



Mid-Year Program Report for 2005-2006

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Table of Contents

Policy Background.....	2
CEI's Academic Improvement Program	3
The Learning Center Program at Thomas R. Pollicita Middle School, Daly City, California	4
Program Description	4
Program Goals and Objectives	4
Recent Program Developments	5
Summer High School Transition Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California	5
Program Description	5
Program Goals and Objectives	6
Recent Program Developments	6
Learning Center Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California.....	6
Program Description	6
Program Goals and Objectives	7
Recent Program Developments	7
School Within a School (SWAS) Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California	8
Program Description	8
Program Goals and Objectives	9
Recent Program Developments	9
College Readiness Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California ..	10
Program Description	10
Program Goals and Objectives	11
Recent Program Developments	11
Conclusion.....	12

Children's Empowerment Mid-Year Program Report for 2005-2006

Children's Empowerment, Inc. (CEI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that provides in-school and after-school academic programs to at-risk middle and high school grade students in Daly City, California. Founded in 1999, we have been working in Daly City since 2000 in partnership with local school districts. CEI focuses on students in underperforming Daly City public schools who want to achieve but face formidable economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers to their educational success.

CEI's Academic Improvement Program currently includes: (1) the Learning Center at Pollicita Middle School, hosting 53 students daily; (2) the Summer Transition Program for Pollicita graduates at Jefferson High School, assisting 40 students; (3) the Learning Center at Jefferson, hosting about 100 students daily; (4) the School Within a School (SWAS) Program at Jefferson, assisting 80 students; and (5) the College Readiness Program at Jefferson, assisting 60 students. Taken together, CEI serves a total of 333 students. These programs provide a continuum of support for local at-risk students at Jefferson High School and at Pollicita, which is Jefferson's principal feeder school. We are pleased to provide you with a 2005-2006 Mid-Year Report on our programs.

Policy Background

As was reported on in the *New York Times* (August 11, 2005), the U.S. Census Bureau identified California's San Mateo County as one of six counties in the country that have experienced the greatest increases in minority populations. Daly City, San Mateo County's northernmost community, is not only a "minority-majority" city, but has a majority of residents (52%) who were foreign-born. California itself will become an increasingly "minority-majority" state in the decades to come, especially in the demographics of our youngest generation. We have an obligation to ensure that these young people become successful, responsible, and productive citizens.

Policymakers are beginning to pay attention to the problems of America's older suburbs, such as Daly City. The Brookings Institute recently released a report by Bruce Katz and Robert Puentes entitled: *One Fifth of America: A Comprehensive Guide to America's First Suburbs*. This study looked at 64 inner suburban counties, including San Mateo County in California. It provides some surprising facts and many problems that we have long suspected or known existed locally. These facts include:

- More people (52 million or 18.6%) now live in the inner suburbs than in the central cities (36 million or 12.9%).
- Demographically and economically, the inner suburbs are becoming more like distressed neighborhoods in nearby cities.
- More foreign-born residents reside in inner suburbs (17%) than in central cities (11%).

In the last census, 32.3% of the residents of San Mateo County were foreign-born, the fourth largest percentage among America's inner suburban counties. Only Dade County in Florida, Hudson County in New Jersey, and Los Angeles County have more foreign-born residents.

Over the last thirty years, poverty rates in these inner suburbs have been rising steadily even as they have leveled off in central cities. While the number of neighborhoods highly impacted by poverty is dropping sharply in central cities throughout the county, it is increasing at an alarming rate in the inner suburbs. The poverty rate varies considerably, however, by race and ethnicity, with inner suburban blacks and Hispanics two to three times more likely to live in poverty than whites. The report concludes that the inner suburbs are currently a "policy blindspot," as the attention of government and private funders is often focused on the widely-recognized problems of central cities instead.

