



EAGLE EYES

Volume 20, Number 2

News From Summer 2012 Trimester

This issue of Eagle Eyes serves to focus on the good work Honda has accomplished across the country through the Professional Development Center.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER: A FORCE FOR GOOD

By Michael Soguero, Director of Professional Development

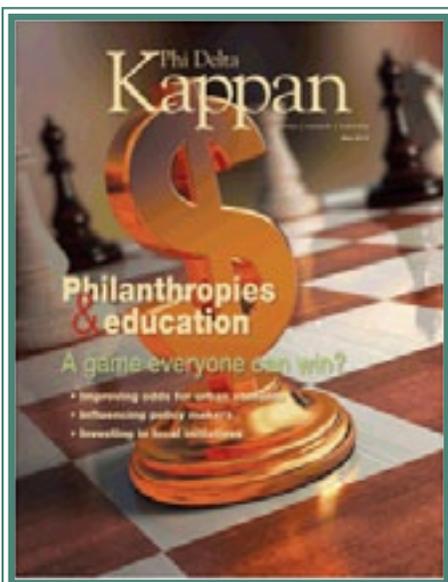
In 1989, American Honda Motor Company, Inc. designed and executed a philanthropic initiative that would strengthen American Honda's good corporate citizenship. Tom Dean and Mak Itabashi identified widespread student disengagement in high school as an issue that American Honda could directly address. This would take the form of a school that served high school students as well as a professional development center that would contribute to improved results in public secondary education nationally.

The school exists for the purpose of professional development. It is through professional development that Honda's investment is leveraged into the greater good.

~ Tom Dean (founding board chair)



☞ See "A Force for Good" – Cont. on Pg. 7



"FOREVER" A UNIQUE APPROACH TO PHILANTHROPY

Portions being reprinted with permission from the May edition of Phi Delta Kappan, written by Lois Brown Easton

When American Honda Motor Co. invested in education, it helped create a school as unique as its philanthropic philosophy.

"So, just how long do you intend to support this school and professional development center in our county?" a Grand County, CO, commissioner asked in 1992.

☞ See "Forever" – Cont. on Pg. 3

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Eagle Rock School
and Professional
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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER PRESENTS AT LEGACY FOUNDATION'S HEALTHY SCHOOLS SUMMIT

By Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development



On April 4, Eagle Rock presented at the 2012 Healthy Schools Summit. Over 900 attendees, including education and health stakeholders from across the state, traveled from all corners of Colorado to learn from Eagle Rock about “Equity in the Classroom: Actively Engaging All Students.”

The summit was able to bring about emphasis on policies and best practices and truly move the needle for creating, enhancing and maintaining healthy, safe and welcoming schools for *all* of our students.

This Summit was a critical event in the Colorado Legacy Foundation’s multi-year commitment to partner with school district administration, school boards and community members from across the state to support policy action and program implementation for improving students’ health and wellness.

The Colorado Legacy Foundation believes that increased student achievement for all Colorado students requires effective leaders in every school, effective educators in every classroom, and healthy and engaged students who come to school ready to learn.

The Colorado Legacy Foundation is an independent 501(c)(3) that serves as a critical friend and partner to the Colorado Department of Education in the effective implementation of good public policy. They identify promising practices, invest in innovative work, recommend policy, evaluate results, and share their findings with all Colorado school districts and schools. They believe that every school should have an effective leader, every classroom should have an effective teacher, and every child should be healthy and ready to learn.

To learn more about their upcoming programs, including the Colorado Legacy Schools Initiative and their work with the Colorado Teacher of the Year visit

<http://colegacy.org/>

📖 *“Forever” – Cont. from Pg. 1*

“Forever,” replied Mak Itabashi and Tom Dean. They were speaking for American Honda Motor Co., which would go on to create the Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center in Estes Park, CO.

The noisy room quieted as the commissioners and audience let that message sink in. Forever is not the approach most private and corporate philanthropies take when funding projects. Certainly, no one can predict “forever,” but Itabashi and Dean clearly signaled that Honda was intending to make a long-term commitment to Eagle Rock.

That commitment Honda made nearly 20 years ago continues today, as Eagle Rock School educates students who have not been successful in traditional schools. Its 96 students live on a campus in Estes Park and participate in an intense, interdisciplinary, and value-driven program. The year-round school operates with three trimesters, and admits and graduates students three times a year. Tuition, room and board, and living expenses are all free to the students.

The professional development center (PDC) hosts educators on issues of school reform, renewal, and reinvention. The PDC exports ideas, offers technical assistance, participates in national initiatives, conducts research, provides internships and fellowships, publishes books and journal articles, and offers teaching certification. The PDC was designed to offer a low-cost mostly immersion experience for adults, with students contributing to the learning of adults, visitors, and staff members. The whole school is a learning environment for students and adults, especially when adults “shadow” students to classes, meet with them or staff members, or hold their own professional learning activities in the community, sometimes inviting Eagle Rockers to attend.

By design, the school and professional development center are two symbiotic entities; the school would not exist without the professional development center and vice versa. Although Honda does not disclose the amount spent on Eagle Rock, the American Honda Education Corp. (AHed) has provided 100% of the operating and capital expenses of the school since it opened. Eagle Rock is unique because Honda’s approach to philanthropy is unique.

Honda principles

Like most large corporations, American Honda Motor Co. (AHM) has a philanthropic arm, its “corporate conscience,” in the American Honda Foundation. It was established in 1984 to help commemorate AHM’s 25th anniversary and has been an important component of the company’s overall effort to be a good corporate citizen. The Foundation supports youth education with a specific focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) projects as well as on the environment. The foundation has made more than 605 grants in 49 states, totaling nearly \$30 million.

American Honda’s interest in philanthropy began when the president of American Honda, Koichi Amemiya, called Itabashi and Dean to his cubicle in Torrance, CA, in 1989 and told them to find out “what we can do to benefit America and Americans.” Itabashi and Dean spent most of a year crisscrossing the country, holding conversations with almost everyone they met — from taxi drivers to policy makers, from classroom teachers to school, district, and state education administrators. When they returned to Torrance, they had two recommendations:

Mark Dougherty
Sous Chef

Denise Dunn
Business Administration
Specialist

Cynthia Elkins
Arts

Beth Ellis
Learning Resources
and Information

Anastacia Galloway
Registrar

John Guffey
Service Learning

Berta Guillen
Society and Cultures

TBA
Head Cook

Karen Ikegami
Mathematics

Janet Johnson
Science

Issac Leslie
Music and Performance

Jeff Liddle
Head of School

Denise Lord
Life After Eagle Rock

Susan Luna
Director of Operations

Dan Madsen
Technology

Jen Morine
Director of Curriculum

Mark Palmer
Public Allies

L’Tanya Perkins
Admissions Associate

Tim Phelps
Chef Instructor

TBA
Second Chef

Kirstin Sizemore
Human Performance

Philbert Smith
Director of Students

Michael Soguero
Director of
Professional Development

Holly Takashima
Literacy & Literature

Terry Tierney
Assistant Facilities

Jesse Tovar
Health and Wellness
Counselor

✍️ *“Forever” – Cont. from Pg. 3*

- Form a nonprofit subsidiary to involve all AHM associates. In other words, don't support this endeavor as a short-term “project” through the foundation. Embed the new subsidiary within AHM and ensure its support “forever.”
- Focus on education, particularly the education of students who have failed or been failed by the system. Learn how to educate them well and graduate them as significant contributors to the greater well-being of America. Share what you have learned with educators throughout the country.

