

Middle Grades Spotlight

A Periodical for California's Middle Grades Educators

Spring 2007

Theme

Relevance

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A Message from the Superintendent

Making learning relevant to the lives of middle grades students is paramount to keeping them interested in school and motivating them to succeed in high school and beyond. The dramatic physical, mental, and emotional changes experienced by young adolescents present unique challenges for educators. We must continue our commitment to provide a standards-based education for all students. But for middle grades students, it is critical that we deliver a rigorous curriculum in a way that meets their need for expression, bonding, exploration, and meaning.

Research shows that a standards-based education is most effective when it is delivered in a manner that is relevant to students. By incorporating relevance into daily lessons, teachers encourage students to discover their talents, develop their dreams, and explore possible careers. A middle grades education focused on relevance also allows students to have a voice in their education and to engage in discussions about issues that matter the most to them.

Many California middle schools are leading the way in engaging young adolescents' interests and abilities while reinforcing learning. Teachers are developing interesting lessons that relate students' daily life to the broader community and world. Technology, visual and performing arts, and foreign languages and culture are being incorporated across the curriculum, keeping students engaged and connected. School schedules are allowing time for electives and interest-based exploratory

courses that cultivate students' curiosity and creativity. Clubs and before- and after-school programs are being offered to help middle grades students develop new interests and social skills.

This issue of *Middle Grades Spotlight* features three outstanding middle schools that have made relevance a priority. Through its Environmental and Spatial Technology program, Zane Middle School engages students in high-tech service-learning projects that connect learning to the real world and promotes student achievement. San Lorenzo Valley Middle School's Nature Academy gives students the opportunity to explore science through a culturally linked, hands-on course of study. Louis Pasteur Fundamental Intermediate School integrates technology throughout the curriculum using spreadsheet, presentation, word processing, graphic organizer, and global positioning system software for a wide variety of student projects.

The California Department of Education commends those schools that have recognized the need to make education relevant for students. I encourage all middle schools to seek out ways to engage students, keeping them interested in school and on the path to lifelong learning. 🌟

JACK O'CONNELL

About This Issue

Welcome to the spring 2007 *Middle Grades Spotlight!* This edition focuses on relevance—providing an educational experience that is germane to the lives of middle school students and instilling in them a lifelong love of learning.

To make education relevant to today's middle school students, adolescents need to connect what they learn in the classroom with its application to real life. Middle school teachers are finding ways to make the curriculum relevant by infusing learning with technology, visual and performing arts, career/real-world connections, service- and project-based learning, and multicultural experiences. Before- and after-school programs are providing additional opportunities for students to participate in socially relevant activities that satisfy their curiosity, keep them interested in their education, and support academic achievement.

In October 2007 State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell released 12 recommendations to launch a new-century vision for middle grades education in California. The recommendations, collaboratively forged by the California Middle Grades Alliance, will be the foundation of *Taking Center Stage – Act II: Closing the Achievement Gap for California's Middle Grades Students*, scheduled for release in early 2008. Relevance is one of the 12 recommendations, and one of four that respond to the developmental needs of middle grades students.

In addition, Superintendent O'Connell has cited on numerous occasions his commitment to the “new 3 Rs”—rigor, relevance, and relationships—to help California's students succeed academically, emotionally, and socially in order to take their place as productive citizens and highly skilled workers in the global economy.

The lead article, “Civic Literacy and the Civic Mission of Schools,” by Cricket F. L. Kidwell, Ed.D., describes the national movement of educators to focus on civic literacy and transform today's students into skilled and informed twenty-first century citizens. Dr. Kidwell discusses a pilot project under way in ten schools promoting a new approach to civic education. One of the pilot schools—Foothill High School—is a school in rural northern California using an interdisciplinary approach to implement a schoolwide civic literacy program designed to build students' skills. Although the pilot project is at a high school, middle-level educators will note that the principles are aligned with eighth-grade English language arts and history standards.

This edition also highlights three California middle schools using relevance-related practices and reaping the rewards. At Zane Middle School, students build skills as part of a team working on high-tech service-learning projects. San Lorenzo Valley Middle School emphasizes a strong student – school connection with several programs and activities. Educators at Louis Pasteur Fundamental Intermediate School are capturing the attention of “millennials” through the use of technology and project-based learning.

“Is Your School Library Relevant to Twenty-First Century Learning?” draws attention to the transformation of yesterday's school library into tomorrow's library media center. The article spotlights how school library media centers are instrumental in bringing relevance to the middle school learning experience and offers a list of key features of a twenty-first century school library.

“The Relevance of Counseling in Middle School” discusses the important role counselors can play in keeping adolescents interested in school and helping them to succeed in middle school, high school, and beyond. The author discusses the new funding available for grades seven through twelve to increase the number of counselors for middle and high schools and provide additional services to students, particularly to those struggling in school.

This issue's “Worth a Click” column has links to resources and information that can help educators bring relevance to school and make learning matter to students. ☆

Civic Literacy and the Civic Mission of Schools

by Cricket F. L. Kidwell, Ed.D.

This article was originally published in the National Social Studies Supervisors Association (NSSSA) journal, the NSSSA Leader Spring 2006. It is reprinted here with permission.

A national movement that invokes renewed interest in civic literacy has emerged and is gaining strength. The Civic Mission of Schools campaign encourages educators around the country to examine existing practice and instructional strategies in an assessment of how civic education goals are being met in our schools at all grade levels. Civic literacy is one critical aspect of civic education that addresses the skills needed for citizenship development as well as the connections to existing standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills. At a time when voter disenfranchisement is increasing and voter turnout levels are decreasing, civic education is a critical issue for our schools, our citizens, and our future. The time has come to re-examine some of our basic practices in preparing our young people to become engaged, productive citizens.

“Civic literacy is an intentional instructional set of goals that provide skill practice, application, and evaluation of civic education issues and content.”

