

The Learning Network

A Newsletter for Washington State High Schools that Receive Gates Reinvention Grants

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Acts of Courage Are Gifts To Us All

“The people working in those schools have a lot of courage.”

This principal had been sent by his superintendent to learn about the redesign work underway in Washington. He had listened carefully to about fifteen minutes of what has become my standard talk when he made his observation. It has echoed in my head almost daily since.

Courage is not often associated with teachers or administrators. Too important, perhaps, for people who do what many see as ordinary work—what you do when you can't do other things, as the old saying goes.

The task of redesigning, transforming, converting, re-imagining schools—by whatever name it goes—is serious business. It will affect the lives of the students we serve as nothing else we've been asked to do. It promises (or threatens) to change our own careers in fundamental ways. It will change many of our communities, dividing some, and creating a rare sense of possibility in others. Everywhere, it will challenge entitlement and privilege.

Many schools find themselves at a critical juncture. The serious transitioning from old to new is well begun, but only begun. The transition is harder and more complex than we had imagined. Key leaders are retiring or leaving for other reasons. District leaders act less wisely than we had hoped. Challenges to privilege are fought ferociously—often unfairly, and sometimes by our own colleagues. Everyone is tired.

We need acts of courage to sustain us. It's a cliché to describe courage, as Hemingway did, as “grace under pressure.” It has a great ring to it, but it's too facile, too easy for the kind of courage we often see. It dismisses the uncertainty and fear that sometimes accompany courage. It discounts the sleepless nights and the self-doubt that often precede courageous acts. In the everyday world we live in, grace is a bonus.

Graceful or not, examples of courage exist all around us.

Sometimes, acts of courage are public. The principal who says “Every student at this school will have what the most privileged

continued on back...

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Community-Based Learning Flourishes at Tacoma School of the Arts

Over 100 students at Tacoma School of the Arts (SOTA) spent the three weeks of their “J-term” (it falls in January) in job shadowing at locations ranging from an architect's office to the Washington Contemporary Ballet, from the Pierce County Prosecutors Office to the American Red Cross.

According to Kim Baldwin, who coordinated SOTA's first venture into job shadowing last year and now serves as a consultant to the program, this second year had more of everything—more students, mentors and locations, more involvement and buy-in from teachers—as well as a smoother running program.

She thinks taking a couple of years to get up to speed should be expected when you are building an internship program. “When you start out, you have to take it one step at a time,” she says. “Otherwise it's too overwhelming.”

Several factors promote program growth

While SOTA's first year of job shadows was certainly successful, Kim credits the growth this year to several factors. “The teachers had a broader understanding of what they wanted, and more of us were out in the community making contacts and site visits.

We also had Tod Lokey, a staff member who helped us develop real structure around the program. We call him ‘data man.’”

A math and science teacher, Tod says his involvement was a “steep learning curve, but I remembered how good it was for me as a high school student to do some job shadowing. And I thought I would get lots of satisfaction out of seeing students get experiences that informed them about their future.”

So Tod volunteered to create databases that would allow SOTA to keep track of all the program's paperwork (student applications, assignments, evaluations, letters to mentors, etc.) as well as site assignments and visits. He also volunteered to serve as job shadow supervisor for a more personal reason.

“Going out to talk to people is hard for me,” he confesses. “But instead of walking around saying, ‘that's not my strength,’ I decided to put myself out there. As a result, I met the most amazing people and feel so privileged to have had the experience.” He vows that next year's program will be even better.

Kim thinks he's probably right. “Getting to know our community has been a wonderful process, as has getting to know what our students' interests are.” She is pleased that most of the

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opportunities involve “real work” and is especially proud of a YWCA project some of the students did that began with interviewing breast cancer survivors and has evolved into a piece that includes dance and video and will be used in the community.

SOTA's J-Term also includes mini-courses

During J-term, most teachers at SOTA conduct mini-courses for students who do not choose job shadowing. (Tod was excused from teaching to serve as job shadow supervisor.)

This year's J-term courses ranged from “Unlocking the Secrets to Pacific Avenue” (in which students researched the history of one of Tacoma's oldest streets and presented their findings in a final show) to “Learning to Appreciate Opera” (students studied the history and evolution of opera, learned production and business aspects from Tacoma Opera professionals, and viewed a final dress rehearsal of *Madame Butterfly*).

Most of the J-term mini-courses involved community presenters or students going out into the community, because as Jon Ketler, SOTA's co-director, explains, “This school is not about being in one building but about being in our community.”

So whether it's for job shadows or help with mini-courses, Kim says, “We reach out and we aren't afraid to ask. And when we ask, the community gives.”

SOTA community mentors say...