On the basis of Itabashi's and Dean's recommendations, Honda doesn't just give; it makes sure the philosophies that the corporation embraces are deeply manifested in the initiative. Honda created the AHED, which created Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center. (So far, Eagle Rock is AHED's only initiative.)

Itabashi's and Dean's recommendation to focus on education isn't surprising. Itabashi, a senior engineer, was well respected within American Honda and later led construction of a company plant in South Carolina. Dean earned his doctorate in education and was instrumental in designing Honda's learning process for upgrading service managers' skills.

After AHM had established a nonprofit subsidiary (AHED) within its organizational structure and decided on education as its focus, Itabashi and Dean crisscrossed the country again, seeking recommendations from educators, supporters of youth organizations, and policy makers about addressing the dropout problem in the United States. As they had after their first set of interviews, Itabashi and Dean developed what they had learned into these key recommendations:

- Build a laboratory type of school whose teachers can experiment, without undue restriction, on how to re-engage young people in learning, graduate them, and help them become productive citizens.
- Enroll students who otherwise might not graduate from high school and, moreover, might have taxed prison, welfare, and health care systems. Do not enroll the easiest-to-reach students, the ones who seem to get themselves educated regardless of their learning environments. Provide all students

scholarships, room and board, and resolution of other needs, such as health care.

- Prepare to share lessons from this laboratory school with educators across the country through low-cost, on-site as well as outreach professional development. Share the news of what works with educators who serve hard-to-reach students. Help other schools adopt or adapt in their own environments what has worked in the laboratory school.
- Fully fund the school and its professional development center through the nonprofit subsidiary, the American Honda Education (AHED) Corporation, and engage AHM associates in the effort.

The American Honda Motor Co. is known for its slogan, “The Power of Dreams.” Less well-known is its fundamental approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR): According to its 2010 CSR Report, AHM strives “to be a company society wants to exist.”

Honda does not believe that big checks alone can cause improvement. What makes the difference is funding the right action and the right people at the right time and supporting the funded effort. Support means Honda continues to engage in the initiative. Honda doesn't just give; it makes sure the philosophies that the corporation embraces are deeply manifested in the initiative.

Another key Honda principle is that philanthropy and the corporate bottom line must be separate. Honda does not believe in self-aggrandizement. No overt or even subtle messages suggest that consumers buy a Honda product because of corporate benevolence. Any public notice accorded to something Honda has funded focuses on the recipient.

“Of course, it doesn't hurt for American Honda to have a general image of contributing to the well-being of America and Americans. It's nice when people have discovered that we've made a difference in their town or school,” said Gary Kessler, chair of AHED and senior vice-president of human resources, administration and corporate affairs for AHM in Torrance, CA.

Typically, advertising links a philanthropic project to a “buy” message. “But, increasingly,” Kessler said, “people want to do business with entities they feel good about.”

Another principle relates to “the art of the long view.” “We subscribe to long-term initiatives and

✍️ *See “Forever” – Cont. on Pg. 5*

✍️ “Forever” – Cont. from Pg. 4

relationships — only through time can you see benefits,” Kessler said.

Philanthropy is often seen as a one-way event, from the philanthropic entity to the deserving organization. Honda sees philanthropy as a two-way relationship. For example, teams of associates work collectively to identify opportunities to improve themselves through self-actualization and their communities through service.

“Our philanthropic funding is all about engagement plus economic support plus hands and feet and spirit and energy from our associates,” Kessler said. “Our approach to philanthropy is rooted in corporate philosophy and ideology. We do not ‘copy-cat’ others’ funded initiatives.”

Success at Eagle Rock

Defining success at Eagle Rock can be difficult. Salvaging students once lost to the public education system can be considered success. Indeed, even though not every student who enrolls at Eagle Rock graduates from Eagle Rock, those who attend for a week or more have attested to changed perspectives about themselves as learners.

About 90% of Eagle Rock students graduate from Eagle Rock or from their home or other schools, able to do what they couldn’t do before they enrolled at Eagle Rock. This means they’re able to stay in school, re-engage in learning, and graduate. Students take a norm-referenced test upon graduation, routinely exceeding their entering scores, even though Eagle Rock is not interested in teaching to this test.

In terms of the PDC, Eagle Rock has graduated about 200 interns or Public Allies Teaching Fellows, with about 75% of them going into education or youth-related services. Ninety percent of Eagle Rock’s alternative licensure candidates continue to work in education, often in charter schools that serve at-risk students. Through outreach, the PDC has worked with hundreds of organizations including districts, schools, and nonprofits to design or redesign environments for students who struggle in school. The PDC has networked with a number of reform efforts, including The Coalition of Essential Schools, Big Picture Learning, and the League of Democratic Schools, sharing resources and learning. The PDC has had between 900 and 1,000 visitors a year since 1994, some of them coming as individuals and some in teams. They haven’t always implemented what they

learned at Eagle Rock, but they have returned to their own environments with ideas for making their schools more hospitable for young people.

Lessons learned

Through the years, Eagle Rock staff and visiting educators have paid close attention to what seems to work with struggling students. These lessons fall into three general categories: culture, curriculum, and community.

Culture

Eagle Rock students are very clear about the effect of culture on them — on their learning as well as their personal well-being. Students are particularly sensitive to a culture that, intentionally or not, seems unfair or depersonalized. Four elements of culture that seem to have particularly powerful effects on struggling students:

1. **Being part of a learning, not a testing, culture.** Eagle Rock students have felt tested to death. They report various reactions to testing — from passivity to destruction. They prefer a learning culture, which they describe in a variety of ways, including doing and experiencing, not just being passive and listening; working according to their passions and interests; teaching others; applying what they are learning; problem solving or struggling with ideas; a continuous connected process of learning; and learning according to their own style or preferences.
2. **Being part of a culture that focuses on relationships.** Relationships profoundly affect learning, especially in terms of trust. “If a young person does not trust the instructor,” an intern commented, “the attempt by that instructor to teach the student content becomes futile.” Relationships help students become more accountable for themselves and their learning and equalize status and hierarchy, power and authority for students who may be especially conscious of inequities.
3. **Being part of a culture that focuses on principles, not rules.** Discipline is a four-letter word to many struggling students, who have perhaps experienced more than their share of it. Rules seem arbitrary and challenge some students to test the limits. What seems to work better for

✍️ See “Forever” – Cont. on Pg. 6

✍️ “Forever” – Cont. from Pg. 5

struggling students is a set of principles rather than rules. The principles embedded in $8 + 5 = 10$ serve Eagle Rock as a template for behavior. They give the community a common language; they focus on the whole student; they invite students and staff to think deeply; they lead to self-realization, personal learning and growth, and future utility.

4. **Being part of a democratic culture.**

Even though democracy is an important content standard in most states, students usually learn about democracy; they don't live it in order to learn it. Students need the experiences of voice and choice that most schools do not allow. A proposal system is one way Eagle Rock facilitates democratic processes. Students are also involved in just about every aspect of school that affects them, from hiring new staff to deciding whether a student who has been dismissed can return on “second chance.”

Curriculum

At Eagle Rock, curriculum actually means curriculum, instruction, and assessment — all of which are determined by graduation requirements. Students graduate when they demonstrate deep understanding of the five expectations from $8 + 5 = 10$.

Students enter and graduate from Eagle Rock at a variety of ages. They don't move from grade to grade in a year because the school has no grade levels. Seat time and credit hours — delivered in packages called English, Social Studies, Science, and the rest — do not rule at Eagle Rock.

Eagle Rock has no course requirements. All classes are electives, and students choose to take them in order to pursue one or more of the expectations required for graduation. In order to pursue the expectation that they create and make healthy life choices, for example, students enroll in Blood and Guts, a biology course with a twist, or serve an internship in the community health clinic in Estes Park, do a service project, or research personal health imperatives.

