



# Watsonville/Aptos Adult Education News and Views

*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. - Eleanor Roosevelt*



Vol.4 No. 29

The "Graduation" Issue

May 31, 2005



Congratulations to our inimitable, classy, accomplished "tenured teacher" class of 2006! From the left Karen Reid, Sonia Morrison, Bob, Elizabeth Cunningham, and Jane Reyes.

## ***Persistence Study Circle***

***By Cary Keisler***

I was volunteered by my peers to do the write up for this activity. Since I was volunteered, I am going to write about my experience. And you can ask the others what they thought of it.

First off, we all realize how we feel on a Friday afternoon. We are tired and worn out from being on all week. Well, the first session I wasn't the only one dragging in the door. Most of us were dragging into the room at every session. Even though that was how we walked in, by the time the three hours had passed, most of us felt energized. There was definitely a lot of laughter. Most of the volunteers completed all three sessions: Deborah Craig, Elizabeth Cunningham, CathyJo Diaz; Marilyn Files, Burr Guthrie, Kim Iwasko, Amy Jewell, Cary Keisler, Karen Reid, Cynthia Stark, with AV Coyle as the trained facilitator. (Cont. on page 2)

## **End-of School Staff Meeting**

***Saturday, June 4  
10:00-12:00 (paid)  
Porter, Room 6***

### *Agenda*

1. School Report: How did we do this year?
2. "Persistence Projects"
3. Passages: Faculty/Staff recognitions
4. Focus Groups for Renewal of our School Improvement Plan.
  - A. Organization: N. Carranco
  - B. Curriculum: K. Reid
  - C. Student Support: A.V.
  - D. Resources: M. Hillyer

## *Persistence Study Circle (cont. from page 1)*

The process was developed around the reading of assigned NCSALL articles from the Harvard research website concerning the topic of "student persistence". I know I grumbled at having to do the readings, like I have more than 24 hours in a day. The group established a set of norms for the study circle, and responded in groups to questions and activities designed by NCSALL to facilitate input and interaction. It was interesting seeing how we all felt about being "prepared" for class.

Some of the authors included in the readings were J. Comings, A. Parrella, L. Soricone, A. Belzer, T. Sticht, B. McDonald, P. Erickson and several others. We agreed that the articles were relevant, informative, thought provoking and included some data that we could talk about during a session. The articles were good reading. We learned the latest "and the greatest" terms used in the discussion arena of student persistence. Some of the old terms are still present. Some terms were **positive and negative forces**, **stopping out** instead of dropping out, **turbulence** refers to the numbers of adult student who add and drop from a class during a semester, and **persistence** refers to how many students complete a course of study.

For those of you that like data, some of the positive and negative forces identified by learners were of interest, but only 150 learners were included in the study. The interesting outcomes were 8% (N=12) identified program supports (facilities and structure of program, overall program quality, and program counselors) and another was 7.3% (N=11) identified child care, conditions at home, mandatory participation, work schedules, pleasure in being in U.S. and students' own investment in class) as a positive force. Positive forces that we would all recognize were instruction, relationships, goals, and teacher/students, and positive self all received 44% or higher. Interesting negative forces included 2% (N=3) for teacher, and 1.3% (N= 2) for program factors including curriculum, methods, subjects, and computer access. The highest on the negative side was life demands (home, work, health, etc;) with 48.7% (N=73), which does not surprise any of us.

The last session included six very structured strategies for a needs assessment activity. The six activities used a variety of methods to include all students in the process. The study circle offered us time to share strategies, better define learner persistence, participate in a staff development activity, and research learner persistence as a vested group. It was hard to keep us from talking, sharing, and laughing. AV even had to resort to using a bell to quiet us down. I am sure each of us would welcome questions about the process and our findings.

The Study Circle Model as been very well received in a number of institutions, including adult schools across California. There has been a suggestion that we continue this at our school next Fall. Are you interested? For more information about "research-to-practice" initiatives for adult educators in California, go to the state website:

<http://www.calpro-online.org/>

## ***Reflection of my experience on the WASC credentialing team***

***By Kim Iwasko***

As I drove to Coalinga, California as a Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation team member many thoughts and concerns raced through my mind. I wondered if I would have the skills necessary to evaluate a school and decide on which term of credentialing would be valid. I was further worried about the school itself. I had been assigned to Pleasant Valley Adult School, which is inside Pleasant Valley State Prison. It is maximum-security prison with more than 5,000 male inmates.

