SECOND BOOK ABOUT EAGLE ROCK SCHOOL RELEASED
Reviewed by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

Engaging the Disengaged: How Schools Can Help Struggling Student Succeed by Lois Brown Easton (Corwin Press, 304 pages, $37.95)

Far too many young people sit in classes disengaged; far too many drop out of school altogether. The drop-out statistics are frightening enough, but no one really knows how many more students merely endure school, sitting in the back of the room, tuned out. Engaging the Disengaged is addressed to those of us who work with such students, and also to those who work with the teachers and principals who work with such students – district administrators, for example. Finally, it speaks to teacher education and continuing education programs that prepare teachers and administrators to work in schools that “house” such students. The reader will encounter many different voices from K-12 schools throughout the country in this book: voices of students, voices of their teachers, and voices of those who observe these students and teachers working together.

This book is about changing the culture of schools so that they are more humane and habitable for struggling learners – really, for all learners. Easton argues that schools should make important changes, such as creating whole-school learning communities. Teachers can certainly change their own classrooms, but school wide change is likely to have a greater effect. In fact, redesigned schools – not just high schools but all schