Students Journey South to Learn Civil Rights History

In the spring of 2008, eight students from Ida B. Wells High, two from Washington High, and approximately 80 students from elsewhere in the country, spent their spring break on a “Sojourn to the Past.” They toured sites in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas to learn first-hand about cornerstone events in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s. To further illuminate their journey, the students met local people who shared their personal stories.

Ida B. Wells Teacher and chaperone Rebekka Jez said that students came to see monuments as more than just a stone, a field, a fountain, or a bridge; they saw them as a resting spot in history. “They learned so much in the intense lectures and readings. They often stayed in silent reflection at memorials for twenty minutes, holding their peers and crying. They all spoke of feeling empowered with their new knowledge.”

Here’s what some of the Ida B. Wells students have to say about their journey:

“During the Sojourn to the Past trip I learned about the Dahmer family and about Vernon Dahmer. Back in the 1960s blacks were allowed to vote, but the government in Mississippi made it almost impossible for them to pass a voting test and pay for registration. Vernon got permission to register people to vote in his store, and he helped pay registration fees.”

Brandi Davis

“One night, The Ku Klux Klan set his house on fire and started to shoot into the house. While his family escaped out the back, Vernon stayed in the front and shot back. He ended up dying of smoke inhalation, but he saved his family. I met his family. I learned that this is the love a family could have if they stick together. They are still a close family, and they showed me how a family should be.”

Brandy Davis

Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Educate Every Child

When veteran superintendent Carlos Garcia came to San Francisco this past July, he did what many new organizational leaders would do - he asked people what the priorities were for the district and looked for examples of how these priorities were visible in the day-to-day operations of the schools.

Garcia quickly determined that, given the challenges of limited resources and a persistent achievement gap, the district needed to do a better job of focusing on priorities. “Our success depends on our ability to focus our resources on our strategic priorities,” says Garcia.

Since then, the Board of Education and the Superintendent have approached strategic planning in a different way. They didn’t want to create a plan that was read once and placed on a shelf to collect dust. The district wanted a plan that was visionary and simple enough that everyone could stay focused on the same goals over the long haul. But they wanted to make it a living document with enough flexibility to incorporate ongoing feedback, make mid-course corrections and evolve as the landscape of schools and the city change and grow. They also wanted multiple measures of progress that would be visible to the whole community and updated regularly. Finally, and

continued on page 12
Lessons We Love

“I love to teach about human organs. First we list all the major organs of the body, and students have to draw where they think they go. We laugh a lot. Then we borrow real donated organs from UCSF, and they get to put on gloves and touch them. I watch these kids turn into real scientists as they propose their scientific question about how a certain organ functions, do their research, teach each other what they learned in class presentations, and evaluate each other. I’m always surprised by how well they describe their process when they talk amongst themselves”

Phuong Nguyen, seventh grade Math & Science teacher, Francisco Middle

“After we study the Maya, Aztec and Inca cultures, I wrap it up with a mural project to highlight the art and architecture. As they study photos of modern-day murals in the Mission District, they see with new eyes how powerful the artistic influence of those cultures still is today. When they present their own (smaller) murals, they have to include an artist statement and explain why they included the elements that they did.” Katherine Ripley, seventh grade Social Studies teacher, Aptos Middle

“My favorite lesson is color mixing. It’s very simple, but I love it because students get to be artists and scientists all at once. We go over primary colors, they begin mixing the primaries to create secondary colors, then we add white or black to get tints of the new colors. Kids’ eyes really light up when they’re mixing. I like to throw a little Language Arts into the lesson by asking them to create an alliterative name for their new color, like ‘Boisterous Blue.’ Sometimes we have time to talk about the industry of color forecasting, too. The whole thing really opens their eyes.” Jake Stokey, Art teacher, James Lick Middle

“I love the very beginning of the year in my journalism class, when I teach the First Amendment. It really opens their eyes to understand that they work with the same rights and responsibilities as any journalist in our country. As they understand this, they begin to understand their purpose as journalists, and I watch their writing improve.”