Many struggling students don't see value in taking whole classes for long periods of time — such as a year of chemistry — but they do appreciate standards and competencies. They like being able to customize their learning — what they learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate their learning.

There are no grades, as in marks of quality; every student is expected to achieve proficiency. Students document proficiency in a variety of ways, sometimes

in combination: portfolios, essays, reports, interviews, demonstrations, creative work, tests, observation results, etc. Rubrics help students and staff understand what proficiency means. There is no failure at Eagle Rock; with the goal of proficiency, a student's demonstration of learning may not yet represent mastery. The operative word is yet.

At the end of 10 weeks, all students make a Presentation of Learning to a panel of outsiders, making a case that they have worked toward one or more of the expectations. Students have 15 minutes to present and 15 minutes to respond to questions from the panel and from staff and their peers. When they graduate, students must limit expanded learning presentations to an hour and report on how they have met all of the graduation expectations.

Community

Struggling students seem to thrive in a culture that focuses on community. Community gives students a chance to invest in something bigger than themselves. Addressing the greater good and helping young people see beyond their egos is an important aspect of community at Eagle Rock.

Calling a school a community doesn't necessarily make it so. A real learning community is brought to life intentionally, including finding ways for students and staff to affiliate (small school, schools within schools, a variety of groups), preserving time and space for meeting as community, governance that allows for voice and choice, and a variety of community building and sustaining activities. At Eagle Rock, those activities include daily morning Gatherings, Tuesday community meetings around issues, service projects, and a variety of small group affiliations that unite students and staff, including intramurals and house (dormitory) activities.

Deep or wide philanthropy?

Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center can be characterized as a deep philanthropic project. Could the corporation have directed its money and attention toward a multitude of projects for shorter periods of time? Certainly, but spreading funds widely and focusing attention on a number of projects for one or two years and then moving on is not consistent with AHM's corporate philosophy (principles and beliefs) nor with its philanthropic philosophy. Eagle Rock is an example of how a foundation support can be both deep and wide.

✍️ “A Force for Good” – Cont. from Pg. 1

According to Forces for Good, a study on what makes great nonprofits great, “Great nonprofits spend as much time working with institutions outside their four walls as they do maintaining their internal operations.” **This issue of Eagle Eyes serves to focus on the good work Honda has accomplished across the country through the Professional Development Center.** A great place to begin is with the article *Forever* describing American Honda’s unique, innovated and enduring approach to philanthropy.

Many consultants to schools practice an expert/export model of professional development. Such providers have developed a package of “answers” and they charge significant fees to give that answer to schools all over the country without regard to context. They take a one-size fits all approach. While we do share some successes at Eagle Rock with others through conference presentations (see, for example, articles covering our presentation for the Legacy Foundation or recognition of our school as a National School of Character), this is not the heart of our work. Our approach finds us working with organizations and public high schools across the country in their setting. We optimize our reach by working primarily through organizations that convene large numbers of schools and touch hundreds, sometimes thousands, of students’ lives. Our approach is to discover the client’s aspirations, surface the assets that already exist in their setting and, through facilitation, engage the local expertise in a process of continuous improvement towards their vision. The local context, strengths based and facilitative approach constitute what Jim Collins would call our hedgehog strategy. In Jim Collins’ words, “The essence of a Hedgehog Concept is to attain piercing clarity about how to produce the best long-term results, and then exercising the relentless discipline to say, ‘No thank you’ to opportunities that fail the hedgehog test.”

You will find many stories of our relentless discipline to exercise this strategy in these pages. For example, we work with Big Picture Learning, a

progressive organization of 70 high schools located around the United States from Los Angeles to New York and Albuquerque to Detroit. Stories of our work can be found in pieces titled *Eagle Rock Delivers Proficiency Based Graduation Requirement Workshop* and *Eagle Rock Facilitates Senior Thesis Project Conference*. We work with these organizations co-designing events that provide value and results in their area of interests. We have worked with schools on instituting project-based learning, developing teacher competencies, and designing literacy programs. Most importantly we model and help launch new approaches to professional development so that we can turn the work over to the local talent in the schools and organizations. Our long term relationships to establish sustainable learning organizations is reflected in our work with the Coalition of Essential Schools [see *Eagle Rock Convenes Coalition of Essential Schools Affiliate Centers*], the U.S. National Park Service [*Rocky Mountain National Park, Eagle Rock to sign Deal*], and Goodwill Industries of Denver [*Goodwill teams up with Eagle Rock to rev up career curriculum for changing workforce*].

The process we use to establish systems for continuous improvement are anchored in the same systems we apply to our own learning at Eagle Rock School. The article titled *Professional Learning Community at Eagle Rock* describes how we walk our talk by employing the same strategies to improve results for our students that we ask of schools around the country.

Our work has been well received as we have groups ranging from 85-100% in their desire to continue their work with Eagle Rock’s facilitation. Typical feedback includes, “The day’s activities were engaging and very thought provoking. Exactly what we needed to get started! The PDC is providing us with a structure that will lead us far in this process. I look forward to our continued work together.” We hope these stories remind our friends and colleagues of the special contribution American Honda has made to education and communities of need over the years. Enjoy.

COLORADO'S EAGLE ROCK HAS CHARACTER

Portions being reprinted with permission from the May 29, 2012 edition of National Public Radio's KUNC 91.5 FM

Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center has been recognized as a 2012 National School of Character by the nonprofit, Character Education Partnership based in Washington, DC.

Each year, Character Education Partnership (CEP) selects schools and districts that demonstrate their focus on character development has had a positive impact on academic achievement, student behavior, and school climate.

National Schools of Character (NSOC) 2012 winners include 20 public schools, 3 private schools, a charter school, and a school district.

Before advancing to the national level for review, those schools and districts from over 30 participating states are recognized at State Schools of Character (SSOC).

Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, based in Estes Park, will receive the SSOC award from The Foundation for Character Development for Colorado later this Spring.

CEP will then honor this year's national winners at their annual conferences scheduled for early November in Washington, DC. At the ceremony, Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center will receive an NSOC award, banner, and a small grant to help with outreach efforts.

Eagle Rock School is an initiative of the American Honda Education Corporation. Based in Estes Park, Eagle Rock is a year-round, full-scholarship school for high school students. Eagle Rock's Professional Development Center works with adult educators from around the country who want to study how to re-engage, retain and graduate students.



EAGLE ROCK DELIVERS PROFICIENCY BASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENT WORKSHOP

By Kristy Willis, AmeriCorps VISTA member with Big Picture Learning

Educators from all over Vermont gathered together on June 21st to discuss Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR). The workshop was organized by Michael Soguero from Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center in collaboration with Jason Cushner of Big Picture South Burlington School. At the beginning of the day they described their excitement of realizing their dream of gathering educators together in one room to discuss the importance and progression of PBGR's in the educational system and despite the very hot weather, everyone seemed very excited to participate in the event.

As stated by Michael in his opening remarks, the big goal of the day was to focus on looking at works in progress and help each other think about the issues—the day was about interaction and creating conversations which would at later times during the school progress into action plans.

