

The Quarterly Newsletter of Springboard Schools

In this Issue

A Letter from
Merrill Vargo:
Teaching English
Learners

Listening to Students:
How Educators Are Learning
New Ways to Improve the
System

Donor Spotlight:
Paramount Agricultural
Companies &
Silicon Valley Community
Foundation

Other News:
• "A Day In The Life..."
• Board of Directors
Event - "Education at a
Crossroads"
• Make a "DAIT" With
Destiny

From the Desk of Dr. Merrill Vargo,
Founder and Executive Director

Teaching English Learners: A Systems Approach

Sincerely,
Dr. Merrill Vargo
Founder and Executive Director

The number of English Learners (EL) is on the rise in the United States, and approximately one-third of these students, or 1.6 million, attend school in the state of California.* These students range from highly literate immigrants with excellent educational preparation to students with little formal schooling who are experiencing severe culture shock. There is no "one size fits all" response to this range of needs, and while some EL students are faring quite well in school, many more are struggling to meet standards and dropping out at consistently higher rates than their English-speaking peers.

We at Springboard Schools believe that serving these students well is a central challenge for our school system and for our democracy. We also believe that teachers cannot single-handedly address the many needs of EL students. If we are to create the conditions for teachers to do their best work and for students learning English to excel, we must treat this issue as a system challenge, one that the whole school district is responsible for, not just the teacher

** based on 2005-06 statistics from the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), US Department of Education*

Listening to Students on How to Improve the System

"Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy."

- Adam Fletcher, Meaningful Student Involvement

Karen Ward stands in front of a packed classroom and begins today's session by addressing the educators with these words:

"Remember. This is about your students. This

is not about you as an instructor."

It is a sentiment Ward repeats again and again as she facilitates this day-long meeting of the Central Valley EL High School Network. [Note: EL stands for "English Learner"] Her audience of faculty and staff from various high schools in the region are here to focus on an important topic: how to improve instruction for their struggling English Learner, or EL students. According to Angela Munoz, a Springboard Schools coach who works with some of the schools in the Network, there is

(See Listening to Students, pg 2)



Dr. Merrill Vargo

Listening to Students *(cont. from page 1)*

a lack of understanding among many teachers about the issues facing these students. The purpose of this Network is to bring to light and address these issues and rethink EL instruction on high school campuses.

Today's session is focused on "Student Voice," a special companion program to the Network that involves developing the leadership skills of EL students and giving them confidence to be vocal part of the process to improve how they are being educated. To Ward, EL students need to be seen differently. "Being educated and bilingual is an incredibly powerful situation in the world today." Last week, Ward and Nikiko Masumoto, Program Director for "Student Voice", facilitated a conference of hard-working EL students from each of the participating Network schools. Today the Network will explore what they learned about EL instruction from the students' point of view. "What they have to share with us is such a strong voice about what they want from us," says Ward. "We cannot ignore them."

As each school in the Network moves toward continuous improvement, they listen to students' concerns and hopes. "When kids are asking educators to help them, the educators will move more rapidly," says Steve Weil, another Springboard Schools coach working with the Network. Ward sums it up: "We want to get [educators] to think differently about the work we have to do."

In the rural Central Valley, educators often feel isolated. Through this Network, principals have developed clear vi-

What is "Student Voice?"

"Student Voice" is a companion program to the Central Valley EL High School Network that works with students from high schools throughout the Central Valley. Led by Program Director, Nikiko Masumoto, the program gives EL students the tools and skills to become active participants in improving EL instruction at their schools and helps build their confidence to become academic leaders among their peers.

Working directly with the EL students from participating Network schools, Masumoto meets with them several times throughout the year on their campuses or at special conferences. "I contextualize our work within a larger idea of making their school a better place for them," she says. "



Karen Ward (left) speaking with Nikko Masumoto during the Network Meeting

sion for their schools; a vision that reflects a deeper awareness of students' needs and goals, and that has yielded practical strategies to help students meet these goals. For example, one teacher from Madera High School relates how a program for their sophomore EL students has grown into an after-school peer group. The kids support one another, share their experiences being EL students, tutor one another in their classes, and collaborate with teachers to explain to parents the work their children are doing in school and why. Ward says, "There has been a deeper knowledge about how to apply the work [improvements in instruction and collaboration] when working with EL students."

Through the Network, practical strategies like these can be shared with other schools throughout the Central Valley, building greater awareness of how improving EL instruction is possible and can be highly successful. By dedicating themselves towards improvement, these educators continue to stay focused on what Ward tells them again and again: "This is about your students."

I ask them to write down their dreams, what do they want to do, what their school is doing now to help them, and then what challenges they face (as EL students) at school that create obstacles between them and their dreams."

Students often express frustration with:

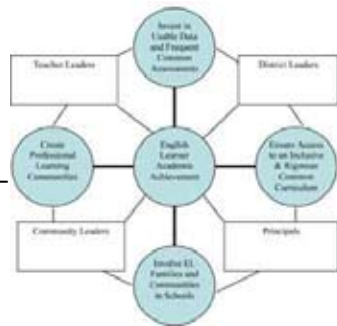
- Not being challenged in classes
- Feeling self-conscious about not being able to speak English well and too shy to ask questions
- A lack of communication with the teachers; and
- The difficulty of finding a peer to help

Through specialized activities, Masumoto guides the students to think critically about how the system is working for them and how they can approach their faculty and staff with their concerns. "I never interject my opinion," she says. "I only ask questions to help facilitate students'

(cont. from page 1)
alone.

