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ABSTRACT

Six programs are profiled that garner both deep engagement and high achievement from young people. All build upon fundamental needs of adolescent life: to register positive impact upon the world, to feel respected and connected, and to construct one's own narrative. A community action initiative at a high school in Texas' Rio Grande Valley is dedicated to helping poor Mexican American students get a college education and then return home to help the community develop. A nonprofit organization helps disadvantaged New York City high school students develop technical filmmaking skills and media literacy while nurturing their idealism, intellectual development, and commitment to social activism. A small high school in Chicago, Illinois, focuses on good teaching, student choice, small-group instruction, interdisciplinary instruction, and high expectations of students. An Arkansas project uses civil rights strategies and exposure to the culture of their communities to encourage Black secondary students to take algebra, long considered a gatekeeper course to advanced placement courses and college admittance. A 7-week summer program in Boston teaches secondary school students how to create a sustainable metropolitan food system; bridge communities divided by race, class, and physical distance; and address critical environmental and social issues. A Providence, Rhode Island, high school focuses on workplace internships and independent projects tailored to students' interests. Small classes, detailed multidimensional examination of fewer topics, and real world projects and internships boost students faith in themselves, altering attitudes and work habits. (TD)

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ED 481 279

Learning Outside the Lines

Six Innovative Programs That Reach Youth

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Learning Outside the Lines: Six Innovative Programs that Reach Youth results from a collaboration among the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, What Kids Can Do, and Jobs for the Future—along with a shared determination to bring new resources and ideas to the education of our nation's young people. The 13-part PBS series *Senior Year*, produced by Displaced Films and shot at Los Angeles's Fairfax High School, provided the spark for this booklet, which is intended to inform the national public engagement campaign about the series directed by Roundtable, Inc.

Senior Year chronicles the lives of 15 teenagers at one of American's most diverse public high schools as they dream, struggle, and cope with the ups and downs of their last year of high school. To augment its stories with examples from elsewhere, *Learning Outside the Lines* documents six ambitious efforts to inspire and engage young people across the entire span of adolescence.

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MARCH 2002

Introduction

Along with graduates, every high school produces stories of various shapes and sizes. In the yearbook, they appear as captions: Salutatorian. Athlete. Comedian. As told by teachers and principals, the stories are often of students overcoming long odds, who make striving a habit, with college admissions and scholarships the reward. In the personal accounts of students, a battle won against depression or a best friend's loyalty may provide the headlines.

But for too many high school students, the main story is anonymity, with low expectations the antagonist. For them, high school becomes a time and place where they lose rather than sharpen a sense of purpose.

Sometimes the "slacking off" follows a stretch of determined effort. "Basically, I'm just going through the motions or whatever, trying to hang up and get out of high school," explains 18-year-old Derard—3.9 GPA in hand—in the PBS series *Senior Year.* In the country's most underfunded and overcrowded urban schools, however, "senior slump" often begins much earlier, boosting dropout rates while devastating students' options for the future.

Against this backdrop, the young people whose voices emerge in the following portraits are, in the words of one grateful parent, "darn lucky." Though "underprivileged," they had the good fortune to find learning environments that inspired and supported them to do their best work.

Whether in or out of school, voluntary or for credit, the programs profiled here garner from young people both deep engagement and high achievement, helping them find pleasure in the right things. All build upon fundamental needs of adolescent life: to register positive impact upon the world around them, to feel respected and connected, to construct one's own narrative. All help youth become persistent and confident learners. Importantly, each does so in its own way.

Why are distinctive learning environments like these the exception and the one-size-fits-all high school the norm? Don't we have a good idea of what young people

need and respond to, what especially helps teens facing poverty, family problems, or worse develop promising storylines?

Indeed, we do. We know that young people—from the least to most advantaged—need opportunities to stand tall. We know teens thrive in settings, in and outside school, where they encounter:

- caring relationships that help them build an attachment to the learning environment and persist through obstacles
- cognitive challenges that engage them intellectually, tap interests, and hone essential skills
- a culture of peer support that pushes them to do their best work
- community membership and voice in a group worth belonging to
- connections to an expanding network of adults who help them access additional learning and career opportunities.

Not only do we understand how much these factors matter, we also know a great deal about putting them into practice. The six schools and programs featured here—from the Llano Grande Center in Southwest Texas to the Food Project in Boston—make it their business to provide youth with these "5 C's." Taken together they constitute an existence proof.

So it is not a lack of know how that keeps such supportive learning environments on the margins—despite their large pay offs for youth who themselves are marginalized. The obstacles, mostly familiar, lie elsewhere: insufficient resources, a dearth of innovative leaders and skilled practitioners, the pull of the familiar, inertia.

Perhaps in shortest supply, though, is the political will to enact policies that place the needs of young people before those of the institutions that serve them. More than 25 years ago the National Commission on Resources for Youth, in a paper on engaging adolescents, concluded:

> There is much that youth can do to contribute actively and responsively to their own development and to the life of their communities. What they cannot do on their own is create the climate and conditions that will permit them to take these participatory roles in society on a widespread scale. That is the challenge and the task of the adult world.

Creating the climate and conditions for youth success remains our challenge. The current interest in small high schools, high quality community programs for youth, and other options for engaging young people is as refreshing as it is hopeful.