The agenda for the day was organized into three sessions of which participants had their choice of workshops ranging from *Looking at Student Work*:

- When Is It Worth Credit? (Big Picture South Burlington): A rubric and system where students defend that they have achieved proficiency. Looking at a student who wanted to learn to teach through being a naturalist.
- The 5 Competencies (Mt. Abraham): Students are assessed using our 5 competencies in an exhibition round table.
- Calibrating Competencies (Rochester): We will be looking at documentation, project work, and competency rubrics for a student who built his own pair of skis.
- Getting Started with PBGRs: An introduction to the what, why, and how of PBGRs.
- Digital Proficiencies or Portfolios (Harwood Union High School): Engage in a discussion

See "Eagle Rock Delivers" – Cont. on Pg. 9

📖 “Eagle Rock Delivers” – Cont. from Pg. 8

about the differences between ‘Portfolio-Based Assessment’ and ‘Proficiency-Based Assessment’ and learn more about the technology tools that can help us achieve our goals.

To more interest based workshops in the afternoon like:

- Vermont Department of Education Support of PBGRs: Workshop is designed to highlight past, present and future strategies regarding the implementation of PBGRs.
- Selecting Meaningful Proficiencies: Big Picture South Burlington. In this workshop, we will examine how BPSB selected the proficiencies which students pursue. Participants will have an opportunity to work on proficiencies for their own school with sharing and feedback from the group.
- Badges for Life-Long Learning: Discussion will include how badges can play a vital role in new assessment schemes.
- Staying Connected: How to stay connected and keep the conversation alive to support each other in doing this innovative work.

Each workshop was run by different members of the attendees, so there was a great flow of conversation between those facilitating the workshops and those attending the workshops. What seemed to be a mainstay or running thread between all of the workshops was that everyone seemed focused on clarifying goals,



exploring options for students doing PBGR’s, and also how can educators share their best practices between not only content area, but also between schools in different regions.

At the end of the day, groups gathered together by schools to discuss their next plan of action. Each group reflected upon the day’s workshops and came up with a collective best next steps action plan for their group to take in approaching their PBGR goals for the upcoming academic school year. The philosophy behind this was based on the chalk talk given by Michael Soguero where he gave the group a step by step plan on how to achieve the most intimidating goals— mostly through breaking down the big goal into a step by step procedure which makes a huge goal easy and achievable through bite size pieces. Each school shared out with the collective group and the workshop ended on a very positive note whereby we note only began a dialogue, everyone walked out of the door with a very achievable action plan.

EAGLE ROCK FACILITATES SENIOR THESIS PROJECT CONFERENCE

By Hannah Valian, AmeriCorps VISTA member with Big Picture Learning

Portions being reprinted with permission from the April 29, 2012 edition of Big Picture Learning’s Network News

At Big Picture (BP), high school does not conclude when a series of standardized requirements are met and measured with numbers and letters. Instead, Big Picture students experience an education that is designed around their individual needs, passions, challenges, and goals. The Big Picture model asks each student to take control of their education, steering their educational endeavors using their passions as a guide. Students at BP culminate their high school experience with a Senior Thesis Project (STP). The STP is an opportunity for students to use the skills and strengths they have developed throughout high school in order to inspire some kind of change in their community.

On April 4th, roughly 60 Big Picture students, advisors, and administrators gathered at the East Bay Met School in Newport, Rhode Island. Members from as far west as Tulsa, Oklahoma and as far north as Winnipeg, Canada gathered for a two-day conference on the Senior Thesis Project. The conference was facilitated by the Professional Development Center at Eagle Rock School in Estes Park, Colorado. Since 2009, the Professional Development

📖 See “Senior Thesis Project” – Cont. on Pg. 10

✍️ “Senior Thesis Project” – Cont. from Pg. 9

Center has been designing and facilitating events to support Big Picture leadership nationwide.

Eagle Rock is both a professional development center committed to supporting educators from around the country to engage students in ways that inspire continual learning and a full-scholarship residential high school where students explore an alternative path to graduation.

The STP conference got its start in the spring of 2011. Charlie Plant, who at that time was principal and founder of the East Bay Met School, was in search of a way to increase communication amongst both the students and staff at Big Picture schools in the region. He recognized a sense of isolation that had grown out of being enveloped in the work he was doing at his own school. Mary Vieira, the current principal at East Bay, was at that time in her principal residency program focusing on project depth. She began exploring the experimentation of instructional practices that support depth of learning through projects. She believed there was a way to develop common structured instructional processes that would not compromise individualized learning but enhance it.

Together Charlie and Mary developed a plan to host a conference that brought Big Picture educators and students together. Charlie had known Michael Soguero, Director of Professional Development, for years and approached him about designing and facilitating the conference. Before he joined Eagle Rock in 2006, Michael was the founder and principal of The Bronx Guild High School in New York which uses the Big Picture education model. His knowledge regarding this particular education model, combined with his resources and experience in professional development, made him an ideal facilitator. Since the first STP conference one year ago, the number of attendees has grown from roughly 20 people to 60.

Michael framed the conference by pointing out that at Big Picture schools, it is easy to become so focused on the individualized project planning that the larger patterns become hard to see. But it is from those patterns that we can shape and guide our work as educators or even as students. He introduced a guiding question for the conference that was, “What instructional practices contribute to project depth?” He later linked this idea



to positive deviance, a concept which asks you to look at the things that are working in order to address the things that are not. If the thing you seek to change has become normal, you may need to dissect how or why your desired result works for some. And so the conference asked participants to examine what the aspects of a successful, in-depth Senior Thesis Project look like.

Conference participants were able to act as panels for brief student presentations given by seniors who had completed successful projects. Cynthia devoted her senior year to investigating human trafficking in Rhode Island. She took a class at Brown University, organized a peace march to raise money for victims of human trafficking, and lobbied for a law that recently passed which bans human trafficking in RI. Corrine applied her passion for environmental studies by travelling abroad to Macedonia where she taught classes about recycling. She also organized an environmental film series in Newport which included guest speakers. These two students, as well as all the other presenting seniors, had successful projects that depended on extensive mentor support, clear organization, and most importantly a passion for their pursuits.

The conference concluded with a circle of acknowledgements. The floor was open for people to recognize other participants for something they admired, learned, or were thankful for. It was in this circle that the success of the conference became apparent. Everyone was walking away with more resources and ideas, but also a deep appreciation for their fellow educators and the students for whom they work to support.

EAGLE ROCK CONVENES COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS AFFILIATE CENTERS

By Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

In a small, inconspicuous room with windows facing the Art Institute in downtown Chicago, a conversation of depth and strategy was had between ten affiliate center directors from the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES).

Though across the nation hundreds of individuals, schools and organizations exist within the CES membership, only a couple dozen organizations hold the status of CES Center, which enable them to operate as independent organizations guided by the CES Principles, providing long-term professional development and technical assistance to schools. Centers are of a size and scale that allow members to know each other well. Each center has the autonomy to create policy appropriate for the schools it serves.

Last November, the Executive Board of the Coalition of Essential Schools named the Professional Development Center at Eagle Rock as a resource to serve as conveners of the Coalition of Essential Schools' Affiliate Centers. Eagle Rock first convened a meeting of the CES Affiliate Centers last November 10th in Providence in conjunction with Fall Forum 2011.

Building on the work done last November, Michael Soguero, Dan Condon, and Seth Wyncott, the Professional Development Team at Eagle Rock, facilitated a process where each participant charted out their own center's theory of action, in order to reintroduce each other to the collective group. Individuals representing Centers asked themselves: "What do we think we're doing in the world of education, and how do we have that affect?" The idea was to look for connections and what could emerge about the collective as a network of Affiliate Centers. Later during the two day meeting centers presented dilemmas that they wanted to work on collectively with the group through using Critical Friends protocols.

Martin L. Krovetz, Director of the Leading for Equity and Achievement Design (LEAD) Center, an affiliate CES Center located in Santa Cruz, California said, "Given the opportunity to think through and present a dilemma we are working with at LEAD, led to a diagram on chart paper and the usual honest and valuable feedback from others that became the center of conversation for those of us working at LEAD as we summarized our "lessons learned" after my return from the Directors meeting."