CEI's Academic Improvement Program

CEI's Academic Improvement Program currently includes: (1) the Learning Center at Pollicita Middle School, hosting 53 students daily; (2) the Summer Transition Program for Pollicita graduates at Jefferson High School, assisting 40 students; (3) the Learning Center at Jefferson, hosting about 100 students daily; (4) the School Within a School (SWAS) Program at Jefferson, assisting 80 students; and (5) the College Readiness Program at Jefferson, assisting 60 students. Taken together, CEI serves a total of 333 students. These programs provide a continuum of support for local at-risk students at Jefferson High School and at Pollicita, which is Jefferson's principal feeder school. We are pleased to provide you with a 2005-2006 Mid-Year Report on our programs.

The Learning Center Program at Thomas R. Pollicita Middle School, Daly City, California

"From our analysis of participating students' grades and performance on assessments, I can say that CEI was effective in increasing their academic performance . . . CEI provided additional support to needy students by helping them improve not only their grades but their behavior in their classes."

- Jay Spaulding, Principal, Pollicita Middle School

Program Description

This is the second full year of operations for CEI's Learning Center at the Thomas R. Pollicita Middle School in Daly City. The Learning Center offers underperforming students the only place they have after school that is a safe environment in which to learn. Besides tutoring, CEI challenges these younger students with educational games that help develop their self-esteem and their ability to work with others. CEI also provides a variety of healthy sandwiches, snacks, fruits and drinks each day.

The tutoring program at Pollicita is carried out by a team of advanced placement and honors students from Jefferson High School, the destination school for most of the Pollicita Middle School Students. All of them are themselves ethnic minority students who have successfully overcome adversity in their pursuit of academic accomplishment. The tutoring takes place after school in four classrooms, overseen by supervisor tutors who are now college students (from San Francisco State University, City College of San Francisco, and Skyline Junior College) and former tutors at Jefferson and students at Pollicita. They are likewise ethnic minority students who serve as outstanding examples of academic success and are now eager to assist younger students who are attending the same schools they once attended themselves. This project structure makes it possible for the program to operate with a minimum of prudent adult supervision and a maximum of involvement by young people who know these schools, these neighborhoods, and these younger students well.

Program Goals and Objectives

The goals of this program are to provide one-on-one and group tutoring to at least 50 students per day and to provide all participants with a healthy, after-school snack. Success is quantified using the following criteria:

- an average of 50 students or more will use the Learning Center each day
- at least 100 students will report using the Learning Center at least 4 times per month
- at least 50% of Pollicita's highest risk students (those with a GPA of 2.0 or lower) will access help at the Learning Center

- at least 75% of students using the Learning Center will report that it has been useful to them.

Recent Program Developments

Academically at-risk students at Pollicita are now being enrolled in the Learning Center program to encourage regular attendance. The program's eighth graders have shown improvement in math and science after just a few weeks of attendance. Students first complete their homework. Then, they participate in math problem solving competitions. At first, these students were unable to solve even basic arithmetic problems, such as simple multiplication, but after many months of practice, they regularly solve algebraic and geometry problems, such as finding the area and perimeter of a rectangle, square and triangle.

The program's seventh graders have also shown improvements, particularly in math. Their basic skills are reinforced by the regular homework they receive, which is completed under tutor supervision in the Learning Center. An effective technique has been to making math problems relevant to everyday life by replacing numbers with objects in real life situations.

The program's sixth graders have generally had very sharp basic math skills and are very mature and respectful for their age. Their problems have not been with the content itself, but rather the effort of "staying on task." Tutors step in to help motivate these students and ensure that they complete their work.

Four new tutors, all members of the Jefferson High School band, joined the program last semester. An unexpected benefit is that students can relax after they've completed their homework through learning new skills, such as reading and playing music.

"I can say without reservation that the services provided through Children's Empowerment have played an integral role in improving student grades and overall achievement in district and state assessments in the areas of math and reading."

—Brent Marquez-Valenti, Vice-Principal, Pollicita Middle School

Summer High School Transition Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California

Program Description

The Summer High School Transition program is designed to assist middle school students in making a positive transition, both socially and academically, to high school.