When the third steel gate slammed shut behind me, I knew that this experience would change me somehow. At that point I wasn't sure how or at what level, but I could feel something awakening. My preconceived visions of what a prison looked like and what the men would be like was radically challenged. My first reflection was that the adult school was aesthetically beautiful. If I ignored the three walls of barbed wire and electrical/razor fencing and focused on the roses and murals the school was beautiful. Inside the school there are roses of every variety. The general population of inmates can earn a job in the prison, and taking care of the roses is a vocational training and a job.

I learned that in order for a student to be eligible for a vocational training they must have completed their G.E.D. program or have a High school Diploma. The school provides G.E.D. training and soon to

## ***Reflection of my experience on the WASC credentialing team***

have a High school diploma program. All students are given the CASAS and TABE tests when they first arrive in the prison's custody. Based on that score they are either directed to ABE 1, ABE 2, ABE 3, or Pre-GED or GED classes. Upon completion of the G.E.D. students can then study in a wide variety of vocational classes included, carpentry, masonry, electrician training, woodworking, landscaping, office careers and janitorial/maintenance.

There is another condition for training. Under the restrictions of custody and the governing Prison code students that are a threat to their own or others safety are not permitted in the classes. As I was starting to feel like the school was as normal as an other school, I saw as plain as day a two-inch thick steel bared human cage that was barely big enough to fit an average size man. This cage is used to put the inmates that get out of control in the classroom. The classes are required to maintain a 27:1 -student/teacher ratio.

The teachers and administrative staff, custodial staff, instructors, and others that I met displayed friendly, positive attitudes and amazing professionalism. The school and prison work together and communicate the many needs of the students. They do this by having Department heads, Leadership Teams, Study Circles and Home Groups. They communicate interdepartmentally though campus in-services and memos. They noted that communication can be challenging when there are close to eighty teachers. They are separated by security yards as

## ***Reflection of my experience on the WASC credentialing team***

well. A level four-yard has higher security and restrictions than a level 1-2 yard. There are four security level yards and each yard has separate training programs and available classes. Teachers' work in various departments all over the 400-acre prison grounds. Teachers' rarely have opportunities to discuss things casually and in passing. Communication must be planned and well organized. Security and safety are always an issue for the instructors and PVAS.

The most memorable moment for me was when our credentialing committee was in a paneled discussion with the inmate students. They naturally segregated themselves in front of us. There were five White men, five Black men and five Hispanic/Latino men. The most outspoken and more verbally articulate of the students was a Black man named Bob. He told us that if someone really wanted to learn a trade inside the prison they could. He did say however that there were numerous barriers preventing the students from being more successful. He told us that the libraries were never open. He said that the only books available were the law case file books. There were no periodicals, newspapers, etc. He said that was very frustrating for him. He wanted to remain connected to the outside world and to know what skills were needed and most current on the outside. The other students all agreed that the library was never open.

It became clear that after the student informational interviewing that the libraries were lacking in materials and accessibility at PVAS.

## ***Reflection of my experience on the WASC credentialing team***

As a result of this finding the WASC accreditation team decided that would be a suggested improvement for the PVAS. My area of focus for the WASC accreditation team was School Organization. I felt very proud, useful and competent being able to notice that there weren't any true authentic assessments for gauging student achievements. I was able to spear-head discussions regarding what might authentic assessments look like at PVAS and it was thrilling to be able to recognize and know the difference between standardized testing and authentic assessments.

The experience changed me. I feel grateful for my freedom. I feel connected to the invisible people of society. I feel somehow responsible to do more to educate my adult students so they can make educated decisions to keep them out of prison. I further strongly believe that people can be rehabilitated. I will never give up hope and I truly believe that it is the core belief as an educator that all students can learn to use their hearts and minds well.

