

“Portraits of Success” Award Nomination

Name: Milpitas Community Day School Nominator: Dennis Burns
District: Milpitas Unified School District e-mail: dburns@musd.org
Category: Program (**At-Risk and Drug Counseling Program**)

The Milpitas Community Day School should be considered for the Portraits of Success Award for its outstanding at-risk and drug counseling program. The school provides not only a safe place to learn, but provides a therapeutic counseling outlet for students going through transitions in their lives.

Students who attend the Community Day School are generally 14-16 years old, are severely behind in credits, or have been referred to CDS by the Administrative Expulsion Panel within the district. CDS also receives students referred by Juvenile Hall, the California Youth Authority, and the Ranch. At times, CDS also provides a safety net for 7th and 8th grade students who are referred.

The curriculum is very systematic and organized so students can chart their own progress. It is based on middle school and high school standards so students are in a better position academically when they move to a more permanent placement. CDS was designed not to be an end destination for students, but one where they can get refocused on their schoolwork.

A critical part of refocusing the students has been provided by a full-time licensed marriage and family therapist, Tianna Nelson, whose specialty is adolescence and substance abuse. She has provided these students with an outlet so they can share their feelings, either in a group setting or individually. The counseling program is highly intensive and structured, conducive to the school setting, and promotes academic achievement as one of its primary goals. The mission of the program sets academics as the vehicle through which students from adverse environments may become successful personally. Students are seen a minimum of 3 to 4 times a week and provided with psycho-educational classes, crisis intervention, individual, group, and family counseling to aid them in identifying and learning to cope with obstacles that may have been preventing their achievement and success.

The 35 students currently enrolled are excelling in both standardized testing and attendance. CDS has improved by over 4 times on the state's standardized testing since the school opened 4 1/2 years ago. CDS also has had over a 75% reduction in suspensions since the 2001-2002 school year, largely attributed to the efforts of our experienced teacher, instructional assistants, and counselor. The credits achieved of those attempted were 98% during the 2002-2003 school year and 97% during the 2003-2004 school year.

CDS has established a partnership with the Calaveras 4H Club because it is on 5 acres of land which they utilize to house their animals. Through this partnership, the students have a unique opportunity to interact with the animals and learn about the operations of the club. The club's variety of farm animals exposes the students to an environment that is unusual for them but eye-opening. Students are provided a tour of the facility, and science lessons are coordinated with the lessons on understanding animal husbandry.

A third partnership that has been established is with the North Valley Job Training Consortium (NOVA), which is a federally funded job training and goal setting program. Students who meet

federal criteria are individually mentored in interviewing skills and personal skills associated with job acquisition. In addition, students are then assisted in acquiring after school jobs.

CDS's low recidivism is associated with the working environment, and environment that encourages participation in the students' own lives, students learn to be more socially adept and enjoy attending school for the social aspect, as well as the scholastic.