented school/program-wide as opposed to those which entailed a myriad of individual interventions. Van Acker concluded that it is possible for alternative school programs to meet the challenge of serving these youth if they provide comprehensive services which focus on individual needs in a treatment environment; however, such programs also run the risk of creating some unintentional consequences, such as disrupting youth attachments in the general education setting and/or segregating minority, poor, or disabled students.

It is clear that alternative schools continue to play a very significant role in education today, but the challenges inherent in designing and implementing programs to meet the multitude of needs presented by these students are daunting. According to Fager and Paglin (1997), successful alternative schools commonly display four significant benefits. “A reduction in dropout rates, a reduction in student truancy, the redirection of disruptive and inattentive students from mainstream institutions into more productive and successful learning environments, and re-engagement with learning and the community that occurs when the students are placed in a more responsive and flexible environment.” (p. 3)

Fager and Paglin also identified several characteristics of successful alternative schools, including a clear mission, smaller enrollment, lower ratio of students to staff, more informal and personal relationships, committed staff, clear rules that are enforced fairly and consistently, high behavioral and academic standards, relevant curriculum, an apparent student voice in school operations, and a flexible schedule. Many of these factors are also deemed relevant in the literature related to building resiliency in youth to be discussed later.



### At-Risk Students

The report commissioned in 1983 by the U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, is often cited as the original call to action for improvements in public education in America. The report concluded that the observed declines in educational performance were largely "the result of disturbing inadequacies in the way the educational process itself is often conducted". And, the authors of this report noted four particular areas of concern: diluted content, lowered expectations, too little time and shortages of teachers in key fields. They stated that this provided evidence that the nation was no longer living up to the promises inherent in our democratic society. "All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance, and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself." (pg.8)

But, who are the students who are deemed to be at-risk? An *at-risk student* is defined by North Central Regional Education Laboratory as one who has not been adequately served by social service or educational systems and is at risk of educational failure due to lack of services, negative life events, or physical or mental challenges, among other things (NCREL, 2002). In a survey regarding public alternative schools conducted by The National Center for Education Statistics in 2002, the term at-risk was defined as "involving the risk of education failure, as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with

temporary or permanent withdrawal from school" (pg. iii).

The Title I, Part D section of the No Child Left Behind legislation, also called The Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk provides federal financial assistance to educational programs serving youth in state- and county-run institutions. In section 1432 of this act, the term at-risk, "When used with respect to a child, youth or student, means a school aged individual who is at-risk of academic failure, has a drug or alcohol problem, is pregnant or is a parent, has come into contact with the juvenile justice system in the past, is at least 1 year behind the expected grade level for the age of the individual, has limited English proficiency, is a gang member, has dropped out of school in the past, or has a high absenteeism rate at school." (pg.8)

One of the three goals cited for Title I, Part D is to "prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school, and to provide dropouts and children and youth returning from correctional facilities with a support system to ensure their continued education" (p.1). Too often, these students who are deemed to be at-risk join the ranks of the millions of students who drop out of school prior to graduation. According to a report published by the National Youth Policy Forum (2006), "Every nine seconds in America a student becomes a dropout" (p. viii). Of the nearly 28 million 18-24 year olds in the United States in 2004, 22% (slightly over 6 million) had not graduated from high school or earned a GED. An estimated 3.8 million youth in this same age bracket were neither in school nor employed. And, for minority students, the statistics (from 2001) are even more dismal, with African Americans having only a 50% graduation rate, 51% for American Indian and 53% for Latinos. The risk of dropping out of high school is greater for males (36%) as opposed to females (28%). And, high school students

In this particular focus on high schools, they identified three foundational elements, which they called 1) structure (school size), 2) academic organization (curriculum), and 3) social organization (relationships between students and teachers).

living in low-income families were found to have the greatest likelihood of dropping out (80%), and this represented a six-fold greater risk than their peers from higher-income families (Martin, 2006).

It is important to remain cognizant of the dire consequences of not graduating from high school. These consequences are very costly for the individual, ranging from unemployment, underemployment, diminished lifetime earning power, poorer health, to a greater potential for having to rely on public assistance and/or to become involved with the criminal justice system. And, the costs to society are similarly stark, as these individuals become consumers of costly public assistance without contributing to state and federal tax coffers.