Laura Thomas, Director of The Antioch Center for School Renewal at Antioch University New England, an affiliate CES Center located in Keene, New Hampshire expressed, "I always benefit from collaborating with the few people in the world who actually do the same work I do - even though we do it in very different contexts."



Eagle Rock looks forward to convening again on Sunday, November 11th following the CES Fall Forum in Providence, Rhode Island.

No asbestos products were used in the construction of Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center. A copy of Eagle Rock's Asbestos Management Plan is on file. This is a once a year notification required by the State of Colorado.

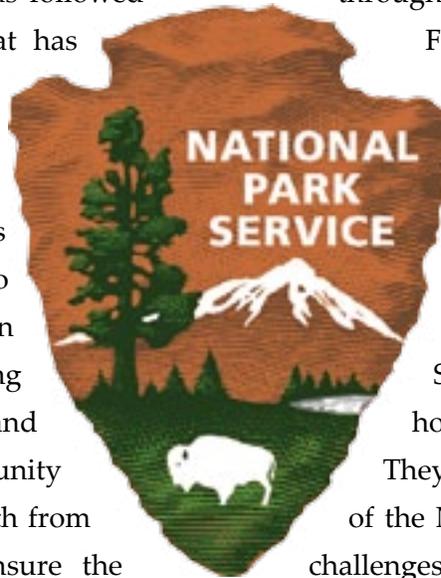
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, EAGLE ROCK TO SIGN DEAL

*Portions being reprinted with permission from the June 1, 2012 edition of
The Estes Park Trail Gazette*

On June 7, Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) and Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center (ER) will sign a General Agreement in an effort to ensure that the youth of today become stewards of public lands well into the future. Anyone who has read *The Last Child in the Woods* or has followed the national dialogue regarding what has been called "nature deficit disorder," a label which describes the disconnect between young people and the natural environment, knows that there is concern about young people relating to nature. With the increase in urbanization of the United States and the increasing diversity of the US population, School and park employees recognized an opportunity to engage and ultimately employ youth from diverse backgrounds in order to insure the relevancy of parks for future generations.

Since 2008, RMNP and ER have worked together to solidify their partnership. During that time, over 200 ER students have participated in outdoor activities, academic classes, and service learning experiences in the park. Of those students, eighteen participated in the ER / park internship and of those eighteen, twelve have moved through a sequenced program ultimately being employed by the park for multiple seasons. The pinnacle of the relationship is employment. To pursue employment, interested students go through an application process with the school and upon being selected are matched with a RMNP division and supervisor. Students start off in the VIP (Volunteers in the Park) program and for five-weeks volunteer

in the park two days per week learning about their responsibilities by working with other VIPs and park employees. During the internship, students spend the other two days in the ER classroom focusing on personal and natural resource professional development through a structured curriculum.



Following the five-week VIP portion, students who are eligible can be hired through the STEP (Student Temporary Employment Program) and become park employees during the trimester break. The benefits to RMNP and Eagle Rock are numerous. Students gain an understanding of how the National Park Service operates. They gain knowledge and appreciation of the NPS history, and examine issues and challenges faced by the NPS. Perhaps most importantly, students experience first hand that the NPS offers them a connection to their parks; both potential careers and seasonal employment in a variety of fields. The National Park Service benefits from this program by increasing its diversity and by hiring young, new employees. ER students also bring a fresh perspective to the park given that many of them represent the diversity of the US and values of the next generation.

This unique program has now started to get national attention and both organizations have started developing curriculum and training materials that can be disseminated to other schools and national parks around the country.

FOUR MORE GRADUATES TAKE FLIGHT

By Seth Wyncott, former Public Allies Fellow in Professional Development

It is through our graduates from Eagle Rock School that the Professional Development Center gains credibility in working with schools on issues of education reform specific to re-engaging youth in their education.

Raphael Bresselsmith spent the first ten years of his life far from the cities and suburbs that many Eagle Rock students arrive from. For his formative years he lived on an organic farm in the coastal mountains of Oregon, completely isolated from the outside world. Surrounded by such a beautiful natural environment, Raph developed a great love and understanding of the outdoors, but a move to bustling Arizona at the age of 10 would make for a difficult transition. "It was a huge shock," he explains. "I didn't know how to interact with my peers. I had no common ground with them." At the age of 12, Raph moved once again. This time to rural southern Utah where he reignited his love for the outdoors, taking advantage of a backyard wilderness. Unfortunately, he was due for yet another shock, once public high school pulled him from his most comfortable environment. The discomfort was enough that he decided to drop out after the first quarter of sophomore year. "The school was bad in general," he says. "A lot of close-minded people; very small, 88 students, all white people." Spurred to find meaningful

change, Raph began researching alternative education opportunities and came across Eagle Rock. After a prospective visit, he was convinced that this was where he belonged and wrote a letter to L'Tanya Perkins, Admission Associate, to convince her, too.

Making his way through wilderness and the interdisciplinary structure of life at Eagle Rock, Raph found motivation to study and work with people who are different from him. "If I get emotional at all, I don't let it affect my job performance," he explains, speaking to his developing leadership style. Yet he admits that this "was a kind of tunnel vision in a way.

I was only looking at things from my point of view. I couldn't deal with people who let their emotions affect their interactions and their job performance. But not everyone's like that. A lot of people get mad if I don't say please and thank you. I found that people didn't react positively to me not saying please and thank you." So how did he adjust? "I started saying please and thank you. I find that the overall mood of my team is more positive. It was a very small change but I think it's had a very big effect."

Despite taking a better perspective of emotion, Raph still encourages others to "invest their energy wisely" instead of focusing on the drama. "I found an intrinsic motivation," he explains. This has made all the difference. Now just weeks away from graduation,

he is focused and filled with quiet determination. He plans to travel the U.S. (including Hawaii), and maybe take a detour through Europe before enrolling at the Air Force Academy by July of 2013. Bon voyage, Raphael. We wish you the best.



"It was just us," **Jeffrey Pomeroy** describes, speaking of his family history and sitting across from me in a rolling office chair. He is reclined with his backpack near his feet. "Never really had a huge family," he says. "It was just my dad, my mom, and my sister." Despite the unique

pieces of family life and his own unique approach to life, Jeffrey's story is not the first of its kind. "Growing up was kind of weird," he says. "I want to be with my family all the time, and then ever so slowly wanted to drift apart." High school brought the most major drift and like many other students at Eagle Rock, school itself was a battle.

Jeffrey is frank about his experience: "All throughout middle school and high school I always had parent teacher conferences... bad grades and stuff." One morning, Jeffrey and his mom went to school early

✍ See "Graduates" – Cont. on Pg. 14

👉 “*Graduates*” – Cont. from Pg. 13

to hear the same old “Oh, he’s not doing so well, if he doesn’t get his act together he is going to fail” speech, when English teacher Mr. Rutherford came onto the scene and brought Eagle Rock into the picture. At the time he didn’t use the Eagle Rock name, but he did explain that such a place could bring good change in Jeffrey’s life. Jeffrey’s first reaction: to disregard. “I wanted to be far away from my family but I didn’t want to leave the house. I didn’t know what else was out there,” he explains. But despite still feeling a bit sketchy about the situation, Jeffrey did take a chance and visited as a prospective student during ER48. Shortly after, he enrolled.

