A Life Upended
Joyce Gu’s Story

At 6:30 one morning in 2011, 14-year-old Joyce Gu woke to a banging at the front door of her family’s home, followed by someone shouting, “Hands up! Hands up!”

Gu, at that time a freshman at Thurgood Marshall High School, scrambled out of bed to join her younger siblings who were preparing for school. Within seconds, they were surrounded by men carrying rifles, dressed in black riot vests labeled either “SHERIFF” or “I.C.E.”

The children were brought into the living room, where Gu remembers seeing her stepfather lying face down on the floor, arms behind his back, wrists handcuffed.

She recalls choosing at that moment to be strong for her younger siblings. “To show them that everything would be okay, I stood calmly and showed no fear.”

But she knew her life was forever changed. Her mother had been incarcerated the month before on drug charges, and now, with her stepfather in police custody on similar charges, her future was uncertain. She and her siblings were placed with Child Protective Services and assigned to separate homes. Gu was sent to live with an uncle. “It was very hard and very different than the life I was used to. He was a very strict guardian and I was scared at the time,” she says.

She also recalls feeling confused about her new life. “I was lost and angry. I felt that my hopes and dreams were never going to be realized.”

But today, three years later, Gu is realizing her
My Favorite Lessons of this Year

It’s May and that means the last day of school is fast approaching. As students clean out lockers and textbooks are turned in, we asked a few teachers to recall their favorite lessons from the year that emphasized the Common Core State Standards, critical thinking and, relevant, real-world applications for students.

Christine Diehl / James Lick Middle School
“My favorite science lesson this year was Tornado Modeling. We were doing the lesson as planned, but the kids got really excited about what they were seeing with the pressure differentials and started asking to make their own experiments. I reminded them to record their hypotheses and observations as they jumped into experiments with different materials in the bottled tornado. To me, this is what the new Common Core instruction is all about – we are able to give students more time to go deeper into concepts and let them build their own understanding.”

Susan Sevilla / Roosevelt Middle School
“I read aloud Sherman Alexie’s poem, ‘Reservation Mathematics’ and students made drawings to reflect on what they heard. I used some questions to help them discuss the poem while they began to develop their own ideas and themes related to the poem and then they wrote essays about the topic. One of the great things about the new Common Core State Standards is that you can provide students at least two days of activities on a reading selection, then give them an entire class period to write, uninterrupted.”

Susan Watson / Buena Vista Horace Mann
“By far my favorite lesson this year was the milestone task for my 7th grade math students to show what they mastered in the Proportional Relationship unit. We called it Setting up Shop. The kids created a fictional store to sell products of their choosing – tacos, shoes, skateboards – whatever they got excited about. Paying to lease a space, making wholesale purchases, paying employee taxes and all the overhead real store owners handle when setting prices – my students had to calculate everything and try to make a profit (or at least break even!) They really took it seriously. They soon made the connection that retail prices are affected by many intricate real-life costs incurred when running a business.”

Marc Williams / Alice Fong Yu Alternative
“This year, my English Language Arts class read The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank. After the traditional, comprehension-oriented lessons, I asked them to make a magazine creatively interpreting the story of her life. I really love this activity: the art, writing, and peer review opportunities serve to validate many skill sets at once. This year, the kids really focused on the personal relationships that grew in the secret annex and what the theme of intolerance means in their own lives today. It was a great chance to step back and let them lead the way in their learning.”

Graduation Requirements
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More challenging coursework
Courses that meet the “a-g” requirements are college preparatory courses established by the University of California.

Specifically, students must complete a pattern of 15 college-preparatory courses drawn from the areas of history/social science, English, math, laboratory science, a language other than English, the visual and performing arts and a college-preparatory elective.

The UC/CSU system categorizes each subject area or requirement with a letter to identify the different course requirements, and has to certify each “a-g” class SFUSD offers. This means the district has to submit every “a-g” class syllabus for UC’s review and approval.

Grades still matter
The goal of the new graduation requirements is to ensure that all students take college preparatory courses and have the option of applying to a wide range of colleges and universities.

To earn a high school diploma, students must meet the requirements with a D grade or better. However, to be UC/CSU eligible, students must complete their “a-g” courses sequence with a C or better.

Options for students
Some students need more time and support to meet the new graduation requirements. With help from the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF) and the City, there are several resources available for those who are missing credits or who want to retake a course for a better grade. SFUSD offers evening high school, online learning, and summer school. The Transitional Studies Department of City College of San Francisco (CCSF) also offers credit recovery options for high school students free of charge.

For more information about the graduation requirements and credit-recovery options go to www.sfusd.edu/curriculum-standards/overview.

SNAPSHOT: Our Students

This paper is made possible with the support of The Examiner
As we close this 2013-2014 school year, we have much to celebrate, but we are also reminded of the work that we must continue.

The class of 2014 will be the first class to graduate under the more rigorous academic requirements of fulfilling the a-g course sequence, which is a series of classes that mirror the eligibility requirements for entrance into California State and University of California.

Before this, we had a system where some students were allowed to take the a-g classes (biology, algebra, etc.) while others were only allowed to take lower level classes that barred them from college eligibility.

Just as we passed this resolution, our budget was severely cut, which eventually totaled $291 million in cuts. We were forced to make tough choices. Summer school was cut. School site budgets were decimated. We instituted furlough days.

And yet, we had just voted to institute a more rigorous graduation requirement, knowing we had many students whom were not prepared to meet that standard. Most districts would have faltered on their commitment. Most districts would have determined that to keep afloat in these difficult times was hard enough.