Like the other programs described in this booklet, the small, inventive "Met" school in Providence prizes individualized learning and high expectations. Culminating four years of independent study, every Met student completes and presents a senior research project to a panel of peers and adults. More unusual, every senior also writes an autobiography and delivers a valedictory speech, underscoring this school's belief that every narrative matters. After last year's ceremony, where she sat surrounded by 42 classmates ready for college and career, 18-year-old Nadia said simply, "We're all the success story here."

A Small Town Dreams Big: Developing Youth and Community Together

"My cousin Mario went up to Princeton University," said Monica, 18, who has lived her whole life in the Rio Grande Valley, 15 miles from the Mexican border. "He's studying to come back here and be a pediatrician."

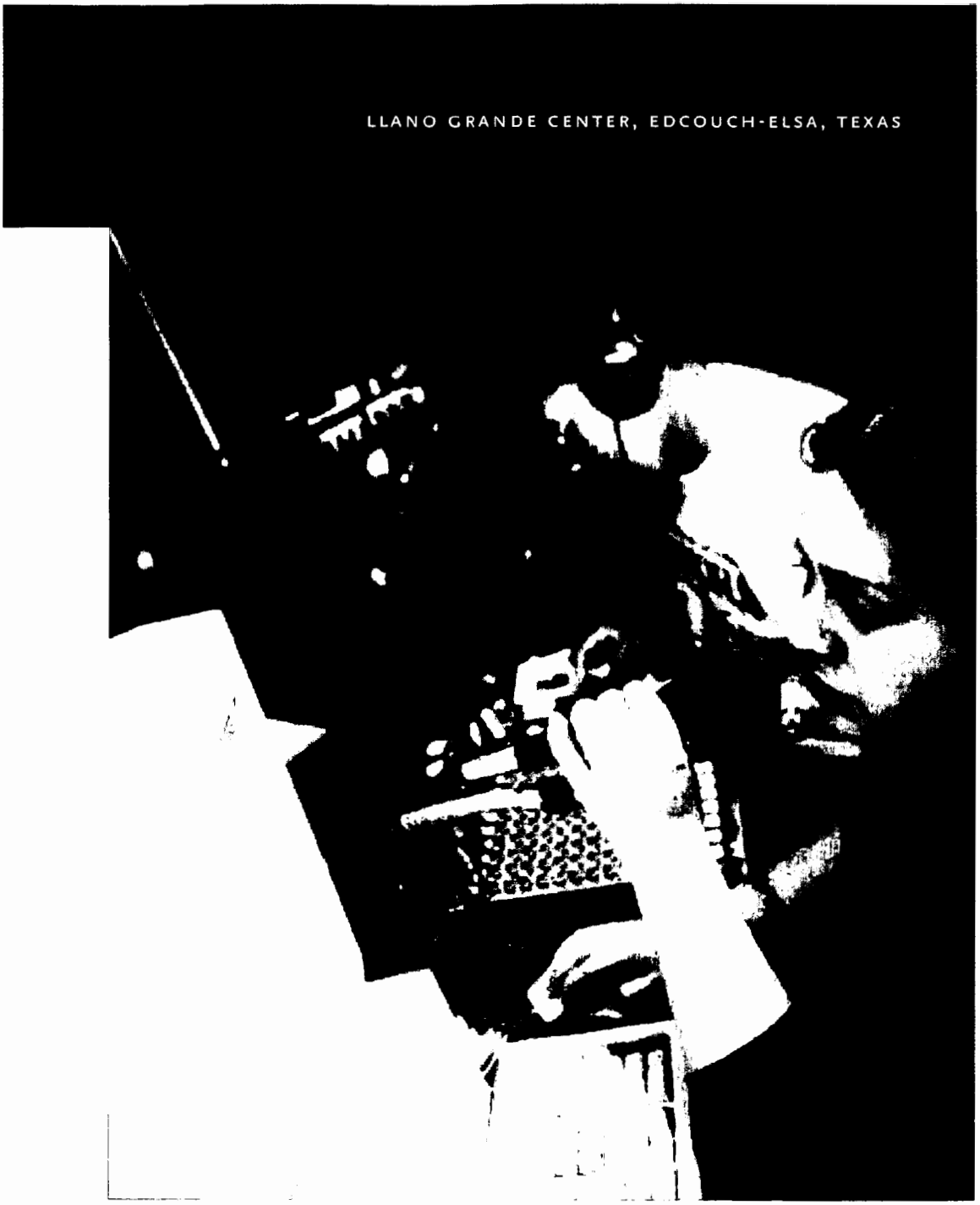
Half the students at Edcouch-Elsa High School, where Monica is a senior, are migrant farm laborers, following the crops every fall and spring. Ninety-one percent of their parents lack a high school diploma. But in the last seven years, supported by adult mentors like Francisco Guajardo, dozens of graduates like Mario are taking off for some of the nation's most prestigious colleges on full scholarships.

More striking still, when they graduate they come back: as doctors, writers, researchers, and media experts.

"Community development can't happen without youth development," asserts Guajardo, 37, who himself grew up poor in one of the local *colonias*, unincorporated settlements without electricity and water that proliferate on this area's back roads. Five years ago, Guajardo rallied the school superintendent, alumni, and students to found the Llano Grande Center, an ever-expanding community action initiative based at Edcouch-Elsa High School. He is unabashed in his mission to help local poor and minority students get the best college educations in the country—and in his blunt compact with them to return home, as he did, to help their community thrive.

