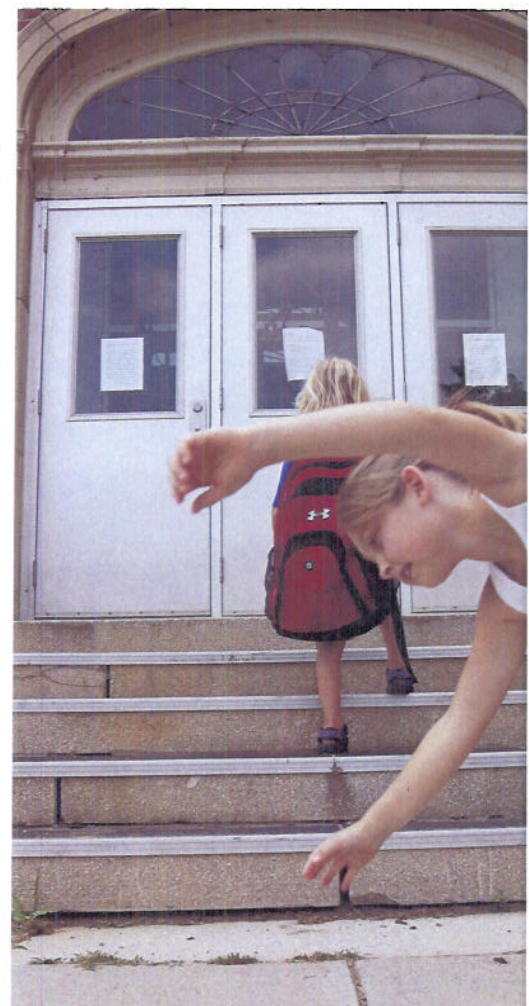


FIELD NOTES

VOLUME IV, ISSUE 2, FALL 2008

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At the headquarters of Paramount Farming Company, MAT Program director Ric Campbell (center) meets with teachers from three Central Valley school districts.

The Bard MAT Program in California: A College/Public School Partnership

By Ric Campbell

In 2009, an unprecedented corporate commitment will allow Bard College's MAT Program to open a satellite campus, including a charter school, in California's Central Valley.

Imagine a visit to a different kind of school.

Classes are smaller in this school—20 students, on average, rather than the more typical 28 to 32 students you'd find in other area schoolrooms.

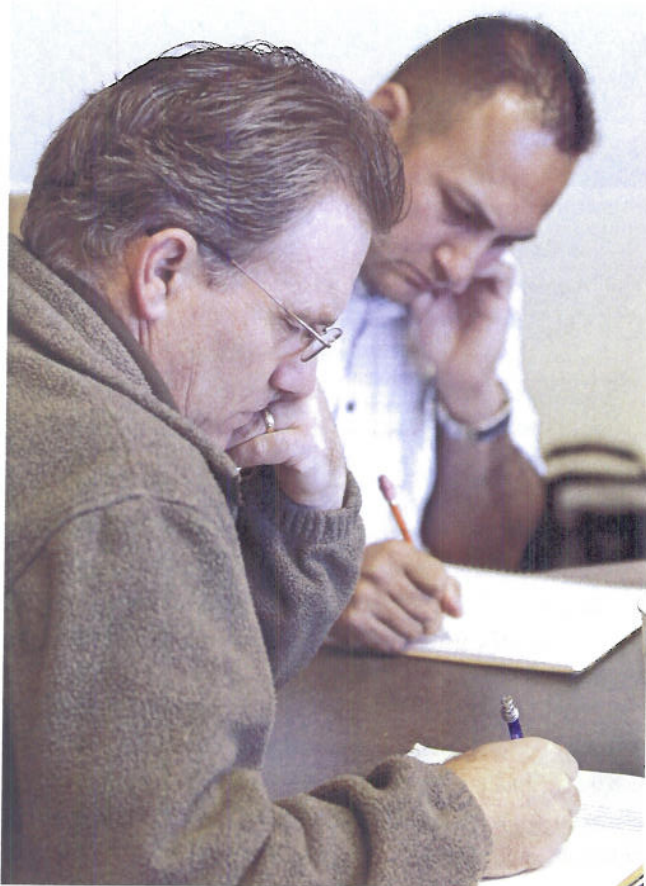
The classrooms themselves are configured differently. Instead of rows of single desks facing in a single direction, the rooms are furnished with trapezoidal tables that are easily moved into a variety of configurations. Generally they are arranged to form a closed ring, allowing teachers and students to sit together for seminar-style interactions.