Carri Campbell, School Programs Coordinator, Tacoma Art Museum. “I wanted our SOTA students to learn a new skill they could walk away with, so I taught them how to develop an art lesson that would meet state EALR's. They took their lessons out to three elementary schools where they taught them to students; they also provided guided museum tours for ‘their’ kids and helped them put on an exhibition.”

Julia Schmidtke, owner of Julia Ellen, women's clothing and accessory store. “I serve as a mentor because I've always believed that the best education comes from real life experiences. Also, I think it's important for our kids to have a strong work ethic. We've asked our job-shadow students to do it all—from unpacking to waiting on customers to helping with promotional displays—and we've been grateful to have them.”

Philip Whitt, manager of the Grand Cinema. “Part of our charge as a nonprofit is to be engaged in educational opportunities, so having a job-shadow student allowed us to meet that charge as well as to introduce a young person to the world of independent film and broaden his scope of possibilities.”

J. D. Fitz, MD, Medical Director of Inpatient Services, Multicare. “While our three SOTA students were having shadowing experiences in a variety of hospital settings, I had them read a series of essays about hospital life. Then, every afternoon, we had a debriefing to discuss what they had seen and read. It's always exciting to watch kids learn, and it was especially thrilling to see people so totally new to the complex issues in a hospital respond to what they were experiencing.”



Back row (from left to right): SOTA students Tayler Johnson, Issac Herriges, Emmett Casey, Chaussee Brown. Front row: SOTA student Haley Thornburg, Community and Fund Developer Kim Baldwin.

SOTA students say...

Haley Thornburg, Tacoma Art Museum; taught elementary students about art. “Preparing lesson plans is a lot harder than it seems, and I gained a lot of respect for all the work teachers do. I also thought it was interesting to watch how people work together; it helped me to understand the importance of respect and teamwork.”

Issac Herriges, REI photo studio. “My experience gave me a glimpse of what life will be like after high school. While I thought the work was less stressful than school, it really opened my eyes to how much work goes into putting together each of those catalogs you get in the mail.”

Chaussee Brown, Tacoma Art Museum; taught elementary students. “I thought the job shadowing was good because it takes you out of your sheltered world and opens you up. I've always wanted to teach, so my experience confirmed that and it also helped me to get more specific about what grades and subjects I might want to teach.”

Emmett Casey, Grand Cinema, a nonprofit movie house. “When you are in high school, the idea of a career can seem very scary, but after this experience, I feel more confident about the future. I know that even if there are difficult times, it's not impossible to do.”

Tayler Johnson, Tacoma General Hospital. “We spent time in many different departments in the hospital. One of the things I learned is that to be successful in that kind of environment, you have to be a people person and have a lot of patience, because you deal with so many different kinds of people and issues.”

They say...

"I've heard there will be more kid-directed projects."

"In a big school, I wouldn't have a chance to get involved in things like student government. I'm going to run here."

"The classes aren't necessarily smaller, but they feel smaller because you know everyone."

"There is more one-on-one with teachers here. They will come over and help you figure stuff out."

Student Comments at Windward's Open House

"The Power Lunch was a blast. I thought I might be too boring as a guest, but the students were interested in policy and how it affects them. What struck me most was how diverse a group they were and how engaged they all were in the conversation."

*Mary Jo Durburow
Ferndale School Board
Power Lunch guest*

Windward High Wastes No Time Involving Parents and Community



Students enjoy power lunch with community leader.

Windward High in Ferndale just opened its doors at the beginning of February to 72 ninth and tenth graders. But the teachers and staff are already working hard to build sustainable connections with family and community.

Parents learn about the school and get involved

At the end of February, Windward parents were invited to a Parent Open House, where they participated in student-led tours (the school is a converted bingo hall/car dealership), talked with teachers, and met other parents.

"This is the students' open house," said Principal Jill Iwasaki, as over a hundred students and parents milled about. "We wanted students to have an opportunity to show off their new school and to tell their parents what happens here."

Parent Michelle Sorenson, whose son Mathew is a sophomore, is pleased with what she's seen at the school. "I know he won't get lost here. By the time he's a senior, the school will only be the size of a class in a regular high school."

"Windward parents want to be involved in a way they haven't been in the past," says Allison Bennett, Windward's Community Coordinator. "They aren't interested in selling cookie dough."

She points to the more than 60 parents who recently attended the first Windward Parent Community meeting (also known as the Parent Teacher Organization at other

schools). "I hope the parents will connect with one another and support each other in this newness," she adds.

Creating community-based learning opportunities

"Kids and parents are excited about the different learning opportunities that will take place at Windward. Our students are proactive and are interested in doing more than just taking tests," said Brian Jensen, an Ameri-corps volunteer who coordinates the school's senior project.