The primary objective is to provide eighth graders at Pollicita Middle School with vital connections to their new school, Jefferson High School, using the power of peers helping peers, to insure academic and social success in a safe and caring community.

Program Goals and Objectives

The Summer High School Transition Program aims to:

- make students aware of the rigorous reading and writing demands of a high school curriculum
- assess and improve students' abilities in the areas of reading, writing, and comprehension
- train students in strategic reading by developing a toolkit of reading strategies that students can utilize to access information across the curriculum, especially in English and science
- lay a positive foundation for reading, writing, and academic attitudes and behaviors
- sustain academic growth from the previous year by keeping students engaged in academics during the summer

Recent Program Developments

We expect to offer this program again this summer, repeating the positive experiences last year's inaugural effort. Program planning will begin later this spring.

Learning Center Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California

It's been difficult to keep players on the Jefferson High School basketball team because of academic requirements. So the coach sent 20 players who were experiencing academic difficulty to the Learning Center. Nearly half of them boosted their academic performance, leading the coach to remark that his team's grades this past semester were the best for any basketball team that he could remember.

Program Description

This has been the third year of operations for CEI's after-school Learning Center at Jefferson High School. The mission of the center is to assist all of Jefferson High School's students in all academic classes with homework assistance, tutoring, a place to study and the support needed in order for students to succeed in the classroom. Jefferson High School has provided the school's cafeteria for the operation of the Homework Center. The room is very large with sufficient seating for students to spread out and adequate lighting for studying. The center is open Monday through Thursday, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., which provides a safe environment to learn while offering a variety of healthful sandwiches, snacks, fruit and drinks each day at no cost to the students.

This year we have moved even more aggressively to address the needs of two groups of students facing special challenges: those experiencing difficulty passing the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), estimated at 200—over a third—of the school's juniors and seniors; and those who are English Language Learners (ELLs), estimated at about 300 students. We have opened a CAHSEE-specific location in the school library called the Grad Zone, while ELLs participate in a part of the original Learning Center location called the Learning Zone.

Program Goals and Objectives

The overall goals for the Learning Center at Jefferson High School are to provide one-on-one and group tutoring to at least 50 students per day and a healthy after-school snack to all participants. Success is quantified using the following criteria:

- an average of 50 students or more will use the Learning Center each day
- at least 100 students will report using the Learning Center at least 4 times per month
- at least 50% of Pollicita's highest risk students (those with a GPA of 2.0 or lower) will access help at the Learning Center
- at least 75% of students using the Learning Center will report that it has been useful to them

We've also set goals and desired outcomes for the two special student groups: our goal is to serve at least 50 of the 200 juniors and seniors who have not yet passed one or both parts of the CAHSEE. We will consider the program successful if 50 students needing assistance attend the Grad Zone regularly, and when all 50 students pass the CAHSEE. For the ELL students, our goal is to offer tutorial and homework assistance to at least 25 students in the Learning Zone. We will consider the program successful if 25 ELL students attend regularly; if half of those demonstrate improvement in reading skills as evidenced by comparison of 2005 and 2006 achievement test scores; and at least half of these students pass all of their classes this year.

Recent Program Developments

Attendance in the Learning Center exceeded expectations in the fall semester, averaging 75 students daily. As the spring semester begins, we are experiencing an even greater number of students dropping in to take advantage of the services the Learning Center offers.

We have dedicated five new laptop computers to the Learning Zone, bringing the total number of laptops available to ten. Students use the computers to work on essays, create

PowerPoint presentations, and put the finishing touches on homework assignments they need to turn in the next day to their teachers. Many of these students do not have access to computers at home. Our ELL students in the Learning Zone are assisted by a CEI teacher who is an expert in literacy skills enhancement and tutors who speak Spanish or Tagalog.