Beginning with Stories

Staffed by returning graduates like writer-in-residence, David Rice, the work of the Llano Grande Center starts in the high school's classrooms, fanning out from there. And it begins with storytelling. In English classes, students create their own personal narratives; in social studies, they retrieve the untold history of rural South Texas. Those who are interested join the Center's ongoing efforts to record the stories of local elders, publishing them in the bilingual *Llano Grande Journal* and sharing them with younger students.



"Now I know actual people who worked in the fields, people who came from my school and went through all that suffering," says 17-year-old Cecilia, after interviewing elderly neighbors whose backbreaking labor made Edcouch-Elsa the broccoli capital of the world in the 1940s. "There's people like that in my very own family that I hadn't even known about," she adds. "We may be one of the poorest parts of the country, but we're rich in stories."

Coached by groups like the Digital Storytelling Center at University of California-Berkeley, students also use images and sound to weave their narratives. In the publi-

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Students as Civic Reporters

The City of Elsa

Building Our Communities

This inaugural edition of the City of Elsa Newsletter is a truly collaborative enterprise between the City of Elsa Leadership, students from Edcouch-Elsa High School, the Llano Grande Center at Edcouch-Elsa High School, and respective community members.

We congratulate the City for having the faith that our young people can indeed participate in professional journalism and community building. Indeed, the City models good behavior when it places responsibility on the shoulders of our youth.

In our public conversation we must continue to challenge ourselves with the question of how all of us can participate in a real democracy? And it is important that our young people become part of answering this. We are also acutely aware of the great wisdom and experience of our elderly. As 19-year-old artist Delvis Cortez depicts in his adjoining art piece, the young and the elderly can clearly partner in building our community structures.

We hope this newsletter becomes a conduit through which our elderly, our youth, and everyone else can express their wisdom for greater community development.

LLANO GRANDE CENTER STAFF

Building a New Community by Delvia Cortez

We may be one of the poorest parts of the country, but we're rich in stories.

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cation *Through Their Own Lenses*, their photography records daily life—their own lives—in the *colonias*: a father milking the family cow, a girlfriend practicing cheerleading. When "outsiders" made a recent documentary film about the *colonias*, focusing only on deficits, students at the Center created their own video, bringing forward the close-knit human ties they prize. "People who live in *colonias* are proud," explains 15-year-old Patty. "We don't look at the disadvantages of our position."

It is this pride, this sense of place, that the Llano Grande Center wants students to forge through their storytelling, along with academic skills. It's what equips these youngsters to confidently leave and spread their wings—whether at an East Coast university or a nearby community college—and then return home.

Building Assets

Not surprisingly, creating a local infrastructure and economy conducive to growth is a parallel mission for the Llano Grande Center. In a high school course on research methods, students learn instrument development, data analysis, report writing. At the Center, they put these skills into practice, surveying merchants to create an Edcouch-Elsa business directory or examining local needs from housing to technology. They publish their findings and other news in a monthly civic affairs bulletin.

And with help from community members and adults at the Center, Edcouch-Elsa's teenagers do their own kind of "asset building." With ninety-nine percent of the local population of Spanish-speaking, Mexican ancestry—what many would consider a liability—they have created a Spanish Language Immersion Institute. "People could learn a lot," speculated one of its 17-year-old planners, "by coming down here for a three-week home-stay with language lessons and other activities." The success of this past summer's pilot institute, which drew a dozen young people and teachers from around the country, supports his hunch.

Knowledge is power, these youth have noticed. Student grant writers have won federal funds to support their community efforts. Young people field phone inquiries at the recently revived Chamber of Commerce, which shares office space with the Center. And they understand that to shape a secure future they must first reclaim their past.

"Our elders teach us many lessons," says Guajardo. "Among them is the lesson of being proud of who we are, of the struggle we have experienced, and of the realizations that are yet to come."

Behind the Camera: Student Filmmakers Push for Social Change

This past June in a New York City public library, a young videographer presented "Youth vs. Media," a documentary she and other students had made about media misrepresentation of youth. In the question-and-answer session that followed, she asserted: "I'm a teen. I want to prove to the whole world that what the media is saying about me is wrong. They judge me by who I am and the way I look. By showing this kind of video, it is like we are fighting back for our rights."

Sparking such attitudes was exactly what the Educational Video Center (EVC) had in mind when it began in 1984. The non-profit organization aims to help adolescents develop technical filmmaking skills and media literacy while nurturing their idealism, intellectual development, and commitment to social activism.

Four afternoons a week, students from resource-poor schools throughout New York City spend three hours at EVC in its High School Documentary Workshop. During the for-credit, semester-long program, students work together—mentored by experts in the field—to produce short video documentaries on subjects ranging from race relations to the environment.

Graduates of the Documentary Workshop may apply to join the more advanced YO-TV crew, which collaborates each year with a professional media client (such as the Brooklyn Museum of Art or the Public Broadcasting Service) to produce a documentary for public distribution.

Film as a Weapon for Social Change

In 18 years, young people at EVC have created over 75 short video documentaries that aim to prompt important questions and stir community action. They include "Young Gunz," about why teenagers carry guns; "Unequal Education," an expose of the uneven allocation of resources in two neighboring schools; and "Blacks and Jews: Are They Really Sworn Enemies?" about the Crown Heights riots. EVC

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student films have aired nationwide on ABC, NBC, and PBS and won some 100 national and international awards.