To encourage students to create connections with their community, teams of two or more Windward students can apply for mini-grants to develop a service learning project that will benefit the Ferndale community. For example, students might develop a plan to create a community garden. The grant resources would be used to pay for plants, seeds, tools, and gardening classes.

"The goal of the mini-grants is to match the needs of the community with student interests," says Allison.

To apply for a grant, students must complete an application, which asks them to describe the purpose of their project and how it will impact the community. They must also list the community partners and describe how

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Building Family and Community Connections

From "Us and Them" to "We"

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Windward High, continued

they will be involved in the project. Lastly, the students are asked to discuss their plans for measuring the project's outcomes and informing the public about their project.

The Windward Advisory Group, comprised of parents, community members, teachers, and students, oversees the mini-grant program and will choose which projects to fund. A subcommittee developed a rubric with criteria that includes the project's significance and impact on the community, the depth of the learning opportunity, the project's connection to school work, and the level of community interest and support.

Science teacher Jenny Buron, who is a member of the Advisory Group, is piloting the mini-grants this spring in her classes. "In order to get the grant process up and running, we really needed some brave souls (teachers and students) to tackle it for us so that we can streamline our process for submitting, reviewing, and awarding the grants. I wanted my science classes to be more project oriented with a long-term focus, so when the Advisory Group asked for help and my students came forward with some project ideas, we decided to roll with it," she says.

"This whole process is far more involved than a typical teacher-directed school project, so it has taken some unlearning on the part of the students and us teachers," Jenny adds. "A lot of what has happened so far has been done with only a little of the needed community mentorship. We want to encourage the students to contact several community mentors before even writing the grants."

Power lunches build connections

Another way Windward students connect with community members is by participating in the Power Lunch Program. On Wednesdays, a community member volunteers to spend an hour having lunch with a group of interested students.

"The Power Lunches provide a casual opportunity for students and adults to connect in a meaningful way," says Allison. "Students have the opportunity to learn about the guest's professional life, education, and interests. Guests will learn about the students' interests, thoughts, and academic lives."

The Ferndale Senior Center invited Windward students and teachers to lunch to help brainstorm ideas for collaboration between the school and senior center.

The Ferndale Chamber of Commerce enlisted Windward students to edit the Chamber's newsletter.

NEW SMALL SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

ORCA Provides Students with Hands-on Marine Research Opportunities

Next fall, 60 juniors will attend the new Ocean Research College Academy (ORCA), created through a partnership with Everett Community College and local Mukilteo marine labs.

The Academy, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, merges the last two years of high school with the first two years of college to create an inquiry-based oceanography program. ORCA will provide students with the opportunity to earn their Associates of Arts and Sciences degree, tuition free, as they work toward their high school diploma.

ORCA is the brainchild of veteran high school science teacher Ardi Kveven, who started her career at North Kitsap High School, where she taught students marine science and oceanography at a nearby marine lab.

"I didn't realize how unique my teaching experience was until I started teaching at a different high school and spent the majority of my time with students in the school's on-site science lab," says Ardi. She ran the campus espresso cart in order to raise money so that she could take her students on a three-day trip aboard a research vessel in the San Juan Islands.

"ORCA is my dream come true," says Ardi, "and I don't have to sell coffee to do it."

Instead of taking traditional math, science, English, and history classes, ORCA students will participate in interdisciplinary learning opportunities that incorporate authentic scientific research and are taught by Everett Community College faculty.

Students will develop crucial communication and critical thinking skills by analyzing data sets, exploring the history of the Puget Sound, and writing and presenting scientific papers. They will also be required to share their research findings with the community, parents, and younger elementary school students.

Although ORCA graduates might not continue in the field of oceanography, Ardi believes the study of the marine environment is a powerful tool for integrating the core subject areas, because the problem-solving nature of science is transferable to other disciplines.

"Science is about asking questions, trying to find answers, and generating more questions in the process. Students will receive a rich education in all of the core subjects, similar to a small liberal arts college," says Ardi.

Ardi has spent the last year meeting with the local area high school counselors and administrators—there are seven high schools within a ten-mile radius that each have 1500 students. She has made presentations to science classes and hopes to attract students whose needs aren't being served in a traditional high school setting.

For more information, visit: www.everettcc.edu/orca.

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Forks High School Makes Community Connections

A newsletter called *The Connection* is one tool Forks High School is using to build its new internship program, according to Steve Goll, coordinator of the school's Connecting Schools and Community Initiative.