The Civic Mission of Schools movement encourages examination of how schools might progress beyond quantitative assessment data and isolated instructional content to a renewed interest in addressing student learning in a societal context. In teaching our students to become future leaders and engaged citizens, all students should be acquiring the skills of civic literacy. To this end, educators in all regions of the country have begun an intentional and strategic effort in assessing and reviewing current teaching practice of civic literacy or, as is more commonly known in the broad sense, civic education.

Civic literacy should be embraced throughout the educational community without hesitation. We know that the fundamentals of democracy must be taught to each generation, as part of an on-going educational effort that begins with the earliest grades and continues through lifelong learning. We know that helping to create effective citizens for the 21st century requires a convergence of skills, knowledge, dispositions, and understanding of democratic practices, principles, and concepts. As most schools and districts across the country have adopted mission statements that clearly define citizenship or civic education as a primary objective of the educational process, civic literacy today is a mandate and high quality civic education is a moral obligation.



Civic literacy is an intentional instructional set of goals that provide skill practice, application, and evaluation of civic education issues and content. The term itself, civic literacy, draws attention to both the literacy movement in general and to the focus on skills as a part of the civic education curriculum package. Although civic education advocates are united in their understanding of the need for a strong civic knowledge base through history and government classes that focus on content, available curriculum resources have been less attentive to the

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development of cognitive and participatory skills. This is particularly true in educational climates that emphasize testing data and standardized tests to the detriment of class activities such as structured debate, analysis of current events, understanding of judicial review of contemporary issues, and student-initiated projects. The civic literacy curriculum represents a coherent curriculum effort that addresses higher level thinking skills, informed decision-making practices, evaluation of information, participatory skills, and civic engagement, and understanding of the broad implications of political, economic, and social issues. Civic literacy is a direct response against attitudes of alienation and distrust of government, disengagement of youth, and disconnectedness between school, community, and life skills.

A project sponsored by the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools in California and the Constitutional Rights Foundation has selected ten high schools to examine, within the school setting, how to adopt a stronger and more effective civic mission within their schools. Foothill High School of Palo Cedro, a rural comprehensive high school of approximately 2000 students in the far northern part of California, was one of the selected schools. A group of six teacher-leaders from across departments and disciplines came together, in the spirit of a professional learning community, to plan and implement a school-wide civic literacy focus.

“Through the two year process of the development of this program at Foothill High School, civic literacy has blossomed.”

The planning at Foothill High School began with a review of the six recommendations of the CIRCLE report, a report of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. These recommendations for effective civic education, based on research-based scholarship, include

- 1) providing a strong foundation of classroom instructional content in democratic foundations;
- 2) classroom discussion of current events;
- 3) service learning;
- 4) extracurricular activities;
- 5) increased use and quality of student voice in school governance; and
- 6) classroom simulations such as mock trial, mock congressional hearings, debate, and other projects.

As teachers at Foothill High School began to discuss the recommendations, they assessed the current program at their school and, simultaneously, began to identify areas and programs that could be improved or implemented. From the new ideas generated, a school-wide plan emerged that included development of a teacher resource packet, monthly themes around civic education topics, formation of a student activist group, development of literature and a website, and numerous presentations to community and school groups. The teacher resource packet included articles and resources for increasing and improving classroom discussion, civic education themes and topics, service learning project development, simulation activities, and civic education in general. The monthly themes included topics such as rights and responsibilities, ethics, decision-making, tolerance, civic engagement, volunteerism, voting, justice, authority, and civic virtue. The program emphasized dialogue, questioning skills, and taking and defending a stand on issues.

Through the two year process of the development of this program at Foothill High School, civic literacy has blossomed. Students have expressed increased interest in current events and school governance. Students have become increasingly involved in community issues, careers in community leadership, and current events. Teachers have become interested in cross-discipline efforts centered on civic education themes and projects. Parents and school board members have become more aware of civic education goals.

The planning and program development process of Foothill High School can easily be replicated at any school. The three-step planning process includes assessment of current programs, generation of new ideas, and

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developing a plan for implementation. The implementation phase, at times concurrent with the planning phase, includes trying new programs, integrating the civic education themes with existing curriculum, developing classroom resources, and adjusting the planned activities as needed.

To begin your school or district planning process, discussion should focus on the six recommendations of the CIRCLE report. From those activities, the following checklist for program assessment of civic literacy should include the following:

Cognitive and Reasoning Skills

- Development of logical argument (oral and written)
- Persuasive argument development or debate skills
- Multiple perspectives
- Evaluation of information
- Recognition of bias
- Drawing conclusions based on evidence
- Decision making skills
- Analytic and synthesis skills

Foundational Content

- Historical understanding
- Foundations of democracy
- Government structure and institutions
- Constitutional constructs
- Landmark Supreme Court cases
- Political, economic, and geographic knowledge

Participation Skills

- Communication skills
- Formal debate skills
- Consensus-building and compromise
- Working together
- Simulations of institutional processes (e.g. Mock Trial, Mock Congressional Hearings)
- Student voice (school and/or local governance)
- Community involvement
- Volunteerism

Dispositions and Attitudes

- Equity and inclusiveness
- Voting and campaign activism
- Community issues interest and research
- Service learning
- Civic engagement
- Role models and career exploration
- Opportunities for school and community involvement

The CIRCLE report is available at <http://www.cms-ca.org/CivicMissionofSchools.pdf> and resources can be obtained from websites such as <http://www.civiced.org> or <http://www.crf-usa.org> or <http://www.cms-ca.org>. A website for student voices on current issues can be accessed at <http://student-voices.org>.

Civic literacy is a noble attempt to address literacy issues from across the disciplines with a focused, coherent, central theme of citizenship. The potential for success increases dramatically with the adoption of student-centered activities and discussion on topics of relevance and importance. The intentional and focused examination of civic literacy within the school setting will generate lively discussion, new perspectives, and great ideas among teachers, students, and all stakeholders in the education of our students. Perhaps most importantly of all, we should aspire to achieve the recognition that the civic education of our students belongs not exclusively to the history-social science departments, but to all who have a part in the development of our citizens and future leaders. ☆

About the author

Cricket F. L. Kidwell, Ed.D., serves as the director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Trinity County Office of Education. She can be reached at cfkidwell@tcoek12.org.