There are two teachers in every classroom: a graduate student engaged in an integrated year of study and apprenticeship, and a mentor teacher who leads and facilitates this teaching collaboration, working closely with faculty partners in the graduate teacher-education program.

Talking to the school students is revealing. These students perform well on the annual state tests, with a high percentage achieving above the minimum standard. But something else is happening for these students, above and beyond these commonly accepted expectations and measures of school success. These students talk about “school ideas” outside the classroom. They refer to authors and their ideas, quote from texts, cite documents and sources, refer to recent scientific research articles, or discuss the qualities of numbers

beyond their role in computation. This isn't a selected group of exceptional students; they represent the same mix of students you'd find in any of the other regional school districts in the Central Valley of California. But learning means something different to these students. There is something personal and lively about their academic involvement that defies a more common idea of either "just getting through" or "doing what's necessary" for higher grades.

Maybe this isn't surprising. In the course of your visit, you attend a science department meeting and listen to the teachers talk about laboratory research being conducted in the school. You realize that the two biologists in the room—Ph.D.s from the teacher-education program that shares the school campus—are equal partners in the conversation about the research-based curriculum that frames student learning. You recognize that the core faculty of the school is made up of public school teachers and graduate professors who share a passion for their subjects. Graduate courses for the teacher apprentices and high school classes meet on a common schedule and use the same classrooms.



In Delano, California, high school science teacher Bill Bliss and middle school social studies teacher Rodney DelRio participated in workshops hosted by the MAT Program and the Institute for Writing and Thinking.

Many of the students begin taking undergraduate courses for credit in their junior year in high school, taught by resident faculty.

This is a different kind of school. Subjects matter differently to teachers and students alike for the simple reason that learning—in science, math, history, or literature—is everyone's motive for coming to school. Public school teachers and graduate professors are colleagues in teaching and research; students are apprentices in this community of inquiry. This is a collaborative, highly infectious environment. The differences between sixth-grade classes and graduate school courses are only a matter of degree. The basic quality of learning is the same.

You can't visit this school yet, but it won't be long before you can. It will open its doors as an integrated graduate teacher-education program and charter school in the summer of 2009. The idea evolved from conversations between Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College, and Lynda and Stewart Resnick, owners of major agricultural concerns in California's Central Valley. Stewart Resnick is also a member of the Bard College Board of Trustees. This school takes its lead from the Resnicks' commitment to improving education in the California communities where their employees live and send their children to the local schools. It reflects three decades of educational innovation under the leadership of Botstein at Bard College. The school also brings together the considerable experiences and ideas of Bard's Institute for Writing and Thinking, the Master of Arts in Teaching Program, and Bard High School Early College to face the challenges of enhancing public education. It is a model for schooling that emerges from the principles and practices that define the MAT Program.

For many years, the Resnicks have been financing initiatives directed toward the improvement of public school districts in communities where their employees raise families. This funding has come from the Paramount Agricultural Companies, which operate over a vast area of the Central Valley of California. Its divisions, which represent particular products and/or aspects of production, include Paramount Farming Company, which produces almonds, pistachios, and pomegranates; Paramount Citrus Association, which produces citrus products; Paramount Farms, Inc., which processes pistachios and almonds; and Paramount Fruit Processing, which processes pomegranates, including the pomegranate juice for POM products. With ongoing leadership from Bill Phillimore, the executive vice president of the Paramount Farming Company in Bakersfield, California, the Resnicks' funding commitments have ranged from college scholarships to various

programs directed at improving teaching and learning from kindergarten through 12th grade. These resources have provided many students with critical support for college, and many others have benefited from expanded opportunities for learning during their primary and secondary school years. Creating a public school with a challenging academic curriculum and instructional practices that engage students in forms of authentic inquiry is an ambitious, yet logical next step in the Resnicks' plans to reach more students in the Central Valley. It has the additional value of providing a model of teaching and learning that stimulates innovation in the larger educational community.

The idea for starting a school and teacher education program in California was first introduced to me in September 2005. Along with about a dozen other members of Bard College's faculty, I was called to a lunch meeting at President Botstein's house. I sat down to this meal with little knowledge of the meeting's goal. Over the opening salad, Botstein described the Resnicks' commitment to improving education. As the main course was served, he explained that they were preparing to take the next step, asking Bard College and its teacher-education program to open a school in California with their financial support. As director of the MAT Program, my job description now included a cross-country initiative, an idea I digested with dessert and coffee.