### **Dropout Prevention Strategies**

In a significant study on dropping out of high school, Lee and Burkam (2003) note that “the most common explanations for dropping out focus on the personal characteristics of individual students” (p. 1), such as their social background, academic experience, and school behaviors. They argue that this, at best, is an incomplete analysis because so many students have these same characteristics and then go on to succeed in school. Further, this philosophy promotes a blame-the-victim rationale. “When researchers frame dropping out as a function of student background, and behavior, the implication is that students themselves are at fault for taking such unwise actions” (p. 1).

Rather, Lee and Burkam (2003) emphasize the importance of focusing on the characteristics of the schools and the individuals within them that have the potential to promote school retention. This is especially important for administrators and teachers working with at-risk youth to keep in mind since what happens inside schools can be controlled, as opposed to the personal/demographic factors that students typically cannot control. It is Lee and Burkam’s contention that “What high schools might do to push out or hold students has received less empirical scrutiny” (p. 1). Their study used nationally representative samples drawn from the High School Effectiveness Supplement to the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, and involved data on 3,840 students from 190 high schools in 30 large metropolitan areas in the United States. In this particular focus on high schools, they identified three foundational elements, which they called 1) structure (school size), 2) academic organization (curriculum), and 3) social organization (relationships between students and teachers).

### **School Structure**

#### **Small Schools**

Among the issues that can powerfully affect student success is the structure of the school. In their 2003 study Lee and Burkam looked at structure in terms of school enrollment size, location, and type (public, private). One of their significant findings was that students were less likely to drop out of schools with an enrollment of fewer than 1,500 stu-

dents; this fact study was consistent with other findings that smaller, but not too small, schools are generally more effective in retaining students. However, in their study and others, it is clear that it is not just size that is important. “School size, per se, is unlikely to directly influence the probability that students will drop out of high school. Rather, there are likely to be other organizational features that accrue to students and staff in smaller high schools. One of those organizational features is how school members – particularly teachers and students- relate to one another.” (p. 13)

### **Academic Organization**

#### Curriculum

The Southern Regional Education Board (2001) conducted a study involving 3,100 students following their completion of their ninth-grade year of high school. The researchers gathered course-assignment and performance information, as well as test results in reading, mathematics, and science, and surveys from students and teachers. They found that taking algebra or pre-algebra in middle school resulted in students taking higher-level math courses in high school, and did not result in higher failure rates. This report identified three actions critically needed for increasing the achievement of high school students: 1) Challenge all students to perform at high levels; 2) Ensure that all middle school students are adequately prepared to enter ninth grade; and 3) Make sure that all students are provided the extra help and the extra time they need to succeed.

Barth (1991) in his work regarding the restructuring of schools noted the potentially grave consequences that too often result from lowered expectations, tracking and unchallenging curriculum: “But the major factor in students’ lives that leads to depression, dropping out, drugs, jail, and suicide appears to be the school experience: ability groups, grade

retention, college pressures, working alone, denial of strengths and focus on weaknesses, learning that is information-rich and experience-poor, and an irrelevant curriculum that students must endure and frequently ignore.” (p.126)

The Education Trust-West (2004) also identified the need for providing a rigorous core curriculum for all students. This publication focused on the A-G curriculum in California high schools, and made the case that this is no longer necessary *only* for students planning to attend college, rather that it is important for all young people. [Note: “A-G curriculum” refers to a sequence of at least 15 academic high school courses, the completion of which is required in order to attend any four-year public college in California.] Contrary to common beliefs, enrollment in harder classes does not make it harder for students to succeed. In fact, the opposite is true – greater challenges lead to greater student success. A high rigor curriculum helps all students do better in school, and schools with a focus on A-G courses create a culture of high expectations for all.

### **Social Organization**

One of the most important findings from the Lee and Burkam (2003) study is that students were less likely to drop out of school when there were positive relationships between teachers and students, but only when the students perceived this to be true. And, it was more common to find these positive relationships in smaller school settings. Interactions between staff and students will be discussed in terms of the environmental settings, and later with regard to the data on resiliency.