Louis Pasteur Fundamental Intermediate School

Making School Relevant for the Millennial Student

by Kamaljit Pannu

Louis Pasteur Fundamental Intermediate School
Sacramento County
San Juan Unified School District
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Orangevale, CA 95662
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<http://www.sanjuana.edu/schools/pasteur/>

2006 School Profile

Community: Urban fringe of a large city

Enrollment: 827

Student Demographics:

- 4% African American
- 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1% Asian
- 1% Filipino
- 10% Hispanic/Latino
- 1% Pacific Islander
- 81% White

Grade Levels: 7-8

2006 **API**: 783 (up 100 points since 1999-00)

2006 **AYP**: Yes*

Free/Reduced Lunch: 20%

English Learners: 1%

Title I: Yes

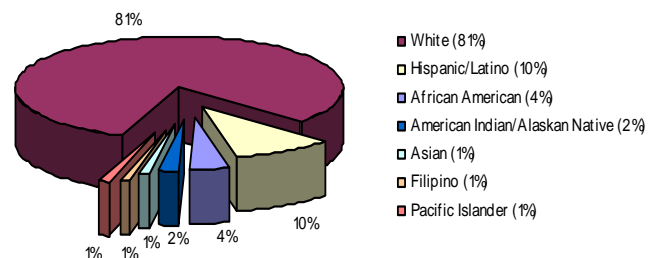
* School met 13 of its 13 criteria for making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

“Keeping today’s students engaged in school and excited about learning has much to do with school culture that fosters a classroom environment where ‘teaching’ versus ‘managing’ is the norm,” explains Kamaljit Pannu, principal of Louis Pasteur Fundamental Intermediate. “Teachers at Pasteur act as facilitators of learning. They have moved away from the work sheet (skill-and-drill) format to one in which students are active participants in their learning.”

Relevance

In his three-year tenure as principal of Pasteur, Pannu has come to understand the implication of working with “millennial” students (those who have never known what it was like to be without technology). Technology in the classroom is a common thread throughout the campus curriculum that is used to connect students to learning. Students use spreadsheet software to graph problems in math, presentation software to explain historical perspective, and word processing and graphic organizer software to put

Louis Pasteur
Demographics



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thoughts on paper. Global positioning system (GPS) technology engages students and assists with their understanding of map concepts such as longitude and latitude through plotting maps, estimation, and [geocaching](#), an outdoor electronic scavenger hunting game in which participants use a [GPS](#) receiver to hide and seek containers called geocaches.

Meeting the Needs of Students

The school boasts two technology labs plus three mobile labs. Every classroom has high-speed Internet access and is equipped with three student workstations and one teacher workstation. Pannu credits some of his 38 teachers' willingness to embrace technology and take risks with technology integration to an elective program funded through the district's successful federal Enhancing Education Through Technology competitive grant. Students are selected by teachers for the elective [Gen Y](#) (a technology literacy program for Title 1 Central Valley schools that serves seventh graders) and then receive nine weeks of training in how to use the technology as well as how to troubleshoot the software and hardware. These students are then paired with teachers to help develop technology-enhanced materials to supplement lessons. For example, students worked with a history teacher to create a PowerPoint presentation that provided insight into the causes of the Civil War. The teacher provided the Gen Y students with the topic points to be covered, and the students created the electronic presentation complete with illustrations, photographs, and sound effects. The PowerPoint presentation was then used in classrooms to help emphasize the lesson. Teachers use these student-created materials in their classes and share them with colleagues.

At Pasteur, students are connected to school in other meaningful ways besides technology. For example, the school's beloved tiger mascot was the inspiration for the design and implementation of a schoolwide model of positive behavior, known as PAWS.

Teachers model the behaviors they want students to learn. Teacher teams then select students for schoolwide recognition when they emulate the PAWS credo. When school begins in the fall, recognition ceremonies are frequent (usually every Friday) and help to generate excitement and cement desired behaviors. Schoolwide homeroom is used, in part, to focus on each one of the PAWS to help students be successful. The schoolwide approach to positive behavior has made a noticeable difference at Pasteur. Since this model was

implemented, suspension rates are down by 60 percent and expulsion rates are down by 80 percent! For the "Work to Succeed" component of PAWS, students are taught organizational and study skills that can be used to enhance achievement in all their classes. Homeroom teachers also provide reteaching assistance to any students who need additional academic help.

Overview of the School

Pasteur is described as a neighborhood school that is located on a 22-acre campus. The school buildings have recently undergone some upgrades as part of the district's modernization plan. The 38

PAWS

Positive Attitude

Always Responsible and Respectful

Work to Succeed

Safety First

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teachers (whom Pannu fondly refers to as family) are all credentialed. Teachers work in cross-curricular teams and department-based groups to assist each other with lesson ideas and to create common assessments. Staff members feel such a part of the school community that there is very little turnover.

There has been a schoolwide focus on making sure that students also feel a part of their school. Students are mentored by teacher teams, and every student has at least one adult advocate. Students who continue to struggle are “adopted” by staff members who then make a special point of assisting, encouraging, and taking a focused interest in the student’s achievement.