Reflecting their own experiences, EVC's young filmmakers embrace controversy and action. "We believe that when you pick up a camera you are arming yourself," EVC students write in a manual for their peers. "Video can give you the potential to bring people together, to make people understand one another, or to kill whatever silence hovers over any issue[s] you are interested in."

In "2371 Second Avenue: An East Harlem Story," for instance, Millie Reyes and her EVC crew documented the sub-standard living conditions in her building—including a shot of a baby in an empty bathtub being washed with water heated on the stove. When Millie and her neighbors petitioned to withhold rent until 90-some violations were addressed, the EVC film crew captured the landlord's furious response. Millie eventually showed her tape and was interviewed on NBC's Today Show. Shortly after, the landlord sold the building and conditions improved.

Revising Work to Meet High Standards

EVC's students are a diverse group, usually coming from alternative high schools and often struggling with academic skills, family troubles, or worse. Though most arrive with little prior knowledge about what a documentary is or how to produce one, their work is held to the highest standards.

Students begin with in-depth research on their topic, gathering the necessary data to support a well-developed argument. They assemble raw materials of images and audio, then edit them into an effective sequence, reviewing each step. Throughout the arduous revision process, working in teams keeps students focused. "Once everyone could start to see [the video] actually materialize," explains one, "everyone wanted to make it the best possible."

"Rough cut" screenings before an audience of experts come next—a demanding process that tests novice and professional filmmakers alike. When two of the Center's students showed their film on the International Criminal Court to officials of Human Rights Watch International, candid suggestions tumbled forth. "Set the historical context more effectively," the audience advised. "Tell more about the United States opposition to the ICC." Returning to the drawing board, one of the two acknowl-

Key Principles of Assessment

Assessment is for students.

- Has personal relevance for students (e.g., provides a tangible product they can use).
- Students become more confident and articulate about what they know.
- Students feel ownership over the process as well as the product of their work.

Assessment is faithful to the work students actually do.

- Notebooks, works-in-progress, and routine presentations are basis of assessment.
- Occasions for reflection and discussion are integrated into ongoing project work.
- Students are assessed on what they know and do, not what they don't.

Assessment is public.

- Students' goals are solicited and become part of those assessed.
- Criteria for judgment remain visible and accessible to students from the beginning.
- Performances are viewed and judged by a broad group of people. .

Assessment promotes ongoing self-reflection and critical inquiry.

- Teachers and students both speak of the qualities of good work, and how to attain it.
- Standards used reflect those of adult practitioners in the field.
- Categories and criteria of assessment remain open-ended, subject to challenge and revision.

— FROM EVC PROGRAM MATERIALS

edged, "there were times I just wanted to walk away. But you can't do that if you want to see your message get out."

Translating youthful idealism into activist films, teaching persistence and collaboration, EVC leaves a powerful mark on students. Filmmaking can transform young people's perceptions of their own surroundings, says EVC founder Steve Goodman. "Video documentary enables students to bear witness to their social conditions—and look for solutions."

The young producer of the ICC film agrees. "I like telling stories that matter—not idiotic stories about asteroids hitting the earth [or] a woman running away from a serial killer. I like telling stories that you can watch and you can learn something from. . . that make you want to act."

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'Best Practice': Good Teaching Front and Center

Six ninth graders sit around a table at Best Practice High School (BPHS), arguing about how much they will read every night in S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*. With the due date three weeks away, one girl proposes two chapters a night. "That way we can finish early, before our physics project hits." Her friend counters with one chapter; she doesn't read that fast. After five minutes, the group settles on two nightly chapters.

When their teacher hears the schedule, she praises the group's ambition, then adds, "Keep tabs on how everyone is doing. Remember, the point is to share different opinions but to all be on the same page."

"Literature circles" are just one way this 420-student school, started in 1996 on Chicago's west side, harnesses the energy of adolescent learners. Students choose the book they will read together and set the pace. As they read, they jot reactions and questions to share with their circle, which meets twice a week. Sometimes students assume special roles: the "Word Wizard" keeps track of new vocabulary words, the "Passage Master" identifies significant parts for discussion.

With innovations like these, BPHS is beating the averages in a school system where most students are poor, graduation and attendance rates are low, and violence levels are high.

Steve Zemelman is one of three faculty at Chicago's National Louis University who helped found BPHS. "More than anything else," he explains, "we wanted this school to show how good teaching, 'best practice,' could enable a cross section of normal urban kids—not the cream of the crop—to become productive, thoughtful, and confident citizens."

Last year, Best Practice sent 73 percent of its graduates to college—while only 67 percent of students citywide completed high school.

'Rigor without *Mortis*'

While many small, innovative high schools focus on a special theme—like the

BEST PRACTICE HIGH SCHOOL, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Best Practice Students on Good Teaching

- Good teaching is when the teacher is not predictable.
- Good teaching is when we learn something and have fun at the same time.
- Good teaching isn't rigid. Good teaching is exploring different fields together. Good teaching is getting involved.
- Good teaching is when the teacher pushes you to the limit.
- Good teaching is if you're teaching and everyone is "getting it," and you're working with your friends.
- Good teaching is when a teacher listens to you.
- Good teaching is when you have a teacher that you understand and the teacher understands you.

FROM *RETHINKING HIGH SCHOOL* BY HARVEY DANIELS, MARILYN BIZAR, STEVEN ZEMELMAN (HEINEMANN, 2001)

Often you have an idea on the tip of your tongue, and it's your group that helps you get it out.

sciences, the arts, or technology—Best Practice makes good teaching the centerpiece. And good teaching, the school believes, begins with high expectations for students, offering them what another university partner, Harvey Daniels, calls "rigor without *mortis*."