Ellen Weldon, English Language Arts teacher, Burton High

Math Teachers in Demand

And not a minute too soon. California students suffer from a dismal and persistent shortage of qualified math teachers. A study released in 2007 by the California Council of Science and Technology reports that more than ten percent of math teachers are lacking training and experience in the subject they teach. And at the rate at which teachers are retiring and new teachers are entering the field, California may soon be looking at a thirty percent shortage in qualified math teachers.

“This is a national problem,” said San Francisco Unified School District’s certificated staffing manager, Julia Stuart. “Everyone can’t find enough math teachers.”

SFUSD is involved in several ongoing strategies to recruit more math teachers. This year the district began collaborating with U.C. Berkeley on a new program called CalTeach that encourages students in math and science fields to enter teaching. But the program, which incorporates tutoring experience and education courses, won’t begin graduating potential teachers until the 2009-2010 school year.

The district has also begun working with EnCorps, a program sponsored by the Governor’s office and the Sherry Lansing Foundation, which partners with local businesses in math and science-related fields to set up an early retirement option for employees interested in a second career as a teacher.

“I want to use my experience to show kids that math can be fun and engaging,” says Yuen. “But attracting individuals with relevant experience, or for that matter, a strong love for math, can be challenging when teacher salaries start far below beginning salaries for the majority of graduates with a math-related degree.

“We don’t want any students falling to the wayside,” said Margret Nye, the veteran math teacher overseeing Yuen. “We want every kid walking out of math class saying, ‘I can do it.’”

But first we need to ensure that every student has a teacher that can teach it.

IT ALL ADDS UP – This spring the Jumpstart Coalition awarded the Academy of Finance teachers at Phillip & Sala Burton High for their accomplishments as outstanding educators in financial literacy. Academy of Finance students learn economics, monetary policy, securities, insurance, accounting, tax policy, marketing and international finance. From left to right: Becky Gerek, SFUSD Content Specialist; Sharon Tallon, Pateco Credit Union Member Education Specialist; and Douglas Knight Singer, Academy of Finance teacher at Burton High.

A sixth grade student in Ms. Nye’s math class at Presidio Middle School constructs a prism as part of a pre-algebra lesson on parallelograms and volume.

Fall 2008 School Calendar

Monday, August 25
first day of school

Monday, September 1
Labor Day (no school)

Monday, October 13
Indigenous People’s Day (no school)

Tuesday, November 11
Veteran’s Day (no school)

Wednesday-Friday
November 26-28
Thanksgiving break (no school)

December 22 – Jan. 2
Winter break (no school)
I am Glad America is a Nation of Immigrants

by Kasey Bruce, fifth grade, Sheridan Elementary

The following is an essay submitted to the American Immigration Lawyers Association, which conducts an annual nationwide essay contest around the topic of immigration. Bruce’s essay, excerpted below, won first place for Northern California and third place nationwide.

One day, our teacher asked the class to color in some rainbow worksheets individually. Then he gave each student one colored marker.

Yes, just one! We waited and waited but no more markers were coming. Then we felt confused. We grew frustrated. We turned outraged! We felt insulted, too!

“We can’t color a rainbow with only one color!” “This is Kindergarten work!”

Suddenly, Burton Wu, a classmate known for his problem-solving skills, beamed and whispered excitedly, “Perhaps Mr. Wen wants us to work TOGETHER, combining the different colors we have!”

Hispanic Americans’ contributions are countless. A lot of friends want piñatas for their birthday parties every year. Various Hispanic customs make our lives so rich and festive. Our country is also more equal and fair thanks to leaders such as Cesar Chavez.

At Sheridan Elementary, we learn about people who had different cultures, which guarantees liberty and justice for all. It’s the very best in the world!

My school is called Sheridan Elementary. It is a great place to learn, play, and to grow. Unlike other places, this school has students from around the world. Mr. Wen came from China and Mrs. A. came from Vietnam. Our principal Ms. Khalique’s father was from Bangladesh, and Mr. Cavalli’s parents came from Italy. My father is Caucasian, and my mother is Asian.

I can go on and on, but I think you’ve got the picture.

I am glad that America is a nation of immigrants, great like our school and beautiful like a rainbow.

I truly believe that we are launching into a new era for San Francisco’s public schools. We are fortunate to have a great superintendent in Carlos Garcia and a wealth of excellent school leaders and teachers.