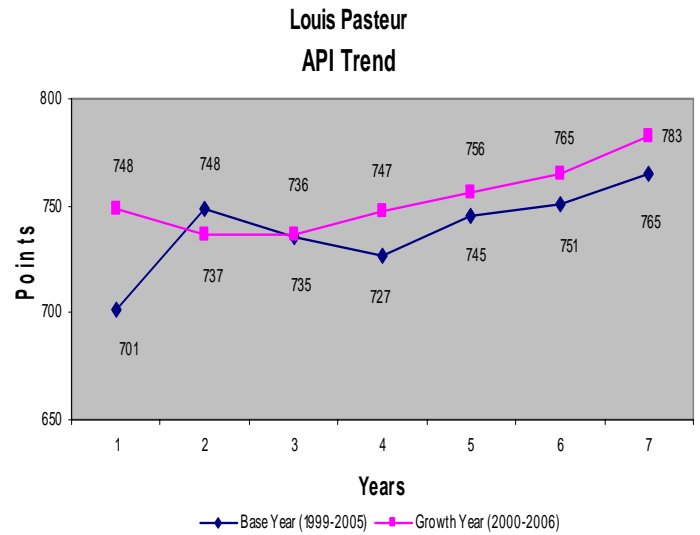
Everyone at Pasteur knows that students who feel connected are engaged as learners and thus learn more. This philosophy seems to be working. Teachers report that the students spend more time on task. Teachers also point to test scores as evidence of four years of success, including an 18-point gain over last year’s scores.

Advice to Other Schools

Pannu’s advice to other schools is succinct but powerful—making school relevant for students is a critical, ongoing task and one that needs to be undertaken as a whole school process. As Pannu emphasized, “To promote the behavior (whether academic or social) you seek, you must do three things: (1) emphasize it; (2) look for it; and (3) reward it.” 🌟

About the author

Kamaljit Pannu is the principal of Louis Pasteur Fundamental Intermediate School.



Zane Middle School Coming Together as a Community of Lifelong Learners

by Teddie Lyons

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Eureka City Unified School District
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Teddie Lyons, Principal
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<http://www.eurekacityschools.org/zane.html>

2006 School Profile

Community: Urban fringe of a large city

Enrollment: 561

Student Demographics:

- 5% African American
- 13% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 8% Asian
- 0% Filipino
- 15% Hispanic/Latino
- 1% Pacific Islander
- 59% White

Grade Levels: 6-8

2006 **API**: 707 (up 46 points since 1999-00)

2006 **AYP**: No*

Free/Reduced Lunch: 70%

English Learners: 14%

Title I: Yes

* School met 16 of its 17 criteria for making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

One of the most important goals at Zane Middle School is to have a community of lifelong learners. As the youngest members of the community, students are supported and treated as partners in the quest for life success. "Teachers are the most magical people in the world. At Zane Middle School, all teachers understand that connecting learning to the student's life provides a reason for the student to learn," says principal Teddie Lyons.

Relevance

The administrators and staff at Zane work hard to make school safe and learning relevant for their students. Self-contained classes are available for targeted students. This format removes the distraction of room-to-room transitions and provides students with more structure. Zane staff includes a full-time counselor and a full-time psychologist who work with targeted students.

Monday mornings are set aside for teachers to meet in teams (grade level, subject level, and cross-departmental). Teachers review student achievement data, develop common assessments, and work together to identify students who may need intervention or other assistance.

A variety of programs and activities keep Zane students engaged in learning, motivated, and actively participating in school. Students in the award-winning Jazz Band travel to performances and play alongside professional bands. Students in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) classes learn organizational and study skills that will last a lifetime.

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“Relevance keeps students engaged and coming to school. One of our most relevant classes (offered in two sections as an elective) is Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST),” explained Lyons. Students in this class, funded through the federal Enhancing Education Through Technology competitive grant, use high-end technology combined with service-learning projects to promote

About EAST

EAST was recognized as a national exemplary model in 2002 and was showcased at the U.S. Department of Education-sponsored Model Schools Conference held in New York. EAST was selected as an exemplary state initiative and featured in the National Education Technology Plan published in 2004.

achievement. In addition to receiving hands-on technology training, students learn to work as part of a team effort, acquire and use information to solve real-life with other EAST students across the nation. Some of the community service projects that have been undertaken by Zane’s students include raising funds for various organizations, such as the Diabetes Foundation, the Humane Society, and the Salvation Army. Students from Zane classes successfully presented their projects at the 2006 National EAST conference held in Arkansas.

One of the most unusual classes at Zane is also one of the most engaging for students. The class, taught by Margot Genger and known simply as “Room 41,” is a seventh-grade English – language arts intervention. Students master academic standards by way of focused, hands-on activities that include everything from technology-enhanced research reports and weaving to the Japanese martial art *akido*. Genger, who holds a black belt in *akido*, has her students research the martial art in addition to practicing it. Students eagerly wait outside Room 41 for class to begin.

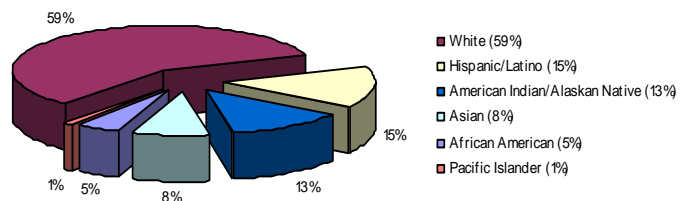
Overview of the School

Located in Eureka, among the giant redwoods in Humboldt County, Zane Middle School in the Eureka City Unified School District has recently undergone a facility transformation. The school was extensively remodeled with funds appropriated through a bond measure. Besides the outside physical changes to the school structure, each classroom has been upgraded to accommodate the latest technology and learning tools commensurate with the task of preparing students for the twenty-first century.

Zane’s API scores have fluctuated dramatically over the last four years as the school and district’s demographics have changed. Although the enrollment at Zane has been declining overall, the Latino and low-income populations are growing. The poverty rate at Zane has increased from approximately 50 percent to approximately 80 percent. A large number of Zane students are classified as homeless, which poses unique challenges for the school administration and staff.

The district recently received help for this group of students through a \$100,000 Education for Homeless Children and Youth grant funded through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. Funds from this grant will be used to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless students.

