

ROOTS *& Wings*

Fall 2007

THE NEWSLETTER of ECHO HORIZON SCHOOL



All Echo Horizon students learn how to integrate amplification technology into the classroom.

Echo Horizon on the *Leading Edge*

Echo Horizon School and Echo Center's innovative program of mainstreaming—and fully supporting—deaf and hard of hearing students has received national recognition from the independent education community.

Earlier this year, the Echo Center program was one of three programs across the country to receive the prestigious *Leading Edge* honor for Demographic Sustainability from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), based in Washington, D.C.

"I believe so strongly in the mission of our school," says Carly Alsbach, an Echo Center teacher who nominated the school along with Second grade teacher Roz Henderson. "The collaboration between the school's mainstream teachers and the Echo Center teachers is what makes the program so successful," she says, adding, "Our inclusive model benefits all of our students, not just those with hearing loss."

The Echo Center program is designed around the auditory-oral philosophy. In practice, teachers work to develop listening skills and spoken language through the use of state-of-the-art technology. Roughly 10% of the students at Echo Horizon School are deaf or hard of hearing. Instead of being separated from the hearing students like in most public school programs, they are fully-integrated into general education classes. This uniquely diverse student population brings lessons of inclusion to the entire student body.

As early as pre-kindergarten, hearing students learn how their deaf and hard of hearing classmates experience the school environment. They become familiar with the hearing aids and cochlear implants that some children use everyday. Echo Center teachers, who are credentialed in the field of deaf education, provide the listening, speech, language development, and academic support to the deaf and hard of hearing students both in the

Working Toward a Sustainable Ecology

Students have been "pitching in" lately when it comes to safeguarding the environment. With a focus on sustainability, Echo Horizon School's curriculum has incorporated a number of exciting "hands-on" activities, which tie into the concepts of reducing, reusing, and recycling, as well as observing and cataloguing the natural world around us. Last Spring saw a lot of activity, ranging from composting to beach clean-ups.

Turning Scraps into Fertilizer

The school's garden has recently been "super-charged" by a new worm composting project that yields a potent black compost, rich with nutrients. The Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes have taken up "vermicomposting," a process of using worms and microorganisms to turn kitchen waste into a powerful fertilizer. They toss in leftover fruit and vegetables from their afternoon snacks and wait to see the transformation.

The project was reinforced by a field trip to TreePeople, a Los Angeles-area organization that encourages and supports planting and caring for trees. During the visit, the tour leader demonstrated the importance of healthy soil.

Mr. Call's and Ms. Wynn's Fourth grade students collected food waste, weighed it, and helped the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students to add it to the compost bins.

Students in Mrs. Henderson's and Mrs. Melnick's Second grade classes developed a composting project of their own using "aerobic decomposition" in bins located outside their classrooms. Once tilled into the soil of the garden, the compost attracts hummingbirds and butterflies.

Beautification Projects

Mrs. Sorenson's and Ms. Udell's First grade students have been working to beautify Syd Kronenthal Park, which the school frequently uses for events and physical education classes.

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As you read through this issue of *Roots & Wings*, I hope that you get a sense for one of the guiding principles EHS teachers consider when planning their curriculum. They “get it” that a lesson works best when it is presented as relevant to the students’ lives.

Whether actively “diggin in” to the science of composting, demonstrating facility with video production, or relating their lives to those of their peers in Africa, our students have opportunities to learn core curriculum concepts in contexts that have personal meaning.

A kindergartener holds up a worm—his partner in making a successful garden. A Fifth grader sees the result of her beach clean-up on the birds and fish that live there. A student finds her voice by picking up a video camera, preparing a script, and refining her message with editing software. A Fourth grader reads closely the account of life in a village halfway across the globe, hearing the voice of another young boy who has written down his story.

Since our founding 25 years ago, EHS students have also benefited from lessons in diversity. Deaf and hard of hearing students have studied side-by-side, learning how to

navigate their differences. Our students learn that, as different as we might appear to be at first, we are actually much the same.

It has been said time and time again by parents and teachers—as well as by members of our extended community—that Echo Horizon kids are exceptionally accepting of one another. Elementary school will always be a time for exploration of self, while each child “individuates” from family and peer group. Yet our kids do this with daily reminders that each student faces unique challenges and that we can best achieve in an atmosphere of mutual respect and consideration for others.



Each day I experience interactions between our students that confirm my confidence in our

model. At one time, long ago, our school was merely an experiment of inclusion and diversity. Now, 25 years later, we have a verified recipe for success, which equips our students with the best education: that of a global citizen.

Paula Dashiell earned her Bachelor of Science (B.S.) from Indiana University and her Masters of Arts for Teachers (M.A.T.) from Harvard University. She has been Head of School at EHS since 1987.

classroom and during one-on-one sessions. These teachers serve as a resource for all students at the school.