In November 2005, Ray Peterson, principal of Bard High School Early College in New York City; Jim Brudvig, vice president for administration at Bard; and I arrived in Bakersfield for three days of visits hosted by Bill Phillimore and Tammy Ketelhut, coordinator of Paramount's educational funding division. We visited with teachers and administrators in many of the districts that receive funding from Paramount, interviewing them to learn about their schools, their students, their ambitions and frustrations. We came with preliminary ideas about creating a different kind of school and ways to address the current needs of teachers within their districts. We listened to superintendents, principals, and teachers as they discussed their own ideas about how to address the educational issues they grapple with in their districts. When we returned to New York, I drafted a two-phase plan that would begin with a smaller professional development initiative, and move toward the creation of a public school and MAT Program that would operate as an integrated learning community, educating high-quality teachers in the context of a model public school.

The work we were proposing was not new to us; it drew from existing models that we continue to develop in the Hudson Valley and in New York City. It is work that reflects two core ideas about teaching and learning. The

first idea begins with the commonsense notion that knowledge and understanding in any discipline or subject area develop from active practice of that discipline guided by instructional support and thoughtful reflection. We regularly witness this idea in practice in the context of sports. Developing athletes at any age not only engages them in forms of practice that develop basic skills but also devotes significant amounts of their learning time to actually playing the game and applying the skills in the very context that gives them meaning.

It is unusual to find high school students in classrooms engaged in the practice of science or history. Often, there isn't even evidence of the practice of basic thinking skills implicit to a given field. Instead, students are directed through various activities that guarantee they can apply the material in a textbook to the questions in a standardized test. Many students perform well on such tests with minimal long-term retention of core knowledge and even less real understanding of how such knowledge is created. The observational skills that are implicit to scientific inquiry or



Tammy Ketelhut, educational funding coordinator, and Bill Phillimore, executive vice president, Paramount Farming Company

the questioning skills that are necessary to a historical analysis of primary documents are not part of their instruction. And the implicit pleasures of discovering connections that emerge from the practices of a discipline remain elusive.

The second idea is a logical corollary of the first. If students are to learn by engaging with the practices of a discipline, they must have teachers who are practitioners—teachers who are deeply interested and practiced in what they teach. The mathematics teacher who grasps the principles and proofs that underlie the approaches to any given problem should be as interested in inquiry as she is in solution. Such a teacher can guide her students through the questions and discoveries that constitute mathematical thinking because her own interests transcend the program of demonstration and rehearsal that marches students toward end-of-the-year tests. More than this, students must have teachers who know how to listen, and adjust interventions and forms of support to advance learning by

responding to the unique understanding of each student. This kind of clinical practice reflects an idea of teaching as mentoring and learning as active apprenticeship.

Together, these two ideas framed a plan for our work in California. It would begin with experiences for teachers, introducing a different idea of teaching to a number of professionals across Central Valley school districts by immersing them in learning that could be the basis for change in their own classrooms. This work would serve as a first forum for discussing the ideas that would shape the structure of an integrated public school/graduate teacher-education program.

In July 2006, we initiated the first phase of this plan. Tammy Ketelhut recruited 14 teachers from five school districts, and Paramount Farming Company covered the costs for all of them to come to Bard College for a weeklong immersion in a workshop hosted by the MAT Program and the Institute for Writing and Thinking. During this week, Susan Behrens, an Institute associate, and I engaged the teachers in a learning experience that is typical to Institute workshops but novel to ways we typically think about teaching and learning. In this first phase we wanted to introduce a set of ideas about intellectual work through experiences grounded in a workshop setting, with teachers as learners. We hoped these teachers would bring these ideas back to their own classrooms and we planned a sequence of follow-up workshops during the academic year. This was the beginning of a conversation about a larger initiative in the months that followed.

During the 2006–07 academic year, the teachers introduced new practices into their classrooms and also conducted some form of research or reflective work associated with these attempts. One of these teachers, Mike Simental of Cesar Chavez High School in Delano, presented his classroom work at the California Association of Teachers of English conference in March of this year. Adriana Plascencia of Woodlake High School shared her work with fellow English teachers and in presentations to the Woodlake Board of Education and the local Kiwanis Club. All of the teachers worked at shifting curriculum and teaching to engage students in authentic intellectual work while grappling with the mandates of state tests and increasing demands for accountability as measured by these standardized assessments.

Conversations with school administrators and potential college partners moved forward during this year in an effort to advance the second and more ambitious phase of this project. A second grant from Paramount Agricultural Companies funded weeklong curriculum development at Sonoma State University and follow-up workshops from



The charter school proposal was submitted in September to Ronald A. Garcia, superintendent, and the Board of Education of Delano Union School District.