### **School Culture**

Often the terms *climate* and *culture* are used interchangeably to describe school environments. Recently, educational scholars tend to use the term culture more often and

agree that it is powerful, and has a strong impact on student learning, though not always positive. Kratochwill and Roach (2004) reviewed the historical differences between terms and the measures for school climate and school culture. They state that researchers often describe the school climate as its personality, emphasizing individuals' behaviors and patterns of communication. They characterize school culture as reflecting the assumptions, interpretations, and expectations that drive individuals' behavior within the school context, shaping the way that things are done. They stress, however, that neither term holds greater value, and that the decision to focus on one versus the other is best shaped by the purpose for which an analysis is to be made.

Peterson and Deal (1998) describe culture as the informal expectations and values that over time determine how school staff think, feel, and act. Further, they talk about the unproductive nature of toxic cultures, in which "negativity dominates conversations, interactions and planning" (p. 1), consequently blocking all efforts for change due to the fact that the goal is to meet the needs of staff, rather than of students. However, they also discuss the opportunities inherent in positive school cultures that have a "shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn" (p. 2). This commitment to ongoing learning on the part of the entire school staff is a characteristic of learning communities.

### Learning Communities

School reform efforts emphasize the importance of continuous learning and growth. Senge (1990) created a long-lasting stir in the business community with the introduction of the concept of organizations as

learning communities. This was a major departure from the norm of authoritarian hierarchical structures at that time. He proposed that corporations could increase their productivity, while its employees expanded their capacity, by embracing the notion of continuous growth. To do so, he introduced the concept of learning organizations. Rather than changing the structure or operational practices within an organization, he argued that it was necessary to redesign how the individuals think and interact within those structures. A learning organization could be characterized



as possessing these five disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team building. Further, he stressed that these were to be practiced routinely as part of a lifetime journey because a learning organization is "continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (p. 14). Two of these disciplines (shared vision and team

building) are quite similar to the attributes found in positive school cultures, small schools, and caring communities. Not surprisingly, it did not take long for the concept of learning organizations to find advocates in the educational community.

One of the most prominent educational leaders to implement this model in a high school setting was Richard Dufour (2001). Under his leadership, Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois became the first to receive the U.S. Department of Education's Excellence in Education award, and he attributes the school's success largely to the fact that it was transformed into a professional learning community, the term used by schools to describe what was known as a learning organization in the business world. "I have also come to understand that the context principals should strive to create in their schools is the collaborative culture of a professional learning community" (p. 15)

Henderson (1996) described resiliency as the ability to rebound from negative and stressful events and adapt in a way that increases the individual's ability to cope. It helped to move professionals away from a damage model to one that was more wellness based and offered hope and empowerment to individuals who had experienced crisis.

### **Caring Communities**

Tom Vander Ark (2002), former executive director for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for seven years, extolled the virtues of personalization. "Good schools intentionally layer multiple personalization strategies in unique ways to ensure powerful relationships. They take steps to ensure that every adult knows every student, at least by sight and every student has an advocate and the opportunity to pursue his or her passion and gifts." (p.14) Small schools offer tremendous opportunity and promise for increasing the connection and engagement of students, but size alone does not guarantee this. It appears that it is also necessary to exhibit a strong positive culture that personalizes the environment and exudes an apparent sense of caring for students.

In that same vein, others have discussed the importance of creating a warm and welcoming school environment, in which students clearly know that they are valued. Nel Noddings (1995) has written extensively on the need to create communities of caring in schools as a way not only to reduce the rampant violence and sense of disconnection in our society, but as an essential component to learning. My contention is first, we should want more from our educational efforts than academic achievement and, second, that we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others. (p. 675) She further emphasizes this need by declaring "personal manifestations of care are probably more impor-

tant in children's lives than any particular curriculum or pattern or pedagogy" (p. 676).

While the structure of schools has a powerful influence on the experiences of students, it is clearly impossible to discount the critical role that the faculty and staff play in that environment. Even when discussing small schools, culture, learning communities and caring communities, it is clear that the relationships among teachers, other school staff, and students are paramount. The following subsection will explore these relationships further in the context of resiliency, which includes the need for heightened expectations, the value of bonding, and the importance of appreciating and addressing individual differences.