Superintendent Garcia has cultivated positive relationships with governing officials, including the Mayor and Board of Supervisors as well as school board members. And the Board of Education has seized the opportunity to work with a unifying superintendent. The shared priorities of the board and the superintendent are in the new strategic plan - a roadmap for how SFUSD will bridge the gap between our high achieving students and our low achieving students.

The right people and plans are settling into place to create even better public schools for San Francisco, but the budgetary challenges have never been greater. Since 1978, with the passage of Proposition 13, the real problem has been the lack of steady funding to sustain public education. Our school system needs more funding to provide the people and resources necessary to give our students a 21st century learning experience.

San Franciscans agree that we need local control over funds to pay our teachers a living wage. Our schools are losing great teachers to districts that can pay more. For several years, we have been working on bringing a thoughtful measure to the voters that will boost the salaries of teachers and provide additional bonuses for working in hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-fill subject areas like math, science and special education. Proposition A will only pass if approved by two-thirds of voters on June 3, so please be sure to vote.

I look forward to an exciting new school year ahead and wish all of our students a safe summer break. And to those students graduating, I offer sincere congratulations and best wishes for a bright future.

It is that time of year when 4,000 students graduate from San Francisco’s public schools.

Seniors, remember where you’re going when you put on that cap and gown: a commencement ceremony. It’s an appropriate name. Welcome to the beginning of the rest of your life.

And it’s not easy.

You’ve heard it before, but here it goes again: anything worth having requires fighting for. If I can offer you one piece of advice, it’s that if you want things done, you have to make them happen. Don’t simply watch the world around you; be engaged in it. Shake it up and make it happen.

I hope we’ve given you the tools to tackle future endeavors, but understand that you’ve only begun your education. You should never stop learning and enriching your life. An active and aware citizen body is the muscle and might behind any community.

Know that you inspire us to practice what we preach. Our district is working on a strategic plan that we hope will revitalize our schools and our community. The process has reminded me that as lifelong learners we should constantly challenge assumptions about the way things are done. Never be afraid to ask questions. Ever. Without questions we can’t move forward.

It’s been a wonderful year being back in San Francisco, working with the great people that breathe life into this city. My only regret is watching the state continue to let down its greatest resource: its young minds. You deserve better, and as you emerge as leaders in our world, I hope you remember that every child deserves a quality education.

This is the most exciting time in your life and the most uncertain. Have confidence. Life is not about watching the dance; it’s about getting out on the floor and showing people what you’re made of.

I wish you all the best.
Journey South to Learn Civil Rights History

her, but she held her head high and stayed strong.

This made me think of the times I have been treated differently because of my ethnicity and taught me how I can handle those situations better. I know what it is like to be in Minniejean’s position.”

~Horace Tai

“For me, the story of Emmett Till was the most memorable thing I learned on Sojourner. Emmett was a 14-year-old child who once whistled at a white woman. That night, men came to his home and kidnapped and murdered Emmett. His body was thrown into the Mississippi with a 75-pound cotton gin wrapped around his neck. I learned how horrible the conditions were for black people back then, and I see how easy I have it now. We met Emmett’s cousin, Simeon Wright, and he shared how he dealt with his cousin’s death. Hearing how someone dealt with such a horrible thing made me think how amazing it is that people can still come out on top, without hate.”

~Caillen Robinson

“I learned that it took power to overcome the segregation in the 1950s and 60s. Even though African Americans were discriminated against, they still held their heads up high without violence. This showed me that I don’t have to use violence; I can talk instead of just react. Above all, I learned that if you stay a silent witness, you will not know what you are or who you can be.”

~Martin Elmore-Robinson

A unique field trip experience

The organization Sojourn to the Past offers students the chance to travel for ten days through the South visiting the historic civil rights movement sites and hearing from people who witnessed and created the civil rights movement. This tour intends to teach the lessons of tolerance, justice, compassion, hope and non-violence. Students

The San Francisco Quality Teacher and Education Act of 2008

Proposition A, the San Francisco Quality Teacher and Education Act, will be decided by voters on June 3. The following information is provided to inform readers about the contents of this measure.

Proposition A is a $198 annual tax per parcel. Senior citizens are eligible for an exemption from this tax.

The funds raised will be primarily for teacher recruitment, retention and training. In addition, funds generated by Proposition A will help schools upgrade and replace old technologies and school computers.