While the first issue of the newsletter highlights the "intern of the month" and the "employer of the month," the second page includes "classifieds" from community organizations looking for qualified students. For example, the local library is looking for a student with "enthusiasm for promoting the joys of reading" to do story time for young children. And the Forks Community Hospital wants a "reliable, organized" student to create a check-out system for their community health resource library.

"When we sent community organizations a request for 'classifieds,' we weren't sure whether we'd get anything back at all," says Steve, "so we were pleased with the responses, particularly because they weren't 'make work' but real world needs."

Wanted: Bilingual Spanish speakers to assist in coordination of May 21st, 22nd, 23rd Regional Latino Workers Forum. Duties to include community outreach, promotion, event planning, and assistance at event.

An "ad" in *The Connection*

For example, Forks Community Hospital has nine interns this semester, in areas from radiology to the mental health clinic to nursing. Patsy Brown, community health and education coordinator, says, "Although being a mentor to an intern requires real commitment on the part of busy employees, everyone in our hospital likes the idea of fostering young people's interest in health, especially rural health."

Community interest and commitment is one reason why the Forks internship program has grown from 21 students during the first semester to 26 this semester. The process has been made smoother through a detailed packet called "Internship Program Training Agreement." This packet includes program expectations for students and mentors, all necessary forms, and student assignments.

To see the packet, go to www.smallschoolsproject.org under the "What's New?" section.

Intern Julia Johnson certainly finds that her experience shadowing Ray Marshall, Forks Middle School principal, is allowing her to make the connections with the world of education that she hopes to enter some day. While she will probably start by teaching high school, she is learning a lot about the varied roles administrators have to play and about the importance of communication skills.

"This is really different from learning in the classroom," she says, "because I get time to talk a lot with my mentor about real-life experiences."

While student/community connections like Julia's are growing, Steve sees building academic/internship connections as an ongoing challenge. "We are still working on ways to connect what the kids are doing in their internships with their academic learning," he says. The school has a faculty internship committee that is looking at the issue, as well as reviewing the progress of the interns.

In addition to logging in at least 120 hours at their sites, students are required to keep journals that not only detail their experiences but answer specific questions about the line of work they are looking at. They must also develop and complete a self-directed project that is approved by both Steve and their mentor.

As far as advice to schools interested in starting internship programs is concerned, Steve recommends checking out the work-based learning information on OSPI's website. He also found that requiring intern applicants to complete résumés and go through an interview process with him first was good preparation for students.

"But first, tap into the expertise of career and vocational teachers," Steve says. "They've been making community connections for a long time."

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Community-Based Learning Resources

Consulting/workshops: Kim Baldwin, Community and Fund Developer at Tacoma School of the Arts, is now available to provide information either through consultation or workshops about community-based learning. How to secure internships, structure timelines, meet legal obligations, build community relationships, and develop student and mentor evaluations are just a few of the topics she can cover. To contact Kim, call 253-222-3711 or email kim@tsotapartners.org.

OSPI Website: The Office of Public Instruction (OSPI) website, www.k12.wa.us/CareerTechEd/workbasedlearning, includes detailed information about work-based learning (requirements, evaluations, etc.).

Forms and Guidelines: In the "What's New?" section of our website, www.smallschoolsproject.org, you will find helpful packets of forms and guidelines from Forks High School and from Tacoma School of the Arts.

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have had in the past,” and endures daily attacks from those currently privileged, while district leaders remain silent.

More often, acts of courage are more private. The experienced teacher who acknowledges that her expectations for far too many students are far too low. The new teacher who decides not to let those more experienced or more cynical speak for her any longer. The principal who decides he doesn't have the skills to lead effectively, or the energy to take this on, and steps aside. Or the one who asks for help learning the skills he needs, or who takes on this work because it's the right thing to do, and never mind being tired. The teacher who acknowledges he is afraid of many of his students, and determines to overcome that fear.

Public or private, graceful or not, they are gifts to us all. Let's use them well, and thank the gift-givers.

- Rick Lear, Director

DATES TO REMEMBER

Gates Foundation High School Cohort Meeting, May 11 and 12, SeaTac. More information is available on the Small Schools Project website.

Teacher Leadership Summer Institute, July 19 through 23, University of Puget Sound. Co-sponsored by CES Northwest and the Small Schools Project, this institute is designed to help teacher leaders assess their leadership style and strengths, develop skills for inclusive involvement, and examine the needs for creating and implementing a new philosophy of leadership. Participants will learn teaching and facilitation strategies that empower and create a climate for renewal.

Other summer institutes, including Critical Friends Group Training, will also be offered throughout the summer. You will find a list of all of them with dates and costs plus a registration form on our website, www.smallschoolsproject.org, in the “What’s New?” section.

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