But, here in San Francisco, we are not like other districts. We lead. We lead with a strong belief and commitment to our students and their families.

In San Francisco, we take a deep breath, roll up our sleeves and use every strategy to make it work.

Mayor Lee joined the fight and gave us money for summer school. Parents gave more of themselves, volunteering and fundraising. Teachers and staff worked long hours and pieced together school budgets to meet the needs of students.

So, this May, when the class of 2014 crosses the stage and the Pomp and Circumstance plays, we all need to take a moment to congratulate ourselves for having the courage and commitment to graduate this class and classes that follow, with the real skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the 21st century and we, as the “old folks,” can rest assured that the new generation will be prepared to take care of themselves and the world. However, we will have some students who will not graduate with their classmates and this is a somber reminder that we still have much work to do.

A wonderful summer to everyone and huge thanks for everything you do for our students, even in the hardest of times.

The apps and gadgets everyone talks about today may not be the ones they are talking about tomorrow, but technology in some form is here to stay. In a city like San Francisco, access to technology for teaching and learning is no longer a “nice to have,” it is a must have.

Just as most of us over 40 couldn’t imagine going to school without books and chalkboards, we have reached a point where children shouldn’t have to imagine going to school without computers and tablets seamlessly integrated into their everyday learning.

It’s not about teachers being replaced by computers. Humans need relationships with other humans to learn and grow. How well do you remember your favorite computer? How about your favorite teacher?

It’s about this: Technology, when accompanied by a skilled maker, makes it possible for students to take charge of their learning like never before. When used wisely, technology enables teachers to accommodate the learning needs of a broader range of students and students to be more self-directed than ever before.

If our vision is fully funded, every classroom will be equipped with the technology that is common in meeting rooms at companies today including wireless connectivity, projectors, speakers, and a phone.

Every educator will be provided a district funded laptop that will be used for creating lessons and reviewing student progress and will have paid time to participate in professional learning about how to integrate technology for student learning.

And every student will have a device to be used during class time and beyond. As students mature, they will receive more responsibility for their device and more flexibility in the choice of the device.

While this is ambitious, we are on our way – thanks to significant support from Mayor Ed Lee, business leader Marc Benioff and many others in our community.

This year, a donation from Salesforce.com Foundation more than doubled the number of tablets for student learning at all of our comprehensive 6-8 grade middle schools. And, just as important, teachers received tailored professional development and coaching in how to integrate technology and digital content to enhance student learning.

I’ve had a lot of conversations with technology companies this year about how they can support our public schools and the response has been extremely promising.

It will take time but I’m happy to report that when thousands of students and teachers return in the fall, they’re going to see some great new tools for learning.
Parent Tips: Five Ways to Keep Your Child Learning All Summer

The school year is almost over. For some families, summer is a welcome break from homework and late nights finishing last-minute projects. But summer is also the perfect time to keep children learning while making it fun. Here are five easy ways to keep them learning:

**Become a Giant reader**
Is your child a Giants fan? Baseball season is in full swing. You can point out Examiner articles and even find newer books in the library written about our championship team. Does your family take in movies during the break? Before heading to the theater, have your child read a review of the movie and afterward ask your child to write a review. If you’re more outdoorsy, planning a hike or picnic, take time to read a map of the park together.

**Leave things around**
At home, have newspapers, magazines, and books on the table to spark your child’s interest. Children are naturally curious, and will choose good reading material if it’s available.

**Hungry? Do some quick math**
At the grocery store, weigh the fruit you are buying and ask your child to figure out how much it will cost based on the price per pound – the suspense at the checkout counter to see the actual amount might make the trip more interesting. If you’re taking Muni, you can have your child count the number of people on the bus and then the number males and the number of females, then try to calculate the fraction of males on board (extra credit for figuring out what percentage of the riders are female). Or, on a long car trip, you can tell your child the speed you are driving and the distance of the trip then together you can figure out how many minutes it will take to reach your destination.

**Be a storyteller**
Use summer as a chance to share fun stories from your own childhood. Perhaps talking about a favorite teacher you had will spark a conversation about your child’s teacher or a special staff member. Talking about what your child likes about school can help the transition back to the classroom next fall."

Joyce Gu’s Story continued from page 1

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"One day I realized that this is the way it was going to be, and it was up to me and no one else to make things better."

During her sophomore year she began working with the high school’s Wellness Center and the Foster Youth Program intern. At the intern’s suggestion, she applied for a position as the school’s Nutrition Outreach Worker.

"Joyce is amazing," says Wendy Snider, Wellness Coordinator at Marshall. "She started a Healthy Cooking Club, a Gardening Club and won the ‘Burpee Home Gardens – Grow Anywhere Tour’ contest, in which the school received over 450 plants and over a thousand pounds of produce."

Snider says Gu is a true leader. This year Gu is the Wellness Center’s Teacher’s Assistant.

"Joyce Gu’s story was shared with School Times by The San Francisco Wellness Initiative, a program dedicated to improving the health, well-being, and academic success of the city’s 16,000 public high school students on 19 SFUSD campuses. The Wellness Initiative is a partnership between the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, and SFUSD. Core funding for the Initiative comes from the City of San Francisco’s Children’s Fund and the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF)."

"Now, almost three years later, I have learned to see the traumatic raid as a transformative, maturing experience. Many people thought entering the foster care system would negatively influence me, but I know that this experience is what shaped my dreams of a career in public health."

Joyce Gu’s Story

Would you like to acknowledge the work of an SFUSD school teacher or other district employee?

Visit www.sfsud.edu/rave

This paper is made possible with the support of The Examiner