According to the criteria for a “high-quality oral education program” set by the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, our Echo Center is exemplary:

- Each child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP);
- We maintain “aggressive audiological management,” meaning that teachers assure that children are wearing the appropriate hearing aids or other devices and monitor the devices daily;
- Each child focuses on developing intelligible spoken language; and
- All teachers at the school are well-trained to integrate deaf and hard of hearing students into their classrooms and lesson plans.

The Leading Edge program, in its fifth year, honors independent schools’ outstanding achievements in five categories: Demographic Sustainability, Environmental Sustainability, Financial Sustainability, Global Sustainability and Programmatic Sustainability.

The NAIS awards program showcases best practices and model programs to inspire and motivate other schools, and seeks public recognition for schools whose programs and projects advance pre-collegiate education.

“Independent schools have the freedom to experiment and model innovative programs that other schools can then adapt within their own settings,” says NAIS President Patrick Bassett. “The *Leading Edge* Recognition Program is designed to encourage, stimulate and recognize schools that exercise their creativity and take calculated risks to improve education for all children.”

And that’s exactly what Ms. Alsbach says she is hoping for—that other schools will be inspired to try similar models of inclusion. “One of the things that is so exciting about this award is that the organization recognizing our school is a consortium of 1,300 independent schools and associations,” she says.

Susan Weiner, whose son Jordan is in the 3rd grade, is proud the school has won the national award. “I hope that school administrators across the United States will embrace educating deaf and hard of hearing children in an oral, mainstream, educational setting.” She continues, “The children at Echo Horizon have proven that, with the proper amplification and classroom support, they can succeed alongside their hearing peers.”

“We Have Two Gifts to Give Our Children... One is Roots, the Other, Wings.”

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Echo Horizon School is to educate hearing and hearing-impaired children in an inclusive environment in which independence, self-reliance and mutual respect are valued and encouraged with a curriculum designed to be challenging and developmentally appropriate for each learner.

GOALS

- Students will develop the academic tools, social skills and moral integrity needed to be successful in the next phase of education.
- Students will integrate themselves successfully, making contributions to a diverse society, while maintaining individuality and respect for others.
- Students will generate a variety of solutions and approaches to situations requiring thoughtful and creative problem solving.
- Students will develop the skills and positive attitude for engaging in learning as a life-long process.

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Diversity & Inclusiveness at EHS

During the 2006-2007 school year, Echo Horizon School engaged in a thorough assessment of its commitment to a diverse and inclusive environment, using the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM) designed by the National Association of Independent Schools.

Echo Horizon School is committed to maintaining an inclusive community in which everyone feels welcome and connected, regardless of ability, age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.

The Board of Trustees established a Diversity Committee to guide the implementation of a unified strategy and practice that helps the school to remain sensitive to the diverse cultures and beliefs among our families, faculty and staff, while extending our outreach to students and families less represented in our enrolled population.

Committee Work

Faculty and staff, trustees and parents worked in committees focused on school governance, teaching and learning, student life and family involvement. The process yielded many specific recommendations to increase awareness and sensitivity. In the aggregate, all constituencies feel proud to be associated with EHS, think the school is committed to inclusiveness and that it has done fairly well at providing an inclusive environment.

Online Survey

The school conducted an online "climate survey" soliciting feedback from faculty and staff, school trustees, parents and students. Over 95% of faculty and staff answered the questions and almost half of all parents took the survey. According to the respondents, Echo Horizon School is succeeding at giving students opportunities to hear about, experience and appreciate cultures that might be different from their own. The survey results reflect the perception that multiculturalism, however, has not yet been fully integrated into all aspects of the curriculum.

Recommendations

As a result of the assessment process, the school has hired a consultant on diversity issues to advise the Diversity Committee and administration on the recommendations that came out of the assessment and to assist the school in establishing administrative and curricular goals as part of a long-term strategic plan. These goals include widening employee recruitment and hiring, expanding outreach in school admissions and increasing opportunities for families to interact.

Echo Horizon and the "Global Village"

Fourth-grade teacher Kim Wynn is enthusiastic about international travel, spending her summers in places like Thailand and Peru. She recently connected what she was learning during her adventures to her writing and social studies curriculum. Inspiration came in the form of a book.

In Our Global Village was written by students at Awet Secondary School in Kambi ya Simba, a rural farming village in Tanzania. The soft cover book is intended as a global exchange project—to help children learn about people in other countries. Proceeds from the sale of the book help students in the village to attend post-secondary education.

Ms. Wynn showed her students on a globe where Tanzania is located and they talked about their impressions. "In the beginning, we thought it was a low-key country with no technology," wrote Emma Bernstein and Sophia Rogg in an essay about what they learned. "They have more than what we thought. Later on in the project, we felt we had made a connection with people we would never know."

The lesson didn't stop there. *In Our Global Village* invited students to write a chapter about his or her own village. EHS students wrote about their own lives and city for a similar book-publishing project, along with students from other schools in our region, as part of their service learning work.

They worked in cooperative groups to research and write about their lives in Los Angeles—everything from the food they eat, to the holidays they celebrate, and the movies they like to watch.