What does it mean to treat English Learners as a challenge for the whole system? School districts that get the best results comprehensively and promptly assess EL students when they enter school, place them in the correct courses, and administer diagnostic assessments regularly to ensure that the students' needs are being met. Successful districts also build schedules that provide EL students with access to an inclusive, yet challenging curriculum that is flexible enough to allow them to transition out of low-level English Language Development classes as soon as they are ready.

High-functioning school districts seize opportunities to provide targeted professional development around this issue – for instance, by helping math teachers understand how to build students' vocabulary and implement the EL-focused tips and strategies that come with California's new required math textbooks. But the most successful districts go further, creating collaborative groups that bring teachers together with each other, with data on student learning and with expert resources. These professional learning communities become forums for teachers



to help each other improve their practices and their results with students learning English.

The final – and most often overlooked – element of a systems approach to meeting the needs of English learners is the students themselves. Many EL students and their families fail to understand our school system and how it works. Yet at Springboard, we have learned that when students are empowered to understand the system, they take more responsibility for their own learning – and make dramatic progress toward their own goals. For these successful students, being bilingual will be a huge asset in the global economy of the future; California has the potential to develop a world-class workforce in this regard. All of our students need a chance to be part of a school system that effectively builds their knowledge and skills in languages and in all other academic areas. We can provide them with this opportunity – but only by working together.

Sincerely,

Merrill Vargo,
Founder and Executive Director

Donor Spotlight: Paramount Agricultural Companies Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Springboard Schools would also like to recognize Paramount Agricultural Companies for its generous contribution of more than \$100,000 to support Springboard's work in the Central Valley this year. Wasco Union School District and Richland School District have both benefited from coaching support and principal training. Avenal, Wasco, and Woodlake High Schools have been able to participate in Springboard Schools' High School English Language Learner Network that focuses on providing support to high schools to improve achievement among English learners in the Central Valley.

Paramount Agricultural Companies is the world's largest supplier of pistachios and almonds. Located in the heart of the Central Valley, Paramount Agricultural Companies

believes in the value of community and education. By supporting the schools and districts its workforce sends their children to everyday, they are helping ensure that every child receives the quality education they deserve.

Springboard Schools would also like to thank Silicon Valley Community Foundation for their generous funding of \$65,000 to support research into alternative pathways for at-risk youths. The project centers on San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties and focuses on researching and developing district-wide strategies for serving students not being well-served in comprehensive high schools. This is important work to support our students who are most at-risk of dropping out of school. Silicon Valley Community Foundation is committed to serving the vibrant and diverse community that makes up San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. They are a leading voice and catalyst for innovative solutions to the regions' most challenging problems. Their commitment is to help all at-risk youth succeed in education and in life.

Voices (cont. from page 2)

ideas for positive change on their campuses." Students in the program can quickly progress from being shy about speaking in public to becoming "empowered experts" about their own education and being assertive when voicing their views and opinions in front of educators. Some even take the initiative and approach the faculty and staff themselves. According to Masumoto, one educator remarked: "I never thought about the EL perspective in this way," and then added, "I'm going to change my practices." "Students are much more willing to 'pony up' and do the work once they've made the commitment," says Karen Ward, program lead of the Central Valley Network. "On some campuses, they [the students] have motivated the work, [because]

students are quicker to do the work than adults are."

As important as it is for the system educating our children to continue to improve, it is equally important to remember to listen to those children to make sure that system is being effective. Encouraging these young adults to find their own voice and develop as academic leaders give EL students a new perspective on their education and their future. For example, after a group of EL students shared their thoughts at a meeting with their faculty and staff, Masumoto asked them, how did they feel? One girl's hand shot up and, with a huge smile, she replied, "For the first time, I don't feel invisible."

Other News

"A Day in the Life..."

A poignant look at what it is like to be an EL student today.

Work by
Marc Patterson
Lead Art
Teacher
McLane High
School, Fresno,
CA

About the Artist

Marc teaches art at ArtVenture Visual and Theatre Arts

Academy at McLane High School in Fresno, CA. He was inspired to create this piece after reading a poem by an EL high school student from the town of Reedley. Marc's intention was to create a visual representation of the thoughts and feelings many EL students feel in the classroom. "I tried to put myself in the shoes of the EL student, and create images that conveyed [their] disengagement, boredom and frustration." He asked his own EL students to help him with the imagery and even pose for some of the drawings. He hopes this piece conveys the importance for educators to reach this population of students. "Our culture, in particular the youth culture, is very visually intelligent. I think that the aphorism, "A picture is worth a thousand words" should be changed to, "A picture is worth 10,000 words".



Springboard Schools' Board of Trustees Hosts Special Discussion Series: Education at a Crossroads

On April 17th at the Four Seasons Hotel in San Francisco, the Springboard Schools Board of Trustees hosted an intimate discussion focused on the experiences of educators working in California's public school system. Entitled "Education at a Crossroads: Voices from the Field," the distinguished panel featured: Carlos Garcia, Superintendent of San Francisco Unified; Dennis Hawkins, Board President of Oak Grove School District; and Maité Itturi, Principal of El Verano Elementary in Sonoma, CA. Merrill Vargo, Executive Director and Founder of Springboard Schools, presented an overview of the organization's work in public schools to an audience of prominent members of the business and philanthropic communities. The panelists then answered questions regarding what education really looks like in school and districts today, demonstrating their passion and enthusiasm for their work.

The Springboard Schools Board of Trustees will host a third discussion in Fall 2008.

Make a DAIT with Destiny

Our systems approach sets Springboard Schools apart from other DAIT providers. We bring years of research and experience to guide each of our DAIT teams, ensuring maximum effect in professional development for educators and expertise in issues related to English Learners and Students with Disabilities.