### **Resiliency**

The roots of the resilience research can be traced to early studies in psychiatry and psychology first conducted in the early 1970s. Garnezy and Neuchterlein (1972) in their research on a group of African-American children reared in poverty and other stark environmental conditions, as well as Blueler (1978) in his work with patients with schizophrenia, found that some within these groups appeared to exhibit an invulnerability to the apparent disadvantages they faced. In a chronology of resilience research findings, Thielemann (2000) noted that conclusions derived from these and other studies "stressed the importance of examining protective attributes in 'at-risk' populations and helped reframe the study of psychological and sociological development using a 'strengths' model rather than a deficit and problem-oriented approach"(p.1).

In a series of epidemiological studies conducted by Rutter (1977, 1979), in which he

compared rates of neurotic and conduct disorders and specific reading retardation in ten-year-old children from two geographically different areas in Great Britain, he identified several protective attributes that reduced risk and promoted a healthier adjustment. These studies included children who had a genetic personality disposition that enabled them to cope with new situations, and children who were exposed to a caring parent or significant other in the home or in the school environment.

In a classic sociological study, Werner and Smith (1982) followed 623 children and grandchildren born in 1955 to Asian and European immigrants on the island of Kauai. This study followed these children from birth to adulthood. One-third of those studied were found to be at-risk due to familial and environmental factors. The researchers discovered that one-third of this group grew up to be competent and autonomous adults. They attributed the resilience of these adults to the existence of three protective factors: dispositional attributes of the individual, affectionate ties with the family, and external support systems in the environment.

Benard (1991) reviewed the emerging body of literature regarding resiliency and highlighted the critical role that schools could play in fostering resilience in children. She described resilience as “the term used to describe a set of qualities that foster a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity”(p.1). She grouped these protective factors into three major categories: caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation. In later publications, Benard (1998) stressed the importance of intersystem collaborations between families and schools and between schools and communities, in order to create a strong network of protection for all children. In a study commissioned by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC),

McMillan and Reed (1993) noted that only 19% of at-risk students developed resiliency and were successful in school. They defined resilient at-risk students as those who have all of the characteristics associated with being at-risk, but somehow succeed in school. Their work suggested that resilient students were “the product of a series of complex processes involving school environment, family support, and individual attributes”(p. 4).

This new literature began to challenge the notion that abuse, loss, or neglect would likely result in dysfunctional behavior, pathologies, failure, or violence. Henderson (1996) described resiliency as the ability to rebound from negative and stressful events and adapt in a way that increases the individual’s ability to cope. It helped to move professionals away from a damage model to one that was more wellness based and offered hope and empowerment to individuals who had experienced crisis. A resounding message was emerging that every student has a capacity for resilience and families, schools, and communities have a role in fostering that resilience. As Henderson noted:

“Characteristics of resiliency can be discovered in almost everyone if they are examined for signs of resiliency with the same meticulousness used in looking for problems and deficits” (p.3). In this model, educators are challenged to focus more on the strengths, rather than the deficits, presented by the students they serve.

All students, particularly at-risk students who are likely to have encountered some degree of trauma, need to develop resiliency. Henderson and Milstein (1996) identified clear and distinct strategies that can be built into the operations of schools and classrooms. When adopted by the educators who work within these environs, these strategies help to instill those protective factors that promote resiliency in students. These strategies are designed to increase prosocial bonding, set clear and consistent boundaries, pro-

vide opportunities for meaningful participation, set and communicate high expectations, provide caring and support, and teach life skills.

It is, however, important to note that building resiliency in students is not solely the compilation of a set of traits, but rather a long-term process. This process is supported by the implementation of these strategies in schools that are intentionally determined to build resilience in the students served. “Schools are critical environments for individuals to develop the capacity to bounce back from adversity, adapt to pressures, and problems encountered, and develop the competencies –social, academic, and vocational – necessary to do well in life (Henderson & Milstein, 1996 p. 11).

### **Discipline Strategies**

One of the significant challenges in working with at-risk students is the need to deal with inappropriate and sometimes aggressive behaviors. The type of discipline policies and procedures implemented at school sites has the potential to positively or negatively impact the quality of the relationships between staff and students.

In a provocative article published in the American School Board Journal, Brown (2005) suggests that at-risk programs may in fact increase the very problems they were designed to prevent. The target of this criticism is school suspensions. He argues that this strict punitive approach to inappropriate behaviors is actually having an unintended consequence of further disengaging these marginal students. He suggests that instead of punishing those displaying at-risk behaviors, schools could do more to increase academic performance and personal development by helping to develop their resilience. An emphasis on specific strategies to promote descriptive rather than evaluative feedback would be more likely to result in improved behavior.