Of course Eagle Rock would throw its own challenges and as Jeffrey describes it, laziness was the issue for him. “Just physical, simple, labor,” he says to me. “Before I would be pretty lazy about things; didn’t want to do anything. School-wise, I’ve definitely kept up with things. I just think this place you have to be on top of things 24/7.” Such a lesson for Jeffrey leads right into his advice for current students: “give it your all, for as long as you can. Let’s say someone knows they’re going to get kicked out at the end of the trimester at least try to get your credit. That can help you out in the long run. Just try to go for it all. Put your full effort into it.” Wise words as he himself pushes down the home stretch. As for his plans after Eagle Rock, Jeffrey plans to attend Mesa Community College in Arizona before enrolling in DePauw in Greencastle, Indiana to study business and minor in music.” An avid music fan, Jeffrey hopes to own his own music venue someday. “And have Chelsea Grin play at my venue,” he poignantly

adds. If you don’t know Chelsea Grin’s music, look them up; I imagine Jeffrey will be happy you did. We wish you the best, Jeffrey.

A resident of Homewood, Illinois since fourth grade, **Julian Smith** was a “pretty active kid” and the typical events of adolescent life in the suburbs—skateboarding and spending time at friends’ houses—took up most of his time. Though art was an early focus, with the coming of 8th grade art disappeared and skateboarding habits took precedence above all else. “I was being really close-minded and focused solely on skating,” Julian says. A sense of balance was disappearing and his efforts in school showed it. When his grades dropped, his parents began to take notice.

Looking back on these early days, Julian knows he was in need of a change; a change in environment to propel him to different, more visionary ideas. “I needed an environment surrounded by people just like me. I needed to surround myself with people who cared about and thought about their future.” Discovering Eagle Rock School in Estes Park, Colorado was the start of enormous change, even if the start itself was slow going. After taking a 4-day prospective visit during the 48th school trimester (ER48), he was initially unenthused with the thought of committing to the Eagle Rock ideal and moving so far from home. If it would have been solely up to him, he would have sat on the decision, but his mom wasn’t having that. She pushed him to make a change and start the admissions process. With a driving force on his case, it was only a matter of time before a decision to enroll was made and an official move to Eagle Rock began.

Fast forward to 2012; now on the verge of graduation, Julian looks back with pride on his accomplishments. Eagle Rock provided the environment for change, even if staying the course was a battle. Reflecting on the experience as an upcoming graduate, he readily admits to difficulty. He describes being in leadership roles as particularly tough, perhaps the greatest challenge, though certainly part of the learning process. “Staying calm and realizing that people are different,” was part of his schooling in diversity. His takeaway: “you need to accept differences to gain a better understanding of them, of the people you’re working with.” As he sees it, the learning won’t stop here. With Antioch College now on his late September horizon, Julian takes strides as a continuous learner and it becomes safe to say that Eagle Rock has served him well. Taking a lesson in “super focus” from IFBB pro bodybuilder Phil Heath, Julian believes he can make progress in any sport or path he chooses. And as his current choice to study art history and the social sciences approaches reality, perhaps his early passion for drawing will make a long awaited comeback. We wish you the best, Julian.

For **Marolise Williams**, cross-cultural experience was an active part of her early childhood experience. By the age of six she had moved from Florida, to Japan, to Washington, D.C., following in the footsteps of her military dad. As he was often at an overseas post, Marolise spent most of her life settled in D.C. with her mother, where mom continued to push for a diverse education. “My mom always wanted me to be enriched

👉 See “*Graduates*” – Cont. on Pg. 15

✍️ “Graduates” – Cont. from Pg. 14

in culture,” Marolise says. “So she put me in a public school for French immersion. From first grade until I came to Eagle Rock, I was in French immersion school.”

Marolise admits hitting a rebellious stage in the early years of high school. It was around this time that her mother first introduced the Eagle Rock bug, setting Marolise up with a prospective visit, in order to gain a better perspective of what the school had to offer. Afraid that Eagle Rock would be an experience in the “boondocks,” Marolise was less than happy about committing to such a program, though she did compose a letter to L’Tanya Perkins,

director of admissions. Marolise heard nothing for a long while, perhaps beginning to think that life in the boondocks wouldn’t happen. But one day a letter appeared in the mail. Six weeks before the trimester was set to begin, she was accepted. And with some hesitation, she dove in.

Once on campus, teachable moments piled up, both in and out of the classroom. At Eagle Rock, emotional interactions can become commonplace for such a tight-knit community, yet for Marolise, learning to show emotion proved to be one of her greatest challenges. “I had never cried in front of anyone until I came to Eagle Rock. It was just ‘cause emotions are weakness.

I was always told that.” But coming to an understanding of emotional expression built strength and maturity; a certain staying power that has kept her here. Offering advice to current students who may be facing trials of their own, Marolise encourages others to ask themselves: “is it worth going back home to the hood or being on the block doing nothing?” Her answer: “stick through it, because it’s worth it at the end.” As Marolise has plans to enter the fashion industry by means of The Fashion Institute of Design in Los Angeles, her motivating words carry all the more clout. We wish you the best, Marolise.

GOODWILL TEAMS UP WITH EAGLE ROCK TO REV UP CAREER CURRICULUM FOR CHANGING WORKFORCE

Portions being reprinted with permission from <http://www.goodwilldenver.org/>

At a time when work opportunities are hard to come by for the average adult, finding a job can be an uphill battle for recent graduates. Educators from Goodwill Industries of Denver’s Youth Career Development program are committed to finding a solution. Goodwill teachers are spending their summer consulting with Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center to expand and evolve Goodwill’s Youth Career Development Curriculum. This pro-bono partnership will enable Goodwill to strengthen its current program to help even more students successfully plan for their future and formulate meaningful and attainable career paths.

Currently, Goodwill facilitators work in 28 Denver and northern Colorado area schools providing much needed career development assistance to at-risk students. Eagle Rock School is an initiative of the American Honda Education Corporation. Based in Estes Park Colorado, Eagle Rock’s Professional Development Center works with adult educators from around the country who want to study how to re-engage, retain and graduate students.



Throughout this one-year partnership, Goodwill educators will take an asset based approach with Eagle Rock staff to create concrete, measurable goals for student success. Using the backward design method, this process will ultimately reformulate Goodwill’s Youth career curriculum to even better prepare students for the future workforce.

“This experience has been motivational and challenging,” said

Kelsey Glass, a Goodwill Facilitator. “It has inspired us to think more in-depth about our curriculum than ever before.”

Goodwill and the Professional Development Center will work together intensively throughout the next year and plan to implement the newly designed job readiness curriculum strategies during the 2013-2014 school year. To learn more about Goodwill’s Youth Career Services program, please visit <http://www.goodwilldenver.org/high-school>

EAGLE ROCK STUDENT AMBASSADORS SHARE THEIR EXPERTISE

By Seth Wyncott, former Public Allies Fellow in Professional Development

From its inception, Eagle Rock was designed to have a national impact. The plan was to build a national presence through developing a team of educational innovators operating both a school and a professional development center. The organization, more than just a school and more than just a professional development center, would take lessons learned and share them with public education nationally. Over time, the professional development center staff developed a facilitation and consulting model that shifted from the expert/export model and replaced it with fostering asset-based solutions that emerge in the context of the schools with which they work. Success stories are numerous. Schools have been mentored into existence, conflict resolution applied to organizational crises among clientele, and a national presence has been fostered. Yet the team of adults facilitating improvement around the country is not the full story. It ignores an essential additive: the student component. Accessing the nation has occurred on two fronts. Today it's all in the name: Eagle Rock School (ERS) and Professional Development Center (PDC).