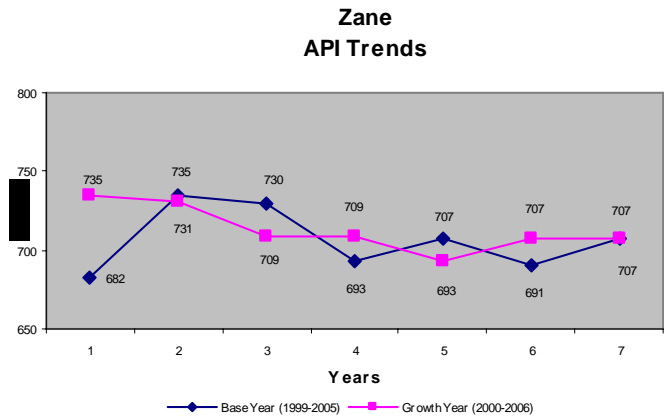
Zane Demographics



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Incorporating relevance into the school has forged a strong student-school connection (especially with lower-performing students) and helps to keep students returning, rather than dropping out. That's the good news. Unfortunately the good news of keeping the highly mobile and lower achieving students engaged in school seems to have contributed to erratic performance of AYP and API.

Zane offers six class periods during the day plus three additional class periods after school. After-school programs include intervention and remediation classes to assist students struggling with academic content. Tutors from Eureka High School, College of the Redwoods, and Humboldt State University provide individual students and small groups of students with homework help and clarification of in-class assignments. Two full-time AmeriCorps members also serve as tutors for Zane students.



Lyons is pleased by the results of a caring school environment and relevant curriculum. Zane Middle School statistics confirm this success. The attendance rate has increased and the suspension rate has decreased—something that makes everyone happy. 🌟

About the author

Teddie Lyons is principal of Zane Middle School.



San Lorenzo Valley Middle School Galvanizing Students' Interest in School

by Chris Mercer

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2006 School Profile

Community: Urban fringe of a mid-sized city
Enrollment: 380¹

Student Demographics:

- 2% African American
- 0% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 1% Asian
- 1% Filipino
- 9% Hispanic/Latino
- 0% Pacific Islander
- 85% White

Grade Levels: 6-8¹

2006 **API**: 776 (up 108 points since 1999-00)

2006 **AYP**: Yes*

Free/Reduced Lunch: 15%

English Learners: 1%

Title I: No

* School met 17 of its 17 criteria for making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

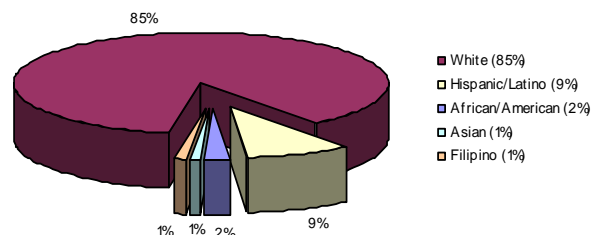
¹This school expanded to include sixth graders in 2006-07 school year; the data presented here reflects previous years' information based on students in seventh and eighth grades only.

San Lorenzo Valley Middle School (SLVMS) is located in the Santa Cruz mountains in the town of Felton. The area is experiencing declining enrollment. However, incorporating an academy as a "school-within-a-school" (Nature Academy), SLVMS is making education relevant and attracting new students to the campus.

Relevance

To make school relevant, administration and staff at SLVMS strongly believe that students must be connected to school. According to Principal Chris Mercer, "When learning is linked with actual experience, learning lasts a lifetime; therefore, many systems are in place at SLVMS to help students connect to school." The staff frames everything around the school theme of **respect**. Respect is modeled daily. Bullying is not tolerated. "We want students to feel safe on our campus. Once they feel safe, we can start to connect with them in other ways," says Mercer.

San Lorenzo Valley
Demographics



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Students have several educational options at SLVMS through different “academies” on campus: (1) Humanities and Science; (2) Performing Arts; and (3) Nature (a “school within a school” charter program for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders). The Nature Academy is a science-based, culturally linked, hands-on course of study.

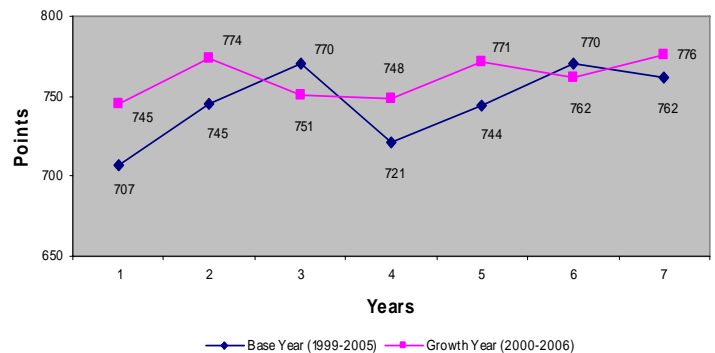
Many adults on campus—the intramural coordinator, student activities director, student council adviser, athletic director, assessment coordinator, and yearbook adviser—work with students in a variety of ways. In addition, teachers are often in their rooms before school, during lunch, and after school to help students. The more contact students have with caring adults, the more they are connected to school.