The CAHSEE students in the Grad Zone have been able to work on 25 computers equipped with Plato, an award-winning, self-instructional software program designed to help students pass high school exit exams. CEI tutors with training in special education provide one-on-one assistance. In January 2006, we received welcome news from the results of the November 2005 CAHSEE administration. Twenty-seven of fifty-five students in the Grad Zone who had previously failed to pass in their junior or senior year, have this time passed either one or both (Math or English) parts of the test after a mere six weeks of assistance from the Grad Zone. We look forward to many more students succeeding when they take the CAHSEE at its next administration in March 2006.

When we look at the overall student performance on the test, we see a direct correlation between time/effort and success. Therefore, as we get closer to the next CAHSEE administration in March, we are emphasizing "commitment leads to success." We believe the key to success in the Grad Zone is building and reinforcing commitment on the part of the students to take direct responsibility for their own academic performance. CEI's teachers are working with Jefferson's Special Education teachers to structure attendance schedules for the Grad Zone that are clearly defined and reinforced through follow-up with students, teachers and parents.

"I have been pleased with the addition of the Grad Zone to the resources available to Jefferson's special education students. This year, even as this program was just beginning, I have seen it make a difference for some of our students. Since September, those students who attend the Grad Zone and use the tutorial services at least two times a week have improved their grades and scored higher on content tests."

—Joan Affeck, Resource Specialist and Department Chair for Special Education

School Within a School (SWAS) Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California

Program Description

The 2005-06 school year represents the fourth year the School Within a School (SWAS) program has been offered. Each year, the program has focused on equipping 40 at-risk sophomore students with the personal and academic tools they need to complete high

school and pursue higher education. To do this, SWAS utilizes the school district's Title I funding to hire four teachers to provide personalized but challenging instruction in the core curriculum (English, mathematics, social studies, and science) in small classes (maximum of 20 students) four times daily throughout the school year.

For the first time this year, CEI is also offering the SWAS program for freshmen at Jefferson High School. Incoming freshmen at Jefferson have a median reading level of grade six, exacerbated by large numbers of students who are not proficient in English. The Freshmen SWAS program is closely modeled on CEI's existing program for sophomores at Jefferson and, like that program, serves 40 students.

Program Goals and Objectives

Our goals for the SWAS program are enrolling 80 high-risk freshmen and sophomores in the program, providing reduced-size classes in four core subjects, coordinating with the after school homework assistance available in CEI's Learning Center, and providing team building and enrichment services throughout the year. We measure success with the following criteria:

- at least 75% of SWAS students will complete the program with 10 or fewer unexcused absences
- at least two-thirds will demonstrate improved GPAs, with at least 10% at a 3.0 GPA or higher
- at least 50% of SWAS students will complete the credits needed to advance to the 11th grade
- standardized test scores for at least 50% of SWAS students will be at or above the school average

Recent Program Developments

The teacher at Pollicita Middle School identified 40 students whom they believed were at-risk for failing high school. Thirty-seven students in danger of not being promoted to the ninth grade enrolled in the freshman SWAS program during the fall semester. Of those, twenty passed all four of their SWAS classes (Academic Literacy, English, Earth Science, and Algebra A) with Cs or better. Twelve students passed all of their classes (PE and electives included) with Cs or better. Two students failed one SWAS class and eleven failed two or more SWAS classes. This year the majority are on track to receive all their credits to advance to tenth grade.

In the beginning of the year, it was a struggle to get students settled in fewer than fifteen minutes. Now students are reading and analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, working

collaboratively on a PowerPoint presentation on earthquake patterns, and moving quickly through the concepts in Algebra A. We worried initially about taking them as a whole group on field trips because of their behavior. But we have been able take the entire group through the Ropes Course, where they worked enthusiastically to help each other face some seriously challenging physical tasks. They also went to a local Barnes & Noble bookstore where they found books they now can't put down. These are not quantitative data points; nevertheless, they point to a thoroughly encouraging sign—these young people are now real *students*.