Tanzanian students graciously accept a copy of *In Our Village: Los Angeles*

In a section entitled, "Los Angeles, Our City," students wrote: "Different countries including Spain and Mexico have inspired the architecture here. There are old wooden buildings, structures made from stucco and some from brick. There are also archways and courtyards." The students had to discuss and agree on what children in other cultures might want to know about them.

"It was far more powerful to teach writing in this way," Ms. Wynn says. "It was passionate, meaningful and informed."

"This small project has taken on a life of its own," Ms. Wynn says. Last Spring, she was invited by the Elementary Community Service Association to speak about the project at a national service learning conference. Over the summer, Ms. Wynn visited Tanzania herself, taking the text, and Echo Horizon School's well wishes to come to Kambi ya Simba. In preparation, her class studied basic Swahili vocabulary.

"They're at an age, developmentally, where they're becoming more aware of the world," she says. "That's social studies—learning about another culture from the inside."

ALUMNI IN THE NEWS

Alex Leichinger, '05, a Ninth grader at Harvard-Westlake, participates in debate, baseball and cross-country teams and has played violin in the school's Concert Strings orchestra. He serves as sports editor for the school paper, *Spectrum* and is studying Chinese.

Adam Factor, '05, a Ninth grader at Windward School, has been enjoying the school's visual arts program, especially ceramics and painting. He also plays soccer and baseball. Adam, who spent his summer relaxing and going to a sleep-away camp in Yosemite, says Echo Horizon prepared him well for Windward, which he describes as "a little harder and more in-depth."

Elina Carpenter, '01, a Freshman at UC Santa Cruz, is studying psychology, design and Japanese. She is continuing her work in art as well, for which she has received numerous awards. Elina recalls the emphasis on developing strong values at EHS, and adds that if she pursues teaching as a career, she would like to teach at Echo Horizon.

Henry Laufer, '02, a Senior at Crossroads, is an illustrator for the school newspaper. He has volunteered his graphic design skill for the organization StandUp for Kids, a charity that helps runaway teenagers. Over the summer, he attended a pre-college art program at the California College of the Arts in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Student Video Projects Earn Praise and Recognition

Last Spring, Echo Horizon students were on center stage showcasing their video projects and garnering recognition and praise at county and statewide technology conferences. Three video projects, which integrate curriculum and creativity, gave students a chance to demonstrate their critical thinking skills and performance aptitude.

2005-06 Video Yearbook

Echo Horizon School's video club produced a video chronicling the school year, including the construction and renovation project. After researching, writing and reporting on-camera, the students then edited the video and authored a DVD.

In March, members of the club were selected to travel to Palm Springs for the Student Technology Showcase, part of the Computer Using Educators conference. The event was sponsored by the California Department of Education and the California Technology Assistance Project. They presented their work to teachers, students and parents from across the state. In the exhibit hall, they were interviewed for the internet podcast *Infinite Thinking Machine*. In the interview, the students donned bright yellow hard hats and described their project.

Life Cycle of a Plant

Mrs. Henderson's Second graders created a short video, which opens with the students sitting curled up in a ball, imitating a seed. Then, slowly, they "sprout," using their arms and legs, acting out the progressive stages that a plant goes through as it grows and blooms. The film incorporated computer-generated drawings and was written and narrated by the students.

"The entire process was very project-based, with the students writing the 'script' after they had learned about the plant's life cycle," Mrs. Henderson says. "The process of acting out the different stages of the life cycle really drove home the concepts—they became the plant that was growing."

Life in 5th Grade

The Fifth graders of the 2005-06 school year produced a video—fittingly called *Life in 5th Grade*, in which they prepared videos to teach incoming Fifth graders about the important aspects of the experience.

All three of the videos were honored at the California Student Media and Multimedia Festival and at the Digital Voice Awards, run by the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

For more information and to see selected video projects, visit:
www.EchoHorizon.org/programs/student_work.html

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Sustainable...

(cont. from front page)



Mr. Worm

As part of their weekly visit to the park, the students pick up trash and collect items that can be recycled. "The kids can't believe all the stuff they find," says Ms. Udell. She continues, "Before we play in the sand, we put on our gloves and gather trash from all over the park. They seem to really search and collect with pleasure."

Mrs. Tremblay's and Mr. Reardon's Third grade curriculum focuses on the study of Los Angeles—past and present. A recent field trip to Escondido Falls in Malibu integrated what they have learned about our local region. A highlight of their mountain hike was observing local wildlife, including croaking toads and a gopher.

Our Fifth and Sixth graders have "Adopted a Beach" through Heal the Bay, which protects Southern California coastal waters and watersheds. Their visit to the Santa Monica beach in May was the first in a series of three visits that will continue this Fall. The students worked in teams to clean up the trash along the coast, and then recorded data to submit to Heal the Bay. Technology skills were also integrated into the activity as the Fifth graders captured the process on videotape and edited it using Apple's iMovie software.

All together, these efforts have brought many rewards to our students and to our community. They prove that each of us can protect and sustain our environment...and have fun at the same time.

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