Recently many schools have been embracing a new model for school-wide discipline, called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS or PBS). This is a research-based framework for implementing school-wide systems of behavioral support to help prevent and reduce problem behavior, and it involves the use of “proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS). The research suggests that there is a great deal that schools, and the staff that work within them, can do to help students remain engaged and thus reduce their risk of dropping out.

### **Summary**

It is clear that there is substantial literature regarding factors known to promote student success for at-risk youth and prevent high school dropouts. However, there is a serious lack of data dealing with alternative education programs, particularly community schools, with regard to how their structure (school size), academic organization (curriculum), and social organization (relationships among students and staff) impacts the graduation or transition rates for at-risk students. This information will be gathered from the unique perspectives of those who work within the community school – the staff and the students. A research project is being designed to analyze these factors and will be reported in the next issue of the *JCCASAC Journal*.

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# Closing the Achievement Gap begins with The Golden Rule

Sacramento County Office of Education  
By Mary Ruth Bell

**T**he academic achievement gap between underserved students (i.e., African American, Latino, and low socioeconomic students) and their higher performing counterparts continues. Many students entering County Office of Education Juvenile Court and Community Schools across the state are underserved students who are two or more years behind grade level in reading and/or math. Over the years, researchers have suggested a variety of strategies to increase student achievement through rigorous and relevant educational practices.

One researcher determined increased student achievement must target affective and behavioral outcomes for students (Guskey, 2003). Another proclaimed career and technical education led to increased student achievement (Veen, 2006). Hollins (2006) conducted a study that revealed teacher participation in structured dialogue concerning issues of improved student literacy led to increased student achievement and created professional learning communities (PLC). Still, other researchers have cited structure of content (Dana Center, 1999), methods of instructional delivery (Izumi, Coburn, & Cox, 2002), evaluation (Borke, Elliott, & Uchiyama, 2002), formation of supportive school cultures (Joyce & Showers, 2002), nested learning environments where all stakeholders are continuously learning (Hord, 2004), and commitment of the PLC

However, interviews with incarcerated students suggested the “Golden Rule,” treating others the way you want to be treated, was the missing ingredient needed to close the achievement gap and eliminate recidivism rates.

(Togneri, 2003) as having the greatest impact on learning. However, interviews with incarcerated students suggested the “Golden Rule,” treating others the way you want to be treated, was the missing ingredient needed to close the achievement gap and eliminate recidivism rates. Students at Carson Creek Jr/Sr High School expressed that having caring adults in their life, mentors, someone who understood them, someone with whom they could talk, someone with life experiences similar to theirs who could help them navigate around trouble was the **link** to keeping them in school and out of the juvenile justice system (Henry-Bell, 1994). The Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) provides education to incarcerated youth and students expelled from school districts or otherwise referred in accordance to California Education Code (*EC*) 1980. In December 2007, SCOE was identified as a Program Improvement (PI) District in response to not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English/Language Arts for two consecutive years.

SCOE is taking an aggressive stance to combat the achievement gap between underserved students attending its schools and their higher achieving counterparts. To do this, a **LINKS** conceptual framework to provide the best educational practices before, during and after-school has been developed and implemented by SCOE. **LINKS**, representing Leadership in everyday life, Ingenuity in thought and practice, Navigating choices, Keeping the

promise, and **Sufficiency** in preparation, is a holistic approach to providing rigorous and relevant education to SCOE Juvenile Court and Community School students. This conceptual framework **LINKS** academic assistance, enrichment, student and family literacy goals in a manner that makes learning meaningful and enjoyable for students, while actively involving family and community in the education of its children.