There was also encouraging news for our SWAS sophomores. Out of the 40 sophomores who completed the fall semester last year, 8 students received passing grades (C or higher) in all of their classes, 9 received passing grades in 5 out of 6 classes, and 12 received passing grades in 4 out of 6 classes. Twenty-one of the forty students improved their GPAs: three students are doing so well, the instructors have recommended them to Jefferson's honors program next year. We anticipate even more improvement in the second semester, as change takes time for some students, especially those who have been underperforming for years.

To help students in the program who are struggling, CEI teachers provide after-school homework assistance in SWAS classrooms. This has proven to be a resource for SWAS students who are in danger of failing one or more courses. Three sophomore SWAS students serve as good examples. One student earned the first B of his entire life this past semester, mostly because he attended the after-school sessions faithfully each day and completed his homework, something he was never willing to do before this year. Two other students started the year struggling, earning Fs on their first and second progress reports. These two students were put on contracts to receive homework assistance every day for the last five weeks of the fall semester. With parental support, they fulfilled their contracts, and both passed all of their classes for the semester.

College Readiness Program at Jefferson High School, Daly City, California

Program Description

CEI is offering the College Readiness Program for 60 academically promising freshmen at Jefferson High School. Although many of Jefferson's honors students enter high school with a plan to go to college, the number of students who actually attend 4-year schools directly out of high school is very low. Somewhere along the way, personal, cultural, and academic obstacles get in the way of college. Many of our brightest students attend

community college or do not attend college at all. There have been many cases in which students who have competitive academic records do not even apply to college despite Jefferson High School's encouragement. These students need more than our encouragement. They need to see that college is within their reach and practical. Most of our students will be the first in their families to attend college—some are the first even to graduate from high school. College (higher education in general) is not the logical next step as it is for so many students in the country who are expected and expect to attend college.

Program Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of this program is to promote awareness of college options among freshmen at Jefferson High School and increase their motivation by making the goal of college realistic, desirable, and attainable. Specific objectives for our program are to:

- make students aware of the rigorous reading and writing demands of a collegiate environment
- help students become more competitive when applying to college by providing support for AP/Honors classes such as English, U.S. History, Biology and Calculus
- encourage students to sign up to take SAT, ACT, AP, and Subject A exams

Recent Program Developments

We began with the data that half of the freshmen honors students at Jefferson will not remain in the program by the time they are seniors. CEI reviewed the program with the teachers to analyze the disappointing retention rate. What we learned is that these students typically are neglecting the additional reading that is required of honors students at Jefferson. To this end, we are planning activities that we expect will interest these students in reading and open their eyes to the possibility of a college career, such as a visit to the local Barnes & Noble bookstore (already done with great success for our SWAS freshmen and sophomores). Many students had never been in a bookstore! Another activity is to take these students on field trips to higher educational institutions, such as University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, San Francisco State University, the Academy of Art College, and the Culinary Academy. We intend to introduce the students to graduates of Jefferson High School at these institutions who are enjoying successful college careers.

Conclusion

A key to CEI's success is the consistent, unstinting support we receive from administrators of the school districts and schools in which we work. Their expressions of appreciation are a most valued tribute to our work.

David Mineta, member of the Board of Trustees of the Jefferson Union High School District, has written: "Time and again, the data presented to the Board of Trustees has shown consistent improvement of students receiving CEI services. Because incoming freshmen at Jefferson High School read at a sixth-grade, eight month proficiency, we must make up years of grade level deficiencies during students' attendance at Jefferson. Individual student achievement appears to be improving, judging from GPA data, testing data, and also CAHSEE pass rates. With the unflappable persistence of CEI and school staff efforts, I believe the academic turnaround at Jefferson is underway."

Finally, CEI would like to thank you for your interest in an invaluable financial support of our programs. We will be back to you this summer with a final report on our program operations in Academic Year 2005-2006. Thank you!

Spencer Holeman
Executive Director