An integral piece of the professional development center's credibility stems from its immersion in a high school for at-risk students. It has developed as a center to serve the educators looking to re-engage disengaged students and has served as an essential component to the professional development mission of improving secondary education through reform and renewal. Daily classroom practice could inform all external efforts, and lessons learned on the outside could be applied internally. Almost 20 years since

its inception, curriculum for at-risk students and external outreach now coexist with a national reputation.

It is only natural that each of these halves would focus on improving their respective abilities—classroom instruction or facilitation and public relations. Yet in the midst of this intensive process, collaborative growth is sometimes stymied. Over the years, students have slowly drifted away from externally focused activity and many face a weak understanding of Eagle Rock's long-term purpose as fulfilled through the PDC. But in the gap between actual reality and preferred future, Lan Dinh, Zack Montez, and me have developed a new experience to bring students into the fold of the larger mission.

As the PDC continues to receive hundreds of visitors in a typical year, students are taking an active role in the visitation process by pairing themselves with educators and other inquiring minds in a classroom "shadowing" experience. With a student guide, guests "shadow" students to class throughout the day and gather the inside scoop; from the seat of a student, with the perspective of an adult. Many Eagle Rock students have been active participants in this process for years. Proclaiming them ambassadors is only another step towards recognizing their important role in the long-term vision of ERS.

After a session of shadowing morning and afternoon classes, the PDC is breaking with tradition and actively inviting students to join debriefs: the all-important, post-class, brainstorm and reflection period for educators and guests. Though Dan Condon and myself have been primary communicators in debriefs, the truth is, students have a stronger inside perspective

than any of us do in administration. They are the gatekeepers of details and inside experience. Dan and I can give guests the reason certain structures exist; students can give you the rhyme, sounds and meanings from the seat of a non-traditional high school learner. Want to know how interdisciplinary structure affects life in community? Want to know how students view their relationship with instructors? Want the inside scoop on how discipline and restorative justice manifest in community? Ask the experts, ask our student ambassadors.

It is planned to continue incorporating students for years to come. Taking students to conferences is also part of the conversation. For now, the opportunity to get involved through shadows and debriefs provides great experience in communication and code switching. Despite the general informal atmosphere at Eagle Rock, meeting with guests can beg formality of speech. Adding a practical boost to their résumé is another component. Certainly it's also about fun. Our guests are passionate about our students, and it shows. Some have expressed that debriefing with students was by far the best part of their visit. From what our students are saying, the feeling is reciprocated. "Whenever you need me, I'm there for you!" Gabriel Hernandez exclaimed to me, one afternoon after sitting in with a group of visiting educators. This is the kind of energy we need, what we hope to inspire. A student more connected to PDC affairs is a jump in the right direction. Thank you, Gabriel. And thanks to all students who have helped so far. Expect more to come.

EAGLE ROCK JOINS THE OPPORTUNITY NATION CAMPAIGN TO HELP RESTORE ECONOMIC MOBILITY IN AMERICA

by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center announced today that it is joining the Opportunity Nation campaign, a broad-based, cross-partisan coalition of 250 public, private, non-profit, civic and faith-based organizations all working together to expand economic opportunity and close the opportunity gap in America.

“We are excited to join the Opportunity Nation coalition to further their aim in addressing opportunity for the 7,000 students who drop out of high school each school day. Eagle Rock’s Professional Development Center has been engaged in school reform initiatives nationally for the past 20 years,” said Michael Soguero, Director of Professional Development.

“Opportunity Nation starts from the belief that the zip code you’re born into shouldn’t pre-determine your destiny, and that when social mobility grinds to a halt, we are in grave danger of losing the best of America,” said Mark Edwards, executive director of Opportunity Nation. “As an organization working everyday to enhance opportunity, we couldn’t be more excited to welcome Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center to our coalition.”

A centerpiece of the campaign is a new measure designed to show exactly what opportunity in America looks like today. The Opportunity Index (www.opportunityindex.org) provides the first-ever snapshot of access to opportunity at the state and county levels. Using sixteen indicators that collectively illustrate a community’s strength, the Opportunity Index ranks every state and assigns almost every county in America a first of its kind Opportunity Score ranging from “A” for excellent to “F” for failing.

Armed with this knowledge, engaged citizens and leaders at the local, state, and federal levels can identify concrete solutions to improve economic mobility at the ground level. The Opportunity Index will be issued annually, giving leaders a way to measure the effectiveness of their efforts.

Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development shared, “We’re honored to join the efforts of Opportunity Nation and other partners of the coalition who we have been collaborating for years such as Public

Allies. The Opportunity Index specific to education will better inform Eagle Rock’s Professional Development Center which regions we will engage with nationally.”

The Index reveals some interesting new facts:

- The indicator with the strongest correlation with the final Opportunity Score for a state is youth academic and economic inclusion. Specifically, states with a higher percentage of “Teenagers (16-19) Not in School and Not Working” have low opportunity scores;
- Twelve of the 15 lowest scoring states are in the south;
- Five of the 10 highest scoring states are in the northeast region;
- Income is surprisingly not the strongest indicator of opportunity. Nevada has higher than average median household income, but ranks last in the nation in opportunity due to low scores in education and community dimensions.

This September, Opportunity Nation will host its second national Summit to shine a spotlight on one of the earliest and most critical rungs on the ladder of opportunity: ensuring that the rising generation is equipped with the skills needed to compete in the current and future economies. The campaign will release a bold set of bipartisan, pragmatic ideas that illuminate pathways to success beyond just a four-year degree, including those that link education to work.

The September Summit will also serve as a platform for businesses to share actions they have taken over the past year to deepen their commitments to the 21st century American workforce, and for leading elected officials from across the political spectrum to share their plans to create communities of opportunity across the country.

To learn more about Opportunity Nation, the September Summit, and the steps they are taking to develop a shared plan to close the skills gap and restore opportunity in America, please visit www.opportunitynation.org.



NETWORK OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AT EAGLE ROCK

By Holly Takashima, Instructional Specialist in Language Arts & Literacy

At many schools, professional development (PD) looks something like this: presenters are brought in from outside the school to lecture on an important educational strategy; teachers sit through the presentation politely; presenters leave; things return to business as usual. Nothing gained, nothing changed. Even with an enthusiastic staff and passionate presenters, this model often proves ineffective because it does not allow time or space for teachers to engage with



the PD. Teachers end up slipping into the role of passive students, revealing a simple truth: pedagogy that doesn't help students learn doesn't help teachers learn either.

At Eagle Rock School, professional development looks quite different from this traditional model of passive teacher learning. Instead of outside presenters coming in, professional development is planned and implemented by a core group of instructors and administrators who make up the Professional Development Critical Friends Group (PDCFG).

The group formed when the professional interests of two staff

members, Michael Soguero and Karen Ikegami, happily coincided. Soguero, Director of Professional Development, had wanted to include instructors in more of the PD planning. Prior to that, he and Jeff Liddle, Director of Curriculum, had been in charge of PD at the school. Ikegami had just been hired as the math instructor, and she had ideas about using Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) to strengthen communication between instruc-

tors. "I've always found a hole in how instructors work together on their own," said Ikegami. "We're often not very collaborative outside of class, and I wanted a little more of a support group. Part of my goals for that year was to put this thing together." She succeeded in creating a CFG, and because of Soguero's guidance, it ultimately ended up focusing on professional development.

The group has planned professional development for ER staff for the past three years, each year having a different instructional theme. The first year focused on writing across the curriculum, followed by a year of exploration into reading strategies. Beginning in the fall of 2011, the group turned its attention to higher order thinking skills. In each case, the PDCFG reflected upon the immediate needs of the students and teachers at the school. Ikegami described it as "flexible PD that is responsive to what the instructors need." She explained, "The goal is

to meet regularly to constantly talk about what to do next. The group was never designed to be experts in PD – it's just a group that was willing to learn about new things and to then bring those to the staff to learn about."