Meeting the Needs of Students

SLVMS administration and staff work hard to ensure that all students are engaged in learning and are an integral part of the school community. This is accomplished in a variety of ways:

- **Positive reinforcement.** Positive behavior is continually stressed and rewarded at SLVMS. Students are honored quarterly for academics, athletics, and perfect attendance. Students receive recognition as Students of the Month and as Heroes. The Hero Award honors students who model behavior based on the school’s Life Skills character trait of the month (e.g., responsibility, integrity, respect). Successes are celebrated often!
- **Special curricular programs.** Teaming fosters relationships and connections. All students in sixth grade are placed on a team. Students share three teachers who teach science/math; language arts/social studies; and physical education. In the seventh grade, students may choose to participate in the Humanities and Science Academy. In the eighth grade, students may opt to join the Performing Arts Academy. These students share a love of performing and are also together for three classes—drama, social studies, and language arts.
- **Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.** SLVMS students enjoy a variety of extra-curricular activities during and after school. Two outstanding drama performances a year take place at the Performing Arts Academy. The band and chorus perform on a regular basis. Students participate in an annual talent show. The digital media class provides pictures for the yearbook. There is a full, yearlong schedule of sports for both boys and girls in all three grade levels that include cross-country, basketball, soccer, volleyball, wrestling, softball, golf, and track. For students who are not able to join these teams, SLVMS offers noontime intramural sports throughout the year. Lunchtime spirit activities, dances for seventh and eighth graders, activity nights for sixth graders, an algebra club, a new Spanish club, a yearbook club, and a student-run newspaper are all activities geared to connect students to their school. The WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) program has been successful in training more than 40 eighth graders as mentors to incoming sixth graders. This program, as well as the student

San Lorenzo Valley
API Trends



San Lorenzo Valley Middle School Interventions for Struggling Students

- Youth services counselor
- After-school tutorials/homework clubs
- Academic performance contracts
- Student success team meetings
- Inclusive discipline policy
- “Late start” day to discuss students at risk

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council/leadership class, provides many opportunities for students to shine as leaders. SLVMS coordinates an annual Career Day where 15 to 20 members from the community share their careers with students. Field trips are still a part of a relevant curriculum. Students make literary connections as they visit Cannery Row near Monterey Bay after reading the Steinbeck novel of the same name.

Overview of the School

After a year of researching, planning, and collaborating with parents, staff, and students, SLVMS welcomed six sixth-grade classes in fall 2005. SLVMS has a population of approximately 614 students, 75 of whom are enrolled in the Nature Academy. The school has 14 new classrooms, including two new science laboratories just completed in January 2006. A state-of-the-art sports complex with an all-weather track will be completed this year.

The middle school staff is unique in that at least nine of the 22 full-time teachers attended SLVMS as children. All teachers are considered qualified under the No Child Left Behind Act and are dedicated to creating a positive, safe, and caring atmosphere in which students and staff members are encouraged to reach their highest personal and educational potential. Each person is recognized as a unique individual with special needs and talents. Above all else, the SLVMS community fosters high academic achievement, self-discipline, self-esteem, and self-knowledge.

Advice to Other Schools

“As educational experts, it is our **job** to make all classes relevant for students,” advises Mercer. It would be hard to defend the existence of a class that was not relevant to students. Classes must engage students or face losing them. This does not mean it has to be all fun and games—for learning is often hard and tedious—but teachers **must** use all the strategies available to get each and every student involved in learning.

Although the elective classes at SLVMS (art, digital media, world languages, chorus, band, drama, and student council) tend to be more activity-based, it is critical for core academic teachers to also make their classes relevant and engaging. An important component of all staff meetings should be professional development. Teachers share their best practices during these meetings and learn from one another. There is never a shortage of good ideas to share. An important discussion that should always take place is “Why was it a success?” The best practices always target how to engage students and produce learning results.

It is also important for administrators and staff to read professional literature and discuss strategies with each other. Collaboration is expected of and delivered by all adults on campus. It is an important part of teaching. The time for going into your classroom, shutting the door, and teaching in isolation is over. Mercer says, “I believe relevance can be incorporated as part of a school’s culture when the focus is kept on the students. Treat them with respect, offer them choices, and surround them with dedicated teachers who truly care about student success and who are willing to be a part of a collaborative, professional learning community. We make school relevant.” 🌟

About the author

Chris Mercer is the principal of San Lorenzo Valley Middle School.

“No Dot Kid” Program

The names of all students in the school are placed on posters on the wall in the San Lorenzo Valley Middle School staff room. At various times throughout the year, staff members place “dots” next to the students with whom they have a close relationship. We identify “close relationship” as a relationship where the adult knows the student’s dreams, fears, aspirations, or their families. We ask ourselves questions such as, “Have I gone to this child’s game or performance?” “Do I know this child more than just to say, ‘Good morning?’ or ‘Good job on your assignment?’” Then the staff members look at the lists of student names and place dots by the names of the students they know well. Last year we found that one of the students who had no dots by his name also had five Fs. Of course, the “No Dot Kids” are added to our “adopt list.”

Is Your School Library Relevant to Twenty-First Century Learning?

Parents of middle and high school students may remember the school library as an out-of-the-way room filled with books and tables where students quietly worked alone on book reports. Attempts at collaboration or simple verbal communication between students could incur harsh looks from the librarian or even banishment from the library.

But the Information Age has transformed the school library into a library media center that appeals to “millennials”—the tech savvy, team-oriented generation born between 1980 and 2000. Today’s library media center plays a significant role in delivering a relevant and rigorous education to middle and high school students.

In its publication *School Libraries Work!*, Scholastic Library Publishing summarizes research and presents case studies that demonstrate the effect libraries have on student achievement. *School Libraries Work!* features an excerpt from the position statement of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) on school libraries. In *Why Care About School Libraries?*, the NCLIS claims “more than 60 studies have shown clear evidence of this connection between student achievement and the presence of libraries with qualified school library media specialists.”¹

A twenty-first century middle or high school library media center may have the following features:

- Library media specialists, highly skilled professionals who work closely with teachers and students to improve academic achievement
- A large room filled with natural light and comfortable sofas that make the space more appealing to students
- A substantial collection of books, including numerous works of fiction that pique students’ interest and encourage them to read, read, and read some more
- Periodicals, both academic and pop culture magazines of interest to adolescents
- Tables where students can gather to collaborate on group projects
- Technology in the form of numerous networked, state-of-the-art computers loaded with a wide variety of software and linked to high-quality printers
- Multicultural resources to enhance students’ understanding of their own heritage and other cultures and tolerance toward them
- Access to licensed databases and subscriptions to academic Web sources that enrich the core curriculum and are developmentally appropriate to adolescents
- A collection of information on colleges and careers
- Bookmarked Web sites that connect students to foreign language, sports, visual and performing arts, and other tween- and teen-related resources
- Displays of student artwork, writing, and science and History Day projects
- A distinct library page on the school’s Web site with helpful homework links related to assigned projects or a blog highlighting new Web resources



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¹ *Why Care About School Libraries?* Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 2005.

