Sac State program serves a community in need

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Sacramento State’s nationally recognized 65th Street Corridor Community Collaborative Project.

Created to increase student academic achievement, foster student leadership, and improve parent participation for disadvantaged children living in neighborhoods, the project has been a godsend to the community. It has countered gang violence and promoted education, thereby providing hope to students and their parents.

The project serves middle and high schools in Sacramento’s 65th Street corridor, a low-income and diverse community that extends from Elvas to Broadway adjacent to the University campus. Sac State faculty and students work with administrators, teachers, students, and parents from these schools to build a healthier, more engaged and vibrant community. This interaction between campus and the 65th Street corridor creates a forum for community concerns.

Project director Professor Gregory Yee Mark is justifiably proud of the program that has enabled parents and their children to envision a world of educational opportunity they might otherwise miss. It’s also touched the lives of Sac State students involved with the project.

Mark recalls one student who wasn’t doing well until she got involved two years ago. Having worked her way from tutoring kids to coordinating school activities, she’s on track to graduate this spring. A 2010 graduate, he notes, became so committed to the project that she continued working with disadvantaged kids. Then there is senior Eduardo Ramirez who kept working with an uncommunicative student and persuaded
him to consider going to college. “I’m certain he will make it,” Ramirez says, “because this program motivates kids to believe in themselves.”

Working with parents, students and school administrators, Mark, his students and staff have placed about 100 students each year at Will C. Wood Middle School and Hiram Johnson High School, while serving more than 2,000 community members.

The project’s tutoring and mentoring program addresses the schools’ low standardized test scores, poor academic performance, and at-risk student behavior. The Student Bridge Program provides information about college preparation and increase access to higher education for students whose field trips to the Sac State’s campus expose them to college culture.

The Parent Bridge Program brings parents to campus for a day, Mark says, to help demystify the college experience with interactive workshop sessions on topics ranging from financial aid to student opportunities. It encourages parents to help prepare their children for the rigors of higher learning.

The 65th Street Project is a comprehensive model of change for local residents and students. Mark, who specializes in preventing youth violence, is no less committed to providing at-risk kids a chance to go to college. He’s consistently tweaking the project to meet the community’s needs. A new after-school program at Hiram Johnson High School to tutor and assist non-English speaking newcomers and a drug prevention program as part of the science curriculum at Will C. Wood Middle School are designed to make Sac State’s core mission of teaching, learning and service even more relevant to a community in need.

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