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CP Academy, Berkeley High

October 30, 2009: Day before Halloween. The Bay Bridge is still closed. It's also Rally Day at Berkeley High, the culmination of Spirit Week. Students are in high gear, dressed to the hilt in all combinations of red-and-gold attire, hair, and you-name-it. The periods are shortened due to the afternoon pep rally. But inside Ariel Morris' 10th grade classroom, it's also the first day of writer coaching and the decked-out students are thrilled to be back with their writer coaches, who worked with them last year in 9th grade at Community Partnerships Academy. Despite all the distractions, they are focused on outlining their essays about world mythology with their coaches. For first-time coaches, this was not a normal introduction to writer coaching but everyone took it in stride – just another day at Berkeley High.

The previous week, we kicked off writer coaching at CPA with Susannah Bell's 9th graders, most of whom were already familiar with WCC from middle school. Coaches helped them tweak the short stories they had written. Once again, we have an impressive lineup of coaches this year, both new and returning – including a few “on loan” from Albany.

The teachers commented on how the students' rate of turning in their writing assignments is higher when they've been coached. They also noted how enthusiastic the students are to receive writer coaching this year. We are looking forward to working with all of them!

Site coordinator Sahib-Amar Khalsa

King Middle School

Even before Bob Menzimer asked us school site coordinators to write something for this newsletter, I had emailed him and Lynn Mueller that I had “an embarrassment of riches” at King.

Though I meant that with all my heart, it could be viewed as a little ironic. WCC at King was blessed for several years with a beautiful and convenient classroom for coaching. This year, because of high enrolment and overcrowding, King teams had to settle for coaching in the “game room,” a cavernous place in the Science Annex that we share with the King Chorus and the after-school program. Now, after two weeks of coaching there, it is actually beginning to grow on me. The chorus sounds beautiful, and the after-school staff and kids are very nice. Plus, coaches can play foosball or ping-pong if we ever get bored with coaching.

Just kidding. No one at King gets bored with coaching. Many of our long-time veterans are back, as well as coaches who started last year, all of them inspirations to our new coaches. We have new Cal students, coaches on loan from Albany, new community members and King parents, and two children of coaches who are now coaches themselves. Many of these volunteers bonded so well with their students the first couple of weeks that they are loathe to let me assign students they worked with to newly trained coaches, which is what I meant by “an embarrassment of riches.” The unflagging support of the King PTA humbles me even more.

Thank you, King community!

Site coordinator Kathleen Hallam



At King Middle School in Berkeley, the teacher's writing assignment is about America today and in Revolutionary times. WCC coach and UC Berkeley student Jessica Valdenegro helps eighth-grader Eduardo Flores get his thoughts on paper.

Longfellow Middle School

Thanks to the hard work and subtle nudging of WCC Associate Director Lynn Mueller, Longfellow is blessed this year with more new coaches than we've ever had. At least half our 70 volunteers are first-timers; put them with our wise and wonderful returning coaches (several of whom have been with WCC since its inception 10 years ago), and we have six multi-talented, multi-age coaching teams ready to listen, laugh, and learn with our 300 seventh- and eighth-graders.

Because the building we've always used is being renovated, our first challenge was finding a physical place to coach. Just as we accepted we'd have to be hallway nomads, teacher Sean Poremba and librarian Carole Bloomstein offered us their spaces, and we couldn't be happier (well, maybe a little, if we could figure out how to turn down the heat in Sean's room . . .). Sean and Carole: we will be forever grateful for your generosity.

Our initial coaching sessions in October were eye-openers and heartbreakers for even the veterans, as the seventh-graders brought us memoirs on a transformative event in their lives and the eighth-graders, who are reading *Of Mice and Men*, began writing on how to tend their hopes and dreams. Whether it was about the loss of a relative or a pet, or the desire to be a sports hero or save the world, every story was deep and true. We coaches were again honored to be given access to the sometimes painful, always complex world of 12- and 13-year-olds.

And so the Longfellow crew embarks on what is sure to be another great year.

Site co-coordinator (with Mark Pasley) Annie Stine

Media Academy

It is always exciting to start a new school year, but this year has been particularly thrilling at Media Academy, because we are beginning to coach the 12th graders, in addition to the 10th graders. This is the first time WCC has worked with 12th graders, and we hope our early success indicates a trend that will continue. With 27 returning coaches, joined by 26 new coaches, we began working with the 10th graders on a persuasive essay based on an article on discrimination in the workplace. The following week, we coached the 12th grade AP class in translating Shakespeare to modern English and a second 12th grade class in the beginning of their year-long Senior Research Project.

And coaches aren't just busy in the English classes at Media. Many coaches were intrigued by the 10th graders' November assignment on the graphic novel, *Persepolis*. Since the three classes are sharing one classroom set of the book, about 20 coaches bought the book, read it, and donated their copies to the school! On October 27, eight coaches joined the students and teachers on a "Media Goes to College" fieldtrip. Students visited UC Berkeley, CSU East Bay, St. Mary's or UCSF with coaches going along as chaperones.

Clearly, writer coaches are becoming more involved with the school. As always, however, the highlight of our interactions are the one-on-one coaching sessions we enjoy every week.

Site coordinator Karen Larson



Coach Steve Moses with Carlin Hudson

Albany Middle School

Much as a beloved quilt is built from a patchwork of favorite fabrics, this year's coaching roster at Albany Middle School is an assemblage of holdovers from last year, new recruits, and refugees from the on-hiatus Albany High School WCC program. Which is fitting, since the coaching program at AMS for this year was rescued only through a mighty effort to patch together scraps of funding!

Coaches will begin working with 8th grade students on their independent research projects, known as the I-Search, in late January. Coaching will continue through the end of March – just long enough to help students refine their topics, draft some of their key report components, and educate their amazed coaches about the intricacies of the hip hop music scene or Japanese manga art.

We still need coaches! We're in action on Tuesdays and Thursdays, working in one or two hour shifts throughout the school day. If you can help out, please contact us at amscoaching@gmail.com.

Site coordinator Teresa Barnett

Willard Middle School

Coaching kicked off at Willard on October 15 with an enthusiastic group of returning and new coaches, not to mention the eager 8th graders who have already begun bonding with their coaches. It's been wonderful to work with Ms. Bonsall and Ms. Prichett, both "veteran" writer coaching teachers. We started off by getting to know the students through their "Autobiographical Turning Point Memoirs." While challenging for some young teens to pinpoint a turning point in their as-yet relatively short lives, they all had great stories to share with their coaches. The coaching room is abuzz at Willard!

Site coordinator Jeanine Brown

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