These modern-day libraries offer students opportunities before, during, and after school that can lead to academic success. They provide enrichment by integrating technology—considered essential by millennials—throughout a rigorous, standards-based curriculum. Well-designed centers are accessible to all students, including those with learning disabilities and physical challenges. In addition, a library media center is often the place where struggling students receive academic interventions.

At many schools the library media center is the hub of the campus. Students may be completing homework, reading on sofas, meandering through the book stacks, studying for exams, and typing papers or conducting research on computers. Library media centers offer a quiet place for reading and writing, tutorials, meeting rooms for before- and after-school clubs and academic enrichment activities, and highly trained staff to provide personalized assistance to students.

As technology evolves, school libraries find themselves on the cutting edge of new trends. The emerging distance-learning movement is prompting educators, particularly at the high school level, to consider how their school libraries might offer students the opportunity to take advanced or specialized courses or serve students who may not be physically present on campus (such as independent study or home-schooled students).

School libraries are increasingly serving not just students, but families and the broader community. Some schools offer students' families access to their libraries before, during, and after school. For instance, every school day Gaspar de Portola Middle School in San Diego opens its library to students and their families 70 minutes before and 30 minutes after school. Many school districts are entering into creative partnerships with local governments to build community libraries on or adjacent to school campuses where students and the general public can have access to services. For example, in Sacramento County, the Elk Grove Unified School District and the City of Elk Grove jointly funded a community library on school grounds. The library, situated between Toby Johnson Middle School and Franklin High School, supports students at both schools while concurrently providing library services to Elk Grove citizens.

To sustain the interest of middle and high school students, learning must be relevant to the lives of adolescents. At a high-impact middle or high school, the entire school team works together to create an environment in which students are engaged as active learners and excited about their educational experiences on every level—academically, socially, and emotionally. Lessons, learning supports, and social activities are carefully planned to appeal to tweens' and teens' current interests and inherent curiosity about the world around them.

As the twenty-first century unfolds, there is a growing consensus that a strong school library plays a part in improving academic achievement and helping students excel in a standards-based curriculum. Above all, a well-designed library media center can make learning relevant to adolescents, keeping them interested in school and on the path to a lifetime of learning. ✨

Contributors to this article

The following CDE staff members contributed to this article: Barbara Jeffus, Education Programs Consultant, and Dinorah Hall, Associate Governmental Program Analyst. For more CDE information on school library resources, visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/lb/>.

The Relevance of Counseling in Middle School

by George Montgomery

Educators are challenged in the twenty-first century to provide middle school students with quality curricula and practices that result in students who are literate, civic-minded, and prepared to understand the complexities of the real world. The question is often asked, “Why do behavior problems increase in middle school? Why do fewer middle school students turn in their homework? Why do more middle school students fail to pass classes?” If there were easy answers, middle schools would already be implementing successful programs that address these concerns. Although there are few simple answers to these complex problems, there are possibilities worthy of consideration.

In recent times it appears that educators have not adequately implemented teaching and learning practices that challenge students toward a higher order of thinking. Educators have concentrated on maintaining an educational structure that teaches to academic standards but frequently ignores the importance of developmental responsiveness.

Students thrive in positive learning environments that encourage high expectations, stimulate creative thinking, and demonstrate the relevance of learning in the classroom as it connects to the broader world. In this way, students not only attend school to learn academic subjects, but in fact go to school **to learn to live**.



According to William Glasser, we learn 10 percent of what we read, 20 percent of what we hear, and 30 percent of what we see.¹ However, we learn as much as 50 percent of what we both see and hear, 70 percent of what we discuss with others, 80 percent of what we experience, and 95 percent of what we apply or teach to someone else. This evidence suggests that educators should embrace as many opportunities as possible to engage students in different modes of learning, ranging from creative teaching techniques to innovative curriculum design. A relevant curriculum is one that prepares students to participate in and make sense of their world.

There are at least three positive, progressive steps to make academic curricula more relevant to students. First, develop a curriculum that embraces the whole student and respects the student’s ability and potential to be active in and responsible for his or her learning. Second, encourage teachers to actively participate in focused, collaborative conversations with counselors. Third, implement an approach to teaching that develops students who are capable of thinking in the abstract and putting their thoughts into action.

As part of this challenging process, counselors can work collaboratively with teachers using materials and activities to develop academic content that engages students and stimulates them to explore course work as it applies to the real world. Currently, 19 middle and high schools in California have piloted a program called [The Real Game California](#) that features a series of career exploration activities connected to the California content standards. This career development curriculum is the latest version of the

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internationally acclaimed Real Game Series and was developed by the [California Career Resource Network](#) (CalCRN) to reflect the California economy. All 19 schools participating in the pilot project are continuing and expanding the program. For example, this year Ed Harris Middle School in the Elk Grove Unified School District is expanding its Real Game California curriculum from one class to five classes. In the Woodland Joint Unified School District (WJUSD), the board of trustees approved the Real Game California program as the official curriculum resource to provide career education to all students in grades five through eight.

According to Michael Gangitano, counselor at Lee Middle School in the WJUSD, The Real Game has truly changed the paradigm at his school by setting the stage for a “working” classroom where students not only “punch in” (in order to learn the importance of being on time) but also purchase items they want and need (in order to learn the value of money). Another resource from the CalCRN is the [California CareerZone](#). This online tool enables students to assess their career interests and then explore California occupations related to those interests.

