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So long, SWAS. It's been great to know you!

One of the first programs started by Children's Empowerment Inc., the **School within a School (SWAS)**, is concluding after six years of operation at Jefferson High School.

The program really works—just look at the results or ask someone who has been involved. SWAS works with a small group of 50 at-risk sophomores, who were selected because they were having trouble, but who seemed to be able to do better.

And they did. SWAS students have consistently performed better academically than the rest of the Jefferson student body: Seventy-one per cent of SWAS sophomores passed both the state English and math tests, compared to 62% for the rest of the student body.

In 2004, SWAS students had higher scores in math, English and essay tests than the rest of the school. They outperformed the entire Jefferson Union High School District on math and essays.

A core of dedicated teachers is assigned to SWAS. They work exclusively with these students. The teachers meet together weekly to discuss progress and problems and to develop strategies for dealing with difficult students. Students get personal attention.

Teacher Mike Tomczyszyn explains the program's success this way: "Students cannot hide as easily, are held more accountable instead of slipping through the cracks, and teachers

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Students enrolled in SWAS value the program. Most wish they could stay with the program when they become juniors next year.

"It pushes the students to do better," said Ruben Espinel.

"It makes us students stay on track and enjoy high school life," according to Rachelle Francisco.

"It challenges each one of us to improve," Anthony Embrado said.

"The teachers all believe in a beautiful future for everyone," Jeanette R. said.

"It shows us that we can do anything in life and accomplish our goals," said Tiana Yambao. "SWAS taught me how to never give up on anything."

Carlos Marroquin said the program is "something I dreamed about in middle school, where the teachers interact and are about you and help you out."

"The teachers get closer to the students, which helps us a lot," Ryan Cordero commented.

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SO LONG, SWAS *Continued*

get to form the kind of bonds with students that are so crucial in getting frequently disaffected young people to care about their own futures.”

SWAS teachers stay connected to parents too. They invite parents to SWAS events and to special parent-teacher conferences. They ask parents to support specific school projects.

SWAS organizes field trips to keep students interested. They have visited colleges, the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance, the Exploratorium and the Monterey Bay Aquarium to give students hands-on learning experiences in a variety of settings. Students also take part in special ropes courses to build teamwork, a sense of belonging and self-esteem.

When they do well, SWAS recognizes students for their achievements. Several students received their own laptop computers this year as rewards for getting straight A's.

“It is because of CEI that we are able to increase personalization, opportunities and expectations for all students,” according to Sandy Nicholson, a history teacher. “Without CEI, the majority of our educational field trips, awards nights and parent drop-ins would not be possible.”

Begun in 2002, SWAS will be phased out at the end of the current school year. SWAS is the successful model for the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC), which are now serving all freshmen at Jefferson and will serve all freshmen and sophomores next year. The whole school will convert to SLCs in the 2009-2010 school year. ■

STUDENTS... *Continued*

“It helps when you are behind in work and the teachers care and help you out,” Mike Miranda said.

Ernesto Lomel said students feel comfortable in class “because we all become close. We are like a big family.”

“It gives us the advantage of being in smaller classes, so we are able to get more teacher attention,” said Zully H.V.

“With a smaller class, I can concentrate better with hardly any distraction,” said Judy Adapon.

Will Hawking said SWAS is especially good “for people who really want to get their grades up.”

Students frequently mentioned the field trips and awards and how much they appreciated them.

“I like the trips because we learn stuff from them,” Jennifer Lockett said.

“When we get good grades, we get rewarded for it, so it motivates us to continue,” Pepper Jefferson said.

And over and over, the students wrote about how they wished they could continue the program next year: “SWAS for Juniors!” ■



Jeff Students Travel to Washington

A total of 26 Jefferson High students enjoyed a week-long visit to Washington, D.C. at the end of February. Students visited Capitol Hill, met with elected representatives and witnessed a Congressional debate. They workshopped with students from other parts of the country.

“We learned how to influence government,” Natalie Arevalo said. CEI helped pay some students’ travel expenses. ■

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CEI is a non-profit organization.