December through March of the 2007–08 academic year. In July 2008, these teachers gathered again at Sonoma State joined by a new group of 14 colleagues and one school principal, spanning elementary through high school, who are bringing new ideas and practices back to their schools in Delano and Woodlake. As you read this issue of *Field Notes*, these teachers are reaching out to colleagues as workshop leaders, facilitating professional development for peers in three school districts. We are building capacity for a different instructional emphasis in these schools. And there's no question that some of the teachers involved in this work will be founding faculty in the new school project.

By October 2007, a full proposal for the establishment of a public school to be called Paramount Bard Academy was under discussion with local school superintendents in Delano. In December, Bill Phillimore and I presented this proposal to the boards of education of the Delano Joint Union High School District and the Delano Union School District. Delano was the community of choice. First, and maybe most importantly, it is a district that stands out in the region for its continued improvement on standardized measures of student achievement. We want to build on these successes. Second, Delano is a large district with greater capacity to accommodate such a project. And, geographically, it is surrounded by smaller districts that might benefit from the outreach of a centrally located initiative like this one. The project design was well received, and in the months that followed conversations with teachers' unions broadened the concept and brought a new level of planning and considerations to the table.

This proposal, quite understandably, raised many questions. It defied standard definitions. It put forward the idea of a school that would have required the autonomy associated with charter schools. But, unlike typical charter schools, this would be an inclusive school seeking to serve the same cross section of students served by the Delano school districts. And, unlike most charter schools, it sought active forms of collaboration with the partner district, sharing programs that benefit all children and engaging in professional collaborations that benefit all faculty members. In this sense, it was more like the special focus programs within these school districts that are often referred to as "academies." It was a proposal for a degree of collaboration that resolved the issues that are often associated with the more independent-minded initiatives of many charter schools.

On March 28, 2008, Bill Phillimore and I sat down to a joint meeting with the two Delano school boards, superintendents Ron Garcia and Rosalina Rivera, and their legal

representatives. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a memorandum of understanding that had been drafted four months earlier and presented to both boards. It was a nonbinding agreement that asked all parties to agree to a set of guiding principles that would help frame the complex negotiations of establishing a collaboration between two districts and an independent school-within-a-school that would work closely with the host districts towards goals of continued school improvement.



Inside the processing plant at Paramount Citrus, a major employer in Delano

This was a historic occasion. It was not only the first time that anyone could remember both boards gathering for a common meeting, but it was also a meeting that would change the course of our own planning. Within 15 minutes of its beginning, the meeting had turned to questions from board members and school lawyers, questions that seemed to focus on various aspects of the concept of program and faculty autonomy that would define and protect the innovative nature of this school project. There were understandable worries about how the school boards would be able to simultaneously grant degrees of autonomy while remaining responsible for the educational quality of this novel program. By the end of this meeting it was clear that neither board would approve the memorandum of understanding we had proffered.

In the weeks that followed, we considered our options and began to understand the ornery wisdom of the charter school legislation that defines a straightforward process for the creation of schools, helping communities and organiza-

system that generally resists change. Working with a company that reflects and acts in ways that are committed to continued success and thinking “ahead of the curve” has been part of my continuing education.

There are advantages in creating the Paramount Bard Academy as a charter school beyond the guarantees of autonomy that allow for innovation and a more immediate realization of a different model of schooling. As a charter, it is a public school open to any students in the surrounding area and offers an educational choice to families in nearby districts, such as McFarland, Earlimart, Richgrove, and Pond. Operating under somewhat different regulations, it is able to share a common campus with Bard College’s graduate teacher-education program and can consider forms of partnership with Bakersfield College at its Delano campus. But achieving such autonomy does not alter in any way a commitment to close collaboration with local districts. It’s not hard to imagine forms of professional outreach between the Paramount Bard Academy and local school teachers,

In the Paramount Bard Academy, the graduate teacher-education program and the public school will share a common campus, common faculty, and common classrooms. Ninth-graders will walk the halls with their student teachers on their way to high school classes and college seminars, respectively. College has never been closer to a high school student.

tions like Paramount Farming to build an educational alternative while providing a model for continued school improvement. The public school system is generally a very conservative institution; it has tracked along a fairly narrow path for more than a century. Though we can point to moments that look like change, the fundamental landscape of the classroom has remained startlingly the same. Larry Cuban’s study of classroom practices, *How Teachers Taught*, covers a period of more than a century but finds that despite advancing research in education and a shifting rhetoric of educational ideas, the instructional experience of students in public school classrooms is not much different than it was in the late 19th century, especially at the secondary level. Cuban offers some explanation for the apparent intransigence of public schooling, but it became clear to us as we continued to reflect on the March 28 meeting that pursuing a charter for the Paramount Bard Academy was a viable and expeditious alternative. As a classroom teacher for over 20 years, I have lived within the constraints of a

ways that we can learn and benefit from working together as we help children move towards productive and satisfying lives as adults.