**How Does It Work?**

A closer look at increased student achievement between high- and low-performing schools serving large numbers of African American, Latino and low-socioeconomic students suggests an eclectic approach to research-based practices is necessary to effect true sustainable learning for all students, particularly those who are underserved (Henry-Bell, 2006). **LINKS** attempts to synchronize and implement these best practices through a holistic approach focused on increased student achievement in reading, language arts and math for students. The fundamental success of this conceptual model rests in teaching students critical thinking skills through a variety of learning activities that engage student modalities, including counseling assistance with student success plan goals, leadership training, small group and one-to-one mentoring services, team sports, project-based assignments, entrepreneurial skills and others. Some of these activities are described:

**Student Success Plans** engage students, parents and, when available, teachers, counselors and mentors in a comprehensive goal setting activity based upon what is important to the student. Three goals are determined by the student and used as a guide for personal choices made in his/her life. At least one goal must be specific to increased reading and/or math proficiency. The other two goals must support acceleration of learning in these core subject areas. Target dates for completion are set, students specify what they will do to meet their goals, necessary supportive

services are ascertained, and steps toward success are continuously monitored on an ongoing basis. The student has primary responsibility for checking progress with a



Success Plan Team Member, who has the role of helping the student clearly understand where he/she is in terms of meeting selected goals and development of future steps to meet those goals.

**Leadership Training** is conducted with students in small groups. There are some primary skills that are necessary in order to navigate choices and attain sufficiency in preparation, these include: (a) study skills, (b) honest progress reflections, (c) commitment to goals, (d) support network to attain goals, (e) self-advocacy skills. Students are taught these fundamentals through an integrative approach that utilizes daily classroom learning objectives.



**LINKS Mentor Program** currently provides mentoring services to all SCOE County Community Schools. Active members represent multicultural and multi-talented backgrounds. These Mentors are committed to closing the academic and social achievement gaps of our students. They provide tutorial services, goal setting and monitoring skills for students, and other needs that are co-determined in the Mentor/Mentee relationship.

**LINKS Mentor Contact Team** bring a variety of skills to this project. The team consists of more than 10 leaders from multicultural backgrounds and all walks of life including: business and industry, Civil Rights agencies, higher education representatives, community-based organizations, law enforcement officers, public school advocates and others. Each team member assists in marketing the LINKS Mentor Program to the local neighborhoods and recruit other businesses to participate in mentoring our students. Additionally, the Mentor Contact Team participates as a Community Advisory to the Local Education Agency Plan (LEAP).

**Team Sports, Visual & Performing Arts** are not only used as student-suggested incentives,

but incorporate a focus on core academic skill areas. Students complete art projects, participate in events that enhance interpersonal skill development through competitive intramural team sports. They write and perform scripts that target increased awareness about social justice, health related toxins, gang agitation, relationship building with parents and peers, and other excerpts determined by School Site Teams which includes student representatives from the student body.

**Career Technical Education** programs are provided at our sites through Regional Occupational Program



(ROP). Not only do students have an opportunity to participate in Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accredited ROP courses that

lead to completion certificates at long-term schools, but also they are **LINKED** to industry specific apprenticeship programs and industrial trade networks that lead to continued high-wage, high-skill paid jobs and internships. Project-based learning activities are ROP centered.

These are some of the research-based strategies utilized to get students actively involved in their own education plan so that they are empowered to impact their futures. Too often educators prescribe what they think is best for the student without serious consideration of what the student thinks. The LINKS approach attempts to balance the scales of educator input with student insight. In other words, like adults deciding their own life's path, students are treated as if they are the ones who determine their own future, "the Golden Rule." Students are empowered to determine how they want to show up in the world. They are taught the skills necessary to become productive citizens in a multi-cultural pluralistic society. They are taught to take responsibility for how they choose to represent themselves. They may choose to make decisions that do not render the positive outcomes they would like to experience—and understand it is their choice to make the decisions which gets them back on the right track.

Every student has an opportunity and daily access to the practices of **LINKS: Leadership** in everyday life, **Ingenuity** in thought and practice,

**Navigating choices, Keeping the promise, and Sufficiency** in preparation. SCOE's conceptual framework utilizes research-based practices in an eclectic manner that **LINKS** students to the services necessary to increase their academic achievement and keep them out of the juvenile justice system. It embraces higher-level critical thinking skills. It is a holistic, "Golden Rule" approach to reconnecting our students to a society which needs their help to create jobs that do not yet exist. **LINKS** helps students and families turn their lives around by acquiring the necessary skills, confidence and commitment to increase academic achievement and eliminate recidivism.



**About this author:**

**Mary Ruth Bell, Ed.D.** is currently a Director III with Sacramento County Office of Education. She received her Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) from the University of Southern California (USC). Her life's mission as an educator is to provide the highest quality educational services to all students, particularly those students and families representing underserved communities.