Rather than start with biology, for example, BPHS freshmen study physics, turning the traditional science sequence upside down—or right side up, according to Nobel prizewinner Leon Lederman. The advantage, he points out, is that "science has a story line when the opening chapter is physics." The approach pays off, as a notable number of students name science as their favorite course. Says sophomore Markesha, "I had no idea I'd enjoy chemistry so much or could feel so motivated."

Good teachers ask students to think deeply about important issues, pushing them to share their thinking in multiple ways. Four times a year, teachers and students spend a week immersed in multidisciplinary units with names like "Island

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Nations" (combining geography, English, and art) or "Isms," an examination of the nature, origins, and solutions for discrimination.

Good teachers also give students choice and voice, making their interests central to learning. Each Wednesday, students split the day between internships throughout the city and seminars of their choice, back at BPHS, on studying probability to analyzing French films.

Lastly, good classrooms are sociable and collaborative—places where young people, working in pairs or teams, learn to lead, carry their weight, and support others. "Often you have an idea or sentence on the tip of your tongue," explains Markesha, "and it's your group that helps you get [it] out." Another student observes, "Small groups teach the power of compromise."

Pushing Limits

Charged with active learning, BPHS teachers and students alike reach beyond the comfortable, stretching their perceptions of abilities and potential. "I couldn't imagine doing physics," says 15-year-old Jenny, "but our teacher, he gets to you, he gets *you*, and there's no turning back."

Curtis, a senior with an eye on architecture as a career, agrees. "[Our music teacher] doesn't take 'normal.' Instead she pushes you beyond where you think you can go. She doesn't just teach music, she forces out your best."

Despite such praise—and the school's beliefs—teachers at BPHS, like those everywhere, have good days and bad, lessons that flop as well as soar. But unlike other schools, BPHS has built in underlying structures that support faculty as they model the risk taking they expect from their students.

Teachers work in teams, for instance, benefiting from mutual support and common planning time, while also tracking the struggles and triumphs of small groups of students. Teachers also meet daily with advisees, staying connected to the same kids over four years.

As a result, Marilyn Bizar, the third university partner, likes to say, "Even when it's not working, it's working."

Jaisy, a Best Practice junior, is asked frequently about her school's unconventional name. She answers: "Because here we practice the best." Pressed to single out the practice that matters most, she says, "There's a real sense that there's a 'we' here—a 'we' that includes students and teachers, working together."

Each One Teach One: Math Literacy and Civil Rights

In Pine Bluff, Arkansas, 40 middle and high school students climbed on a bus this summer for a tour of the local sights. During the following two-week session of the Algebra Project camp, they described in pictures and phrases every stop on that trip. They then turned their observations into the *x's and y's* of mathematical expression, a key step in understanding algebra. The idea is to transform the familiar—like a trip around the neighborhood—into the symbolic language of advanced math.

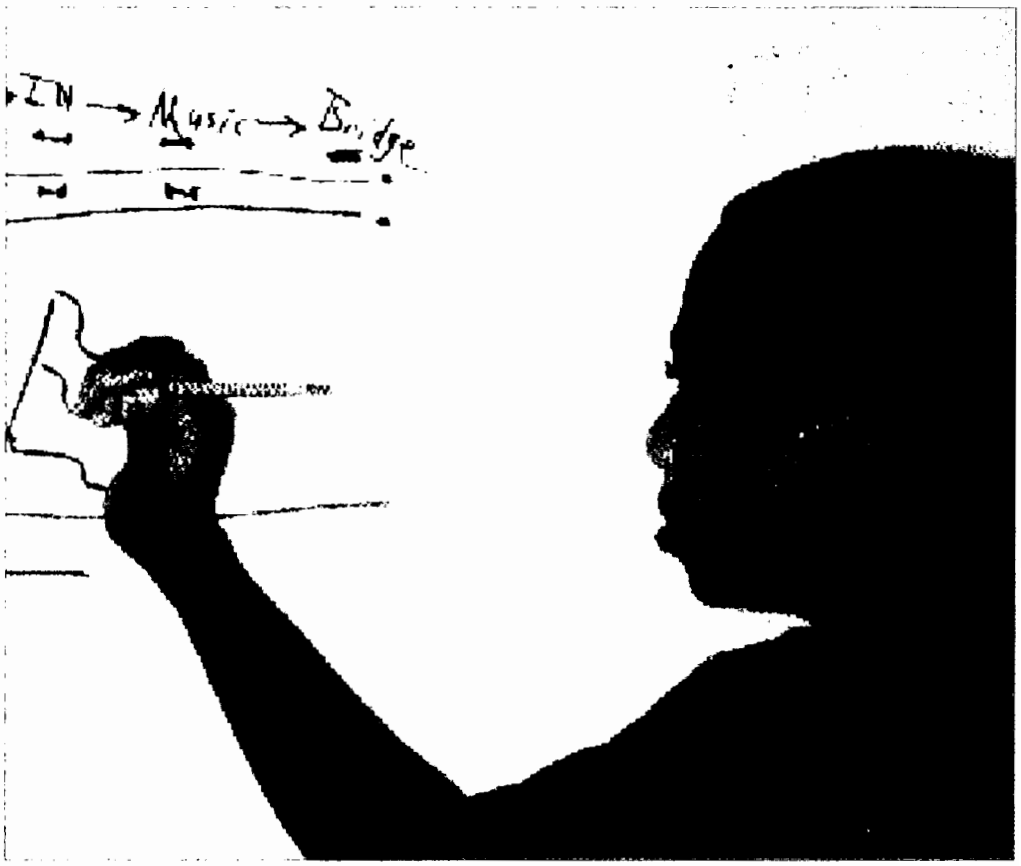
Along the way, campers spent twelve-hour days forging connections with each other, their college-age mentors, and members of this Arkansas Delta community—and began to make the link between algebra and their own futures.