Instructional meetings are the primary places where this new learning is brought to the staff. This past year's study of higher order thinking skills was the focus during each meeting. Many meetings revolved around the examination of both student and teacher work, in the form of lesson plans, assessments, and other classroom evidence. Through the use of protocols, instructors were able to critically examine their own and each other's work, deepening their understanding of what higher order thinking skills are and how they can be woven into the content of any class.

Bringing in work can be a stressful experience for any teacher. For the group of twelve Public Allies teaching fellows, who participate alongside their instructional specialist mentors, the experience was made even more overwhelming by its novelty. "It's such a personal piece of something you put a lot of effort into," said Lan Dinh, the Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Societies and Cultures, as she described the experience of presenting her own work to be examined. "As a new teacher, it's always really nerve-racking to have seasoned teachers look at it, but in the end, it is always productive. The process of looking at others'

EAGLE ROCK INSPIRES ALUMNA ANNA ALARID IN EDUCATION REFORM EFFORTS

By Seth Wyncott, former Public Allies Fellow in Professional Development

As Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center approaches its twentieth anniversary, and our graduated student body spreads across the nation, impact becomes all the more interesting and all the more measurable. It was the 32nd trimester of ER that Anna Alarid arrived on campus and entered a trajectory that would lead her from non-traditional learner to non-traditional educator. In her own words, “I went to ER because I was a non-traditional student (as they say). When I left, I still very much felt like a non-traditional student.” As the Life After Eagle Rock coordinator had connections to Eugene Lane College, the liberal arts division of the New School, and as it seemed like a good fit, Anna was excited to begin. Once arriving, she joined the Ed Studies program, “which is more than just teaching and learning,” as she describes it. “They look at policy, the history of education, and so on, and I knew that I wanted to learn about all of these things. Because of Eagle Rock’s Professional Development Center, I felt I had an understanding: I always kind of thought, ‘what’s available and what are the choices?’” Classroom discussion included a lot about the student perspective, both within traditional systems and what is reproduced on a social level. Questions like “What can we do to improve it?” were natural catalysts for Anna’s involvement in educational reform. Questions like this were a natural catalyst for Anna’s involvement in educational reform.

During her junior year, she began work as a program assistant on a project titled Creative Pedagogy for Teacher Change. Through the program, groups of six to eight from six different Title I schools in NYC—schools receiving money under No Child Left Behind because of their student population—could study concerns and issues with instruction from the instructor perspective. As Anna describes it, “Telling teachers what to do might not be the best model. They wanted to open up the university to the general teachers to find their needs and perspectives.” In order to address change occurring at the ground level, Creative Pedagogy for Teacher Change would look at and discuss teacher practices and needs in order to discover successful processes already in place. Together, Anna and her team used the Action Research Model to move teachers through a process of ongoing inquiry, in regards to their place throughout multiple tiers of educational leadership. In other words, “Their position in the school, their school in the larger spectrum, and in the Department of Education.”

Overall, the project was very process-oriented. Rather than providing teachers with a traditional top-down lecture on improvement, the Creative Pedagogy Project sought to learn from the ground up. Confirming certain expectations, teachers are at the front lines of education, yet impactful change is difficult to achieve without strong teams or proper leadership in place. “Sometimes they are working



towards these things—strategies and innovations, pedagogical teaching and learning-based skills—within a vacuum,” she says. Often teachers hit a wall, where they realize that large organizational changes have to take place before they can make a change. In spite of a disconnect between the front lines and the upper echelon of school leadership, Anna and the team were determined to build rapport between teachers by leveraging local resources across disciplines. This meant bringing in undergrad and graduate students, while also reaching across school disciplines. “What we tried to do was pull from all different divisions, by using faculty or conferences; bridging the gap between traditional professional development and things that have been developing in other industries or disciplines.” Rather than only asking, ‘what does education have to say about education practices?’ inquiring ‘how do the sciences and business approach education?’ would supply a diverse array of local advice.

✍ See “Ana Alarid” – Cont. on Pg. 20

✍️ *“Ana Alarid” – Cont. from Pg. 19*

Accomplished by means of a federal grant, Creative Pedagogy for Teacher Change is now reaching the end of its initial research lifecycle. Though the grant was largely experimental, steps have been made to bring about final resolution. “It looks like now they’re pulling together all their findings and reflecting again to find shortcomings,” Anna explains. “Then take these into teacher communities and research communities.”

For Anna, the end of one project would mark the beginning of the next. This time around would make a departure from pedagogical research and a return to her true passion: high school students. Currently she is working to understand college readiness through Engage College Scholars. “Working with high school students was a better fit for me because I was them,” she softly proclaims. Suddenly beliefs she had as a student at Eagle Rock could be addressed in a practical framework with financial backing.

“We were just at a conference talking about college readiness,” she explains. “The story of graduation rates is that they are higher than ever, but we know that a lot of students aren’t graduating once they get there, or are getting lost somewhere between senior year and college. Some of the students are a bit late in the game getting prepared for college. The problems are just immense in that area, especially in NYC.”

According to Anna, oftentimes this is a systemic issue of making room for proper counseling. Many of the kids she worked with simply “didn’t have a lot of space in the system. By the time they were in their senior year they knew they weren’t where they should be.” Without proper counseling into the later years of high school, the issue became one of positive motivation. “We need more counselors in New York City. Sometimes it’s 1:300,” (counselors to students). “Really it’s about creating a culture of college awareness and college readiness in schools.” A big part of her efforts is helping students stay in a mentality of readiness. Often, when college looms at the door, students realize they are not ready to make a big move. Anna believes all the little things make the difference. For example, “it’s important for future that you work on your spelling.” She says this with a slight chuckle, yet in this sound it is apparent that she is fully cognizant of the truth in her statement.

With one-year left to complete a master’s degree in Urban Policy and Management at the New School, Anna continues down the non-traditional learner track while focusing her attention on real clients. Having the firsthand experience of Eagle Rock has set her up well. If anything, it’s set her up for the long haul. Like the namesake of her education, she is in it for the long haul, fully aware that it takes time, effort, and staying power to produce results.

✍️ *“Network” – Cont. from Pg. 18*

work is also helpful because it makes me have a more critical eye when looking at my own.”

Grace Deputy, the Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Human Performance, described a similar experience when she first participated as a presenter during an instructional meeting. “I was really nervous the first time I brought in work,” she said, “but I realized the benefits of having others look at it outweighed that nervousness. It gave me new perspectives and new ideas.” Like Dinh, Deputy also recognized the benefit of participating in the instructional meetings even when her work was not being examined. She explained, “In seeing other instructors’ work, I saw that I had similar issues with my own. I was able to apply feedback others received to my own work even if it was a week when I wasn’t presenting.”

The impact the instructional meetings had on Dinh and Deputy was no accident. The sentiments they expressed were echoed by many other fellows and instructors who had the opportunity to present work related to the year’s theme, and to learn and to reflect on it. “The PDCFG plans really well for instructors to look critically at one another’s work,” said Ikegami. Through its planning, the group has created a culture of feedback, teaching, and learning among Eagle Rock staff. More importantly, it has helped nurture teachers who are curious and reflective learners, and who will take the PDCFG’s critical practice with them wherever they go. “The encouragement of the staff to put work out there made it possible for me to do it,” said Deputy. “It created the space for it. Now in the future, I will jump on those opportunities because I know how beneficial they are.”