“The more educators can provide skills
for learning, skills for earning,
and skills for living, the more relevant
their work will be”

As a result of experiencing these activities, students are more engaged in school, more connected to their school, more aware of occupations connected to academic course work, and—most importantly—more in tune with how these experiences create relevant meaning in their lives as they begin a journey of self-discovery and lifelong learning. The combination of collaboration among counselor, teacher, and student as well as programs like The Real Game California, create powerful teaching and learning for youth.

Legislation recently signed by Governor Schwarzenegger (Assembly Bill 1802) will provide school districts with additional funding to increase the number of counselors serving students in grades seven through twelve. This new funding will enable counselors to provide supplemental services to all students and additional services to those students who are Far Below Basic in math, English, or both. With the myriad of social and emotional issues that impede the learning process of youths, these additional resources will be a welcome relief to counselors challenged with heavy caseloads and greater demands for increased student academic performance.

When counselors and teachers connect middle school academic curricula to real-world applications, students gain problem-solving skills, learn risk-taking strategies, and attain the lifelong goal of continuous learning. The more educators can provide skills for learning, skills for earning, and skills for living, the more relevant their work will be in helping students successfully navigate the challenging path toward personal fulfillment and professional success. To occupy positions of leadership in the twenty-first century, students must be equipped with an education that is relevant to the world in which they live. 🌟

¹Glasser, William (1992). William Glasser Institute Newsletter.

About the author

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Worth a Click

The following Web sites provide additional information on relevance.

Curricular:

California Department of Education Standards & Frameworks

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st>

Presents California's standards and frameworks.

California Science Teachers Association

<http://www.cascience.org>

Provides information to and training for California's science teachers.

National Council for Geographic Education

<http://www.ncge.org>

Enhances the preparation of geographic educators with respect to their knowledge of content, techniques, and learning processes; develops, publishes, and promotes the use of curriculum, resources, and learning materials;

National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.ncss.org>

Features information on academic instruction; includes ideas on how to emphasize the relevance of social studies to students.

National Council of Teachers of English

<http://www.ncte.org>

Highlights a number of research studies and resources including information that speaks to the need for bringing relevance to middle and high school English/language arts curricula.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

<http://www.nctm.org>

Among other things, presents information on using real-world problems to teach mathematics; special sections for middle and high school teachers.

National Science Teachers Association

<http://www.nsta.org>

Provides information to middle and high school science teachers including ideas on how to make lessons relevant to students' lives.

Technology:

Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST)

<http://www.eastproject.org>

Recognized as an exemplary program in the United States Department of Education's National Technology Plan; offers pedagogical training for teachers, technical training for students, and assistance for effectively integrating technology in service learning projects.



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Gen Y

<http://www.geny.org/>

With funding from the Verizon Corporation, provides seventh grade students in California's Central Valley with the opportunity to become nationally certified in technology literacy using the TechYES program; any public Title I school in selected Central Valley counties that serves 7th grade students is eligible to apply for funds and resources.

Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership (TICAL)

<http://www.portical.org>

Includes tools, resources, tutorials, and case studies on integrating technology for “digital school” leaders.

Visual and Performing Arts:

California Department of Education Visual and Performing Arts Guidance

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/vp/vapaguidance.asp>

Provides information and resources for implementing high quality K-12 visual and performing arts education programs.

Career/Real World Connections:

California Career Resources Network

<http://www.californiacareers.info>

Features a number of career development related tools to bring meaning to learning.

California Department of Education

Health Career Education

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/hc>

Helps students gain insight into the health care industry, explore health-related areas, and prepare for career entry/postsecondary education.

Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education

<http://www.entre-ed.org>

Presents information for teachers, instructors, program developers, and others who help students of all ages find their own entrepreneurial opportunities.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills

<http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php>

Encourages schools, districts, and states to advocate for the infusion of twenty-first century skills into education; provides tools and resources to help facilitate and drive change.

The Real Game California

<http://www.californiacareers.info/downloads/rgc.pdf>

Highlights career development curriculum aligned with California content standards and designed to engage students learning connected to the real world.

Service Learning:

Learn and Service America

<http://www.learnandserve.gov>

A program of the Corporation for National and Community Service; provides funding, training, and technical assistance to K-12 schools to facilitate service-learning.

National Service Learning Clearinghouse

<http://www.servicelearning.org>

Provides support for strengthening schools and communities using service-learning techniques and methodologies.

Project-Based Learning:

Project-Based Learning Checklists

<http://pblchecklist.4teachers.org>

Helps teachers create age-appropriate, customizable project checklists for written reports, multimedia projects, oral presentations, and science projects; checklists are designed to help teachers start using project-based learning in their classrooms.

Multicultural Experiences:

California Department of Education

Foreign Languages

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/fl>

Provides information on developing foreign language proficiency in students; presents California's curriculum framework and instruction materials for foreign language instruction.

California Department of Education

Reading/Language Arts

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/l>

Presents a list of recommended literature for children and adolescents in grade K-12; ability to search by grade, age, and culture.

National Association for Multicultural Education

<http://www.nameorg.org>

Features information and resources on multicultural education.

School Libraries:

California Department of Education

School Libraries

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/lb>

Highlights information and resources for keeping school libraries current and relevant for today's students.

Scholastic Library Publishing

<http://www.scholastic.com/librarypublishing>

Features the publication *School Libraries Work!*, a Research Foundation Paper that explains the impact school libraries have on student achievement.

U.S. National Commission on Library and Information Science

<http://www.nclis.gov>

Provides guidance and support to strengthen the relevance of libraries and information science.

Join MidNet—the Middle Grades E-mail List!

Join the CDE Middle Grades e-mail list at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gS/mg> to receive notices about middle grades-related information and upcoming *Middle Grades Spotlight* periodical issues.

To view current and past *Middle Grades Spotlight* periodical issues, visit:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/nl/mdlgrdsnswltrs.asp>

Please send your comments or suggestions to MidNet@cde.ca.gov. Your ideas and suggestions are welcome.

Middle Grades Spotlight

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