Proposition A will only pass if approved by two-thirds of voters on June 3.

The San Francisco Unified School District has a long-term strategy to address the most important problems facing schools, and this proposition is a critical part of the solution.

Studies show that well-trained teachers are the most important factor in determining student achievement, yet SFUSD is losing teachers to districts that pay more.

Proposition A will:

- Increase training and professional development opportunities for teachers to stay abreast of the latest teaching methods.
- Increase teacher support and accountability, including mentoring for new teachers and greater assurance that only teachers who meet standards are in the classroom.
- Provide block grants to schools showing the most growth in student achievement.
- Improve academic innovation and upgrade technologies and computer systems at schools.

Since Proposition 13 passed in 1978, California’s per-pupil spending has slid to one of the lowest in the nation. In an effort to create adequate and stable funding for schools, school districts in California have been passing parcel taxes, and other voter-approved funding measures, to generate crucial resources. Examples of other city’s recent parcel tax measures include: Albany 2005 - $250 per parcel; Lafayette 2007 - $313 per parcel; and Kentfield 2008 - $774 per parcel.

Proposition A will require regular independent audits and an independent oversight group to ensure that all proceeds from the parcel tax are spent in the manner approved by voters.

Taking Action to Educate Every Child

most importantly, they wanted a plan that holds each and every individual in the public school system and the community accountable for creating the best outcomes for children.

The result is the Balanced Scorecard, a strategic management system that translates vision into specific, measurable outcomes. The Balanced Scorecard is a planning and accountability tool that has led to great results in other urban districts across the country.

With the balanced scorecard before the school board for approval, SFUSD is at the beginning of a multi-year effort to create systems centered around three primary goals: access and equity, achievement, and accountability. Over the next year, each stakeholder group in the district, from the Board of Education to central office to school sites, will have a scorecard.

“It is imperative that we know where we’re going and how we will get there. Through this work, we will create the public schools that San Francisco’s children, families, and community deserve,” says School Board President Mark Sanchez.

To begin the mammoth undertaking of transformation, the district has three initiatives to organize its efforts.

The Performance Management Initiative will increase the personal and professional capability of every employee in SFUSD.

Building on the idea that everyone, from students to the superintendent, must have the resources, information, and support they need to do well, SFUSD is designing and implementing a comprehensive system of performance management directly connected to the balanced scorecard.

The Equity-Centered Professional Learning Initiative will create and sustain professional learning communities. This initiative will develop the conditions and structures within SFUSD to challenge all forms of inequity and develop opportunities for staff to learn from each other.

The third initiative is called the 21st Century Curriculum Initiative. This initiative is about ensuring that classroom instruction is personalized, relevant, meaningful and engaging for each student. To create socially conscious and globally competitive students, technological literacy and critical thinking skills will be embedded in the curriculum and in all the subjects that compose this broader, more rigorous curriculum.

“San Francisco and the American public recognize the urgency to move our education system into the 21st century. Our education system is not keeping pace with our kids’ aspirations. We are educating children to a world that doesn’t exist anymore,” says Superintendent Carlos Garcia.

That is, until now.

To learn more about the district’s strategic plan, go to www.sfusd.edu.

YOUNG AT ART - The de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park, in partnership with SFUSD, will host the 22nd annual Young at Art Festival, a showcase of San Francisco students’ talent and creativity May 17-25. More than a thousand works of art will be on display. Pictured above are shoes made of leaves and flowers, created by Lowell students Juliana Hiura, Caitlin Ng and Patricia To, which were part of last year’s exhibition.

at Ida B. Wells High have participated in Sojourner since 2001.

The trip costs $2,500 per student. Students and staff raised funds with a letter writing campaign, fundraisers, staff donations, violence prevention funds, as well as a grant from the organization Sojourn to the Past.

San Francisco Unified School District

Volume II Issue III

Published by the San Francisco Unified School District

Executive Editor, Gentle Blythe
Managing Editor, Heidi Anderson
Assistant Editor, Mitzi Mock

Office of Public Outreach & Communications
555 Franklin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
415-241-6565
email: newsline@sfusd.edu
visit: www.sfusd.edu

This paper is made possible with the support of The Examiner