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The Juvenile, Court, Community, and Alternative Schools Administrators of California

# Scholarship Application

## Deadline June 30, 2008

### About the JCCASAC Scholarship:

Student must be a graduate during the 2007-08 school year. The nominee needs to be enrolled in a higher education or training program, prior to release of the scholarship funds. Please have the student attach statement to application, expressing future plans.

### Please complete the following application and return it to:

Paula Mitchell, *JCCASAC Treasurer*  
Santa Clara COE  
(408)453-6999 paula\_mitchell@sccoe.org

### Student Data

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Last First MI  
 Permanent Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street  
 Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### School Data

Juvenile Court / Community School Attended: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Graduation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Program Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street  
 Name of College/Trade School Attending: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Address/City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Enrollment: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Credits: \_\_\_\_\_

### Financial Data

Has student ever received an award from JCCASAC?	Yes	No	Amount Received/Date:
	Circle one		
Tuition	\$	_____	
books	\$	_____	
Other	\$	_____	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>_____</b>	

**ATTACH LETTER FROM THE STUDENT TO THIS SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION**

\_\_\_\_\_  
JCCASAC Program Administrator Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
JCCASAC Section Representative Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Approved JCCASAC Treasurer Date



# Congratulations

## 2006/07 JCCASAC Scholarship Recipients

**Manuel Contreras**

San Mateo  
Office of Education

**Gabrielle Hines**

San Diego County  
Office of Education

**Samual Estacio**

San Diego County  
Office of Education

**Brenna McDonald**

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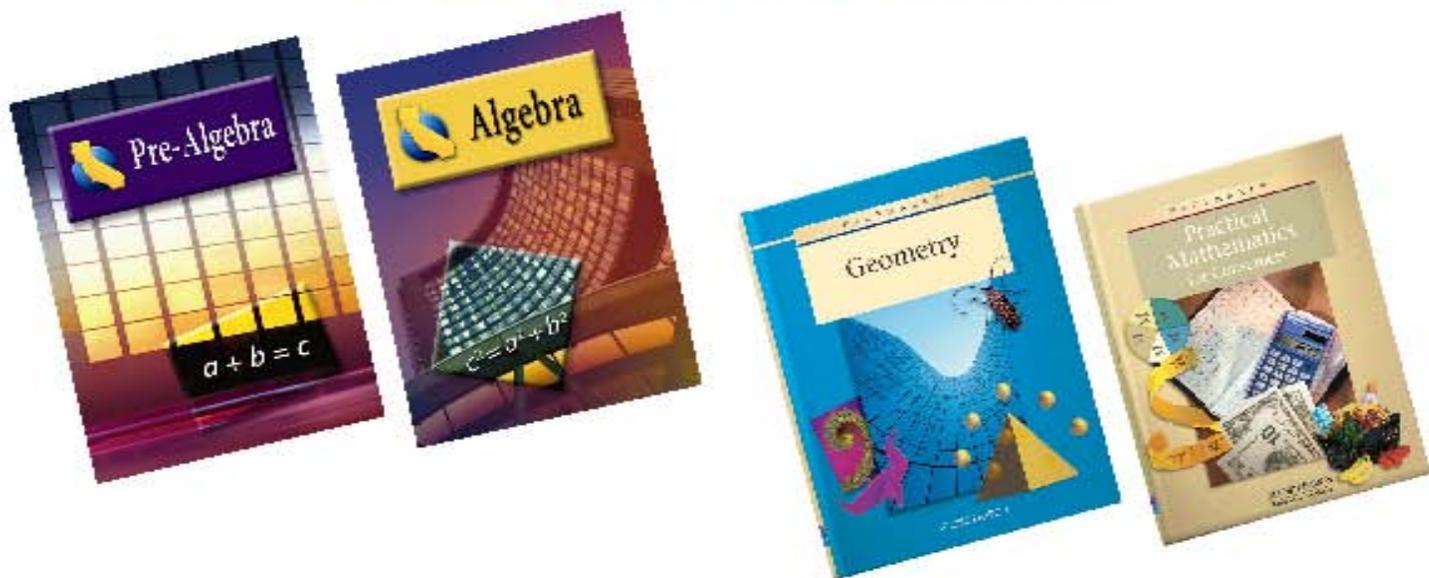
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