"If you go to college and major in math, you can go to any place in the United States of America," said 16-year-old Arleus. To support his point, he proudly described his dorm counselor and role model, Stargell Lawson, a premedical student at college in North Carolina.

Linking Algebra with Civil Rights

Started in the 1980s by Harvard-educated mathematician and veteran civil rights activist Robert Moses, the Algebra Project began with the observation that mastering algebra before high school is the key to students' placement in advanced academic paths—those that lead to higher education and promising futures. Many educators call algebra a "gatekeeper," and for students of color, tracked into general education and "basic" math, that gate has kept them out.

"I know at my school there were only two African-American males who actually took calculus in our whole entire high school," said Stargell, 21. "That was myself and another person. I hope this program wakes up some of the kids to question, you know, 'why can't I take calculus class,' or 'why can't I take a tougher curriculum, so I can get ahead? '"



Tapping civil rights strategies, the Algebra Project enlists youthful energies into an expanding network of young people—from middle school to college in age—with the motto "Each one teach one." They develop curriculum materials and math games. They help teachers as well as students learn to use graphing calculators. They hope to inspire African-American communities across the Deep South to take a more powerful role in the knowledge economy.

After his camp session this summer, for example, Arieus expects to help lead after-school and weekend Algebra Project classes back in his hometown of Marvell, Arkansas, drawing in not just his peers but older residents as well. "Some people

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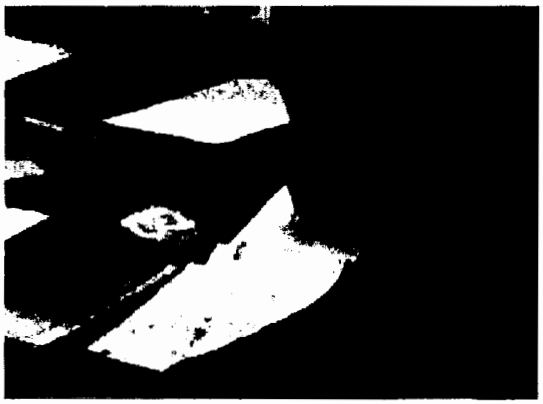
Learning Outside the Lines

Algebra Matters

"I love algebra, there's nothing that could replace algebra to me. If people are like, you're not going to be good at anything, you can't do algebra or whatever, it just makes me want to try harder to do algebra. When we go places and talk to people, you can see in their faces that they're understanding what you're talking about."

ARIEUS, 16, MARVELL, ARKANSAS
FIRST YEAR WITH THE ALGEBRA PROJECT



"We're always talking about the technology gap, and how blacks aren't as far along in technology. So if we give these kids a good background in algebra, which leads to the higher math program, getting them involved in calculus and physics and biology and the science fields, which there aren't many minorities in, then once we get more into the technology-based fields, it will lead to empowerment."

DERRICK, 21, FAYETTEVILLE, NC
SEVENTH YEAR WITH THE ALGEBRA PROJECT

If you go to college and major in math, you can go to any place in the United States of America.

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when they grow up, they kind of lag off on math," he said. "So we intend to brush them up on their skills, and kind of inspire them to keep doing math."

Appropriately, the Algebra Project also aims to steep youngsters in the history of the civil rights movement. At Pine Bluff, students visited Central High School in Little Rock, where kids no older than themselves made history in the 1950s. Students from seventh grade through high school also read and discussed Moses' recent book, *Radical Equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights* (Beacon Press, 2001).

Leading while Giving Back

"It's more than just learning about mathematics," commented David Dennis, a retired lawyer who leads the Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project from Jackson, Mississippi. "The kids get a lot of exposure to the culture of the community, and that gets them motivated." This session's curriculum, he noted, included quilting, folk medicine, African dance and drumming, and the local history of Pine Bluff. Not least, "it's about leadership abilities," he said.

The Algebra Project's network of young people serves as powerful role models to its younger students. Embodying the persistence necessary to get ahead and the importance of giving back, many return to the program year after year, eager to lend the assistance they themselves received earlier.

"If I can come in and take two, three weeks out of my summer to be a role model and facilitator, so [these kids] can go back to help their community," said Derrick, a 21-year-old counselor in his seventh year with the Algebra Project, "I feel that it's worth it."

The approach yields good results. Five years after the Algebra Project took hold at Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi, more than six times as many ninth graders were enrolling in geometry classes, putting students on track for advanced classes in Algebra 2 and pre-calculus. And 33 percent of tenth graders—the highest rate in Jackson—were taking Algebra 2.

Stargell Lawson, who like Derrick has been with the program seven years, took a two-week leave from another job to come to the Pine Bluff camp this summer. He stated simply, "I expect that all my life I would drop anything to give back to this project."