As I write this piece, two months ahead of publication, I have to imagine what will have happened by the time you are reading these pages. If our timeline holds true, the Paramount Bard Academy will be nearing approval as a charter school. The charter petition was submitted to the local school board in early August. The school’s principal will have been hired as well as the associate director for Bard’s MAT Program, who will oversee the graduate teacher-education program on its Delano campus. The search for charter schoolteachers and graduate faculty will begin shortly. Facilities have been secured and are being prepared for an initial enrollment of 200 students, evenly divided between sixth and ninth grades. The governing board of the Paramount Bard Academy is meeting every month. Students and their families are looking forward to the first day in a different kind of school.

The Paramount Bard Academy, serving 700 students in grades 6 through 12 by 2012, will reach its capacity of 1,300 students in grades kindergarten through 12 by 2019. It will be fully integrated with the work of Bard's MAT Program, and will follow the model of professional development schools that took root in the late 1980s, with some critical differences. In this school, the graduate teacher-education program and the public school will share a common campus, common faculty, and common classrooms. Ninth-graders will walk the halls with their student teachers on their way to high school classes and college seminars, respectively. College has never been closer to a high school student.

Public school and college faculty will co-teach and work on curriculum development together. Teachers will continue their own learning in the field as graduate faculty carry out their research, sharing their work with the school community in ways that contribute to their scholarship and the intellectual life of the school. The questions that drive

None of this would be possible without the leadership and support of Lynda and Stewart Resnick and the ideas that have defined Bard College's path under the presidency of Leon Botstein.

essential inquiry in various fields define the learning milieu from kindergarten through graduate school. Public school students in this "academy" do not need to wait through years of narrowly prescribed curricula to engage in what matters in a field. This school is more than a mere stage on which some shadow version of the intellectual life is played. Here, the classroom is the connection to authentic inquiry.

The measures of success are simple. The Paramount Bard Academy aims to graduate 95 percent of its entering students, with all of these students leaving high school having earned a minimum of 30 college credits and at least 75 percent of these graduates going on to complete a four-year college degree. All of this is happening in the context of a program that follows the precepts of a liberal arts education, providing learning experiences in core academic fields, including study and practice in the visual and performing arts, and an approach to instruction that assumes that what we value in these subjects is intellectually engaging and the authentic basis for developing critical human potential.

None of this would be possible without the leadership and support of Lynda and Stewart Resnick and the ideas that have defined Bard College's path under the presidency of Leon Botstein. In a singular move, the Resnicks have committed resources sufficient to fund the start-up of a charter school and graduate teacher-education program, with support extending for some years ahead. This model school will be funded by the same per-pupil costs as the host Delano districts in an effort to demonstrate that this kind of school is possible at conventional funding levels. Will there be a financial impact on the Delano school districts as families choose to send their children to the Paramount Bard Academy? Yes. As a student's dedicated schooling funds move from one school to the next, revenue levels shift, but so do the numbers of students who require costly services. However, a district needs to make some short-term adjustments as it waits for retirements and other regularly occurring opportunities to reduce operating costs in ways that do not impact existing programs. Certainly, the forms of consultant support and professional development that become available through a partnership between charter and public schools can only contribute to ongoing improvement plans within host districts and may well alleviate costs to local districts through program restructuring and the reduction of professional development costs. This level of support and leadership from the Resnicks and the Paramount Agricultural Companies for a charter school initiative is unprecedented. The funding that has supported these partner districts will continue unchanged, but the Paramount Bard Academy will become the largest contributor so far to the educational advancement of schooling in the region.

I write this piece well in advance of publication, knowing that by the time you are reading this we will have taken many more steps forward. This is a first report in a regular column of *Field Notes* that will cover our work in California. Teachers, public school and graduate students, researchers, graduate faculty, and administrators will join the conversation between these pages in the months and years ahead. Talking and writing about our California campus can only enrich the dialogue on teaching and learning that began in these pages just three years ago.

Works Cited

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