Editorial comment from Bob: Almost without fail, those educators who are selected to serve on WASC visiting committees return with a sense of renewed purpose. Over the years I have found it to be my most effective and authentic professional development activity. You go to another institution, see the work of peers, learn from them, share ideas with them, and return to your own school with new eyes. Although you are not paid for this hard work, your expenses are covered by WASC and you are given released time by your own school (us). Also talk to A.V. Coyle, Burr Guthrie, and Jane McCormick who served on committees this year. If anyone is interested in making yourself available to serve on a visiting committee, talk to Bob and/or visit the WASC website to get more information (including the application you will submit to WASC.)

**<http://www.acswasc.org/>**

# **First ESL Awards Ceremony**

The First Annual ESL Recognition Ceremonies happened in front of hundreds of ESL students, family and our school's staff. The highpoint to the ceremonies in the Mello Center was the speeches from ESL alumni who had come back to tell stories of their success. By all accounts these stories were very emotionally powerful to most of our current students. Few things have a greater impact on our students than seeing and hearing the success stories of ex-students.

Most teachers expressed appreciation for the events. The overwhelming majority of student evaluations turned in so far also express appreciation and enthusiasm for the event. There was agreement that the ceremonies went on too long, and that babysitting would be appreciated.

Some teachers (and students) expressed a concern over "awarding" some students and not others. "What were the awards for?" asked one teacher. That's a good question.

Thanks to Cathy Jo who did so much to get these ceremonies off the ground this year. She would like a group of teachers to meet and talk about how to improve next time.

*Dear WAAE classified and certificated staff,*

*I feel so proud to work at WAAE with each and every one of you. After attending our **ESL Home Group Department Meeting** I thought, "These teachers are so professional! It feels good to be with people that are really into their job and desirous to do the best for their students."*

*After the **ESL Awards Ceremony** several teachers came up to me and told me they had tears in their eyes, that now they can see the big picture. "Now I can see what my BL 1 students can do. I haven't been here long enough to understand the impact of teaching them English."*

*I remember speaking with a teacher 3 years ago as she saw former students come in and tell me of their new jobs, attending WAAE office skills classes, Cabrillo classes, etc. I told her, "In a few years the same will happen to you. The students you have now will complete their ESL classes and move on." She looked at me with uncertainty or maybe curiosity in her expression. Today her former BL 1 students are now registering for Cabrillo, volunteering at Freedom as teachers' aides, have completed their GEDs and so forth.*

*I have been at WAAE for 20 years. I know students that started in BL 1 and they are now nurses, teachers, social workers, preschool teachers, business owners, Cabrillo College students, university students and so on. Their children are doing the same as a result of their parents' examples. You/We make a huge impact on the lives of our students, and in turn on the lives of everyone in their lives; children, spouses, etc.. Watsonville and the community at large is a better community for the work that we/you do. It is quite profound and I feel very proud to be a part of this with all of you.*

*Keep up the good work! Today a field worker and in the future a .....*

*Sincerely,*

*CathyJo Diaz, ESL Student Advisor*



# WAAE Spring Calendar

Graduation Ceremonies, Friday, June 3, 7:30pm, Mello Center

## **End-of-School All Staff Meeting,**

Saturday, June 4, 10:00-12:00 (paid)

Porter Building, Room 6

*Agenda*

1. School Report: How did we do this year? How have our efforts remained in alignment with our School Improvement Plan? What improvements have we made in the last three years?
2. "Persistence Projects"
3. Passages: Faculty/Staff recognitions
4. Focus Groups for Renewal of our School Improvement Plan.  
For the second hour we'll divide up into four groups in order to have discussions about how school can continue to improve in these next three years of our accreditation. These are the groups with their facilitator.
  - A. Organization for Student Learning: Natalie Carranco
  - B. Curriculum and Instruction: Karen Reid
  - C. Student Connectedness and Support Services: A.V.Coyle
  - D. Resources: Michael Hillyer

"Intersession, many classes running June 6-11, (ask your dept. chair)  
Summer school begins, June 13

Monday, July 4, no school

***Summer School: June 13 - July 29, 2005***

***Classified Retreat (Bob's house): August 10***

***School Council Retreat, August 11***

***Back-to-School Meeting, August 12***

***Fall Semester Begins, August 15***

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**Fall Schedules and Assignments are being made now. There may be opportunities for new classes in the Lifelong Learning Dept., see Jane Reyes. There may be "leadership" assignments open in both CBET and the Career Technical Ed. Department.**

**Check postings next week!!**