Common Ground: Young People Harvest Food and Community

Fifteen miles west of Boston, surrounded by lush fields of fresh vegetables, The Food Project's teenaged work crews gather with their families to celebrate the summer's harvest. They have set a record with this season's yield, which goes to Boston area food banks and homeless shelters: 73,000 pounds from 21 acres of conservation land in Lincoln, Massachusetts, plus 6,000 pounds from two previously hardscrabble lots in inner-city Dorchester.

These novice farmers, urban and suburban youth aged 14 to 19, say they, too, have had a growing season. Asked what she gained from the experience, 16-year-old Shatara replies, "patience," then adds, "take your anger out on the weeds." A companion answers, "The power of connections—connecting black and white, rich and poor, young and adult, ideas with needs."

Like the seeds these young people planted, The Food Project (TFP) has blossomed from a small pilot ten years ago to a nationally recognized program. Year-round, youth and adult partners join TFP's quest to create a sustainable metropolitan food system, to bridge communities divided by race, class, and physical distance, and to address critical environmental and social issues. The goals are ambitious, the stakes high.

"If we do not farm well and productively," says program director Greg Gale, "land lies wasted and people go hungry."

Responsibility and Teamwork

Youth begin their Food Project experience in the seven-week summer program, the first job and paycheck for many of the 60 participants. Each teen signs a contract spelling out common expectations, infractions, and consequences—which range from a talk with staff for tardiness to automatic dismissal for lying or vandalism. Most catch on quickly; major violations are rare.

Also new to these teens are the dirt, sweat, and fatigue that come with working

THE FOOD PROJECT, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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the land. For some, this aspect is the program's biggest lure, for others, a trial whose tribulations unfold slowly.

Work teams—ten-person crews with two older teens serving as crew leaders—provide the necessary spark and glue for TFP's demanding mix of physical labor and important lessons about identity, diversity, community, and service. In addition to daily farming chores, TFP's young people participate in intensive workshops where they create personal and community goals, draft a plan for achieving them, and set targets for measuring progress. Using a program called "Straight Talk," they evaluate honestly but respectfully both their strengths and areas needing improvement. Not surprisingly, "My team kept me going" is a common refrain.

Building Community, Seeding Stewardship

The Food Project teaches caring for the land and the community, along with growing and distributing food. In the immigrant neighborhood where TFP is headquartered, it seeks to tap residents' agricultural pride to help them imagine and build a sustainable metropolitan food system. TFP's young people, along with their adult mentors, contribute greatly toward this ambitious vision. They have reclaimed a network of abandoned and contaminated lots. They have surveyed the neighborhood's 156 front and backyard growers, then provided assistance with heavy chores. They staff two low-cost, inner-city farmers markets and host free community lunches. They helped launch an EPA-sponsored environmental awareness program.

greig cranna

Their presence goes neither unnoticed nor unappreciated. "These teens bring a level of energy and vitality that is like a breath of fresh air—or controlled hurricane—to the neighborhood," says one community partner.

And because many of these projects take more than one growing season, TFP offers its youth the opportunity to return year after year. Many advance over successive summers from crew member to crew leader, to intern to staff, as TFP reaps its own crop of future agriculturists and activists.

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Meaningful Work: A 20-Question Assessment Tool

1. Are the goals clear?
2. Is there enough work for the group?
3. Are there enough resources, materials, and tools to carry the project to completion?
4. Are people organized and prepared?
5. Are people trained well enough to succeed?
6. Is the work organized so that people of all talents can make a contribution?
7. Do people understand how the work connects to the community?
8. Do people have a sense of shared purpose?
9. Is the leadership structure clear?
10. What is the quality/style of leadership needed, and is it present?
11. Is respect present throughout the work and between all people?
12. How are people given responsibility?
13. What are the strategies for building teamwork?
14. What are people learning through their work?
15. Is there a commitment to helping people develop skills and character through work?
16. Are you challenging people's minds and bodies?
17. Do you have a discipline strategy for individuals unwilling to contribute to the work?
18. Do you have strategies for incorporating fun into the work?
19. What assessment/reflection/evaluation tools are in place for the end of the project?
20. How do you plan to celebrate when the work is complete?

FROM *GROWING TOGETHER* BY GREG GALE (THE FOOD PROJECT, 2001)

Tashana, who joined TFP at age 14, now attends the Cornell School of Agriculture and Life Sciences, aiming to work in community nutrition for the US Department of Agriculture. Sixteen-year-old Sparkle—who hated her first days with The Food Project, when peers denigrated her farming as "picking cotton"—now leads neighborhood workshops on diversity. Eric heads to medical school to study community medicine after spending two years helping urban teens gain access to college.

Adam began as a crew member at 15 and this summer, as a college student, coordinated The Food Project's environmental awareness program. He asks tough questions about how outsiders like him can build reciprocal partnerships with the communities they hope to help change. He gets his answer when the people whose backyard gardens he knows well speak of this work—of harvesting crops and community—not as "yours" but as "ours."

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Valedictorians All: Seizing Learning at Every Turn

Overwhelmed by family problems, Jennifer often considered quitting high school. But in a hospital internship monitoring patients with high-risk pregnancies, she discovered a passion for nursing—and a reason to stay in school. "This was not the time to end anything," she said, "it was just the beginning." True to her word, Jennifer took on her senior year the formidable task of establishing a school-based health clinic.

A zealous outdoorsman at 17, Jason spent much of his senior year assembling outdoor excursions for other students and a climbing wall for his school—getting a chance, in his words, "to explore things I could never have imagined."

