

“PORTRAITS OF SUCCESS” AWARD NOMINATION

Name: Alta Vista Academy
District: Sweetwater Union HSD
Category: School

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Located on the grounds of a children’s residential treatment center, the Alta Vista Academy Community Day School, serves children between 12 and 18 years old who need the safety, security and support of a sheltered treatment facility. With round-the-clock care of health professionals, the students work to mend physical and emotional traumas. Exceptional, caring teachers work with students on a standards-based curriculum to provide new paths to success for these troubled teens.

The children at Alta Vista are expelled students from throughout the county, victims of physical/sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence, abandonment and other traumas. They are at the very highest risk of injuring themselves, another person or of running away. They often have moved from school to school and have had immense difficulty in coping with regular educational placements.

The academy is located on the grounds of the New Alternatives Licensed Children’s institution in Chula Vista. The district’s standards-based curriculum, special education materials and training are part of the academy. Nine teachers and several behavioral specialists work in small ratios to monitor student needs and provide constant feedback and motivation. A treatment team that includes Department of Social Services, all designated service providers and a district school psychologist review all student progress monthly.

Alta Vista Academy, a community day school, replaced a private school for foster children that was declared a failure by juvenile court justices, who then asked the Sweetwater Union High School District to take over operations. After obtaining emergency funding three years ago through an act of legislation, Alta Vista became a public community day school.

Alta Vista is a locked facility that offers daily counseling, individual therapy, family therapy and group therapy. It’s located on the grounds of a children’s residential treatment center, operated by New Alternatives, a private nonprofit corporation licensed to provide residential care to high-risk youth. Teachers work as a team with social workers and mental health professionals to make sure everyone is on the same page. Assistants or "behavioral specialists" are in every classroom monitoring students' behavior. If they sense an imminent blowup or catch one in progress, they escort the student out of the classroom and talk calmly until he or she is ready to return to class. Rarely, a child may have to be physically restrained. Some of the students’ progress so well that they are able to transition into a lower level of care, go to another foster home, or live at New Alternatives and attend a regular high school. Some are even reunited with their natural families. Others stay at Alta Vista CDS for years and are "raised" by staff much like orphans.

The Alta Vista Academy CDS was developed to help these students with the best possible education in a safe, secure environment. It has won a **“Cool School” Award** from Channel 8 and recognition from the **San Diego County Grand Jury**. In 2003, Alta Vista Academy won the **Golden Bell Award** from the **California School Boards Association** for creativity in educational approaches. Most recently, the school was featured in a major article in **California Educator** extolling the virtues of the campus and its unique educational community.