Kim, whose mother had HIV, also interned at a local hospital. As she presented her senior project on teenagers and HIV/AIDS to a room packed with doctors and nurses, "she was presenting to the experts," her advisor noted, "and she had become one herself."

Like most their classmates, these students at the Metropolitan Career and Technical Center—a unique state-funded high school in Providence, Rhode Island—reached beyond what they or anyone else thought possible for them. But as each senior delivered a graduation valedictory speech in what has become a "Met" tradition, none felt like the exception.

One Student at a Time

Neither "vocational" nor "college prep," the Met's program centers on workplace internships and independent projects tailored to students' interests. With input from a parent and teacher-adviser, each student designs a personal learning plan, reviewed and revised quarterly, to plot progress towards the Met's goals and requirements. Schedules, too, vary for every student, every day of the week.

"There's no such thing as a typical day," one student explained. "It's never boring because every day is different."

With the motto "One student at a time," the Met relies heavily on teachers' daily

THE MET SCHOOL, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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Met 401: Expectations for 12th Graders

- Complete all Annual Expectations
- Demonstrate heightened personal qualities and depth of work
- Play a leadership role in the school
- Meet consistently with senior thesis mentor
- Contact a resource related to the thesis at least every other week and keep track of these contacts
- Complete an in-depth senior thesis project
- Read a book each month (nine total, including one autobiography) and update reading inventory
- Write a 75- to 100-page autobiography
- Prepare for and take the SAT or ACT
- Complete a college portfolio
- Visit and interview with at least four colleges
- Research and apply to colleges
- Apply for scholarships and financial aid
- Create a post-Met plan
- Present work and reflection at graduation exhibition

There's no such thing as a typical day. It's never boring because every day is different.

guidance of students. Instead of seeing six or seven sets of instructors and classmates each day, students spend intensive time in an advisory group of one teacher and 13 or 14 peers. Students and advisers develop close relationships, as much personal as academic. "We've laughed, we've cried, we've argued," said Nadia about her advisory group. "It's just been so great, because we're able to understand each other so well."

Students gain additional support from adults outside school in their projects and internships. A senior said

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about her project mentor for the year: "She always challenged me in ways that I wanted to be challenged (even though I would never tell her that). She set these really high standards for me, and I loved that just because it made me feel that I can do so much more than what I was doing."

Learning at Every Turn

The Met's student body mirrors that of the Providence public schools: 52 percent qualify for free lunch; 22 percent are African-American, 38 percent Hispanic, and 38 percent white. Though most start high school at the lower end of the achievement scale, all have met the exacting standards required for the school's graduation portfolio. And all Met graduates go on to college.

Met students may cover less academic content than their peers, but their detailed, multi-dimensional examination of fewer topics offsets that. The wilderness-loving Jason, for instance, interned at the zoo and a hydroponics farm, then completed an eel grass restoration project with Save the Bay, a local conservation group. Prompted by the school to consider vacations as learning opportunities, Jason spent successive summers sailing the North Atlantic in Maine, hiking and camping in the Colorado Rockies, and studying wildlife and habitats on a Caribbean island. For the college class all students take as part of their senior year, Jason opted for an environmental science course at Brown University.

Such challenging, real world projects and internships boost students' faith in themselves, altering attitudes and work habits alike. "Now I do more, I concentrate, I go into depth," said Maya. She added, "I'm so engaged that I really want to work my butt off for the next four years again—and do the same cycle and get somewhere after that."

These students' words and actions raise important questions about the boundaries between formal and informal learning, about what should "count" for a high school diploma, and, finally, about the combination of knowledge, skills, and personal qualities youth need to succeed in higher education and beyond.

"What I will remember most is the ups and downs that we all went through," said Nadia in her graduation address. "It's a great feeling to know that we succeeded together." Surrounded by 42 other valedictorians ready for college and career, she declared, "We're all the success story here."

- Started in the winter of 2001, What Kids Can Do (WKCD) seeks to spur more schools and communities to work together to challenge young people intellectually, enlist their help with real problems, nourish their diverse talents, support their perseverance, and encourage their contributions as citizens and knowledge creators. Through an array of media and publication formats, What Kids Can Do presents powerful examples of what young people, guided by teachers and other adults, can contribute and achieve. It amplifies the voices of young people, helping them bring their perspectives and ideas to the attention of educators and policy makers. WKCD also collects and shares the actual work of students.

- A Boston-based national non-profit organization, Jobs for the Future (JFF) seeks to accelerate the educational and economic progress of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. In 2000 JFF launched *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, a multi-year initiative aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of higher education and career options for 15 to 24 year olds. Joining a growing push to improve teaching and learning for this age group, the project looks beyond the walls of the one-size-fits-all traditional high school for breakthrough strategies in and outside the school building, school day, and school year. It then brings these strategies and their requirements to the attention of policy makers and school system leaders.

- Since 1930, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has been dedicated to its mission of helping people help themselves. To this end, education and positive youth development are cornerstones of programming. To increase the learning, academic performance, and workplace preparation of vulnerable young people, a key Foundation strategy is to forge partnerships between educational institutions and communities. A new initiative, New Options for Youth Through Engaged Institutions, is examining ways communities and post-secondary institutions can foster innovative approaches that encourage all young people, ages 14 to 20, to learn, achieve, and prepare effectively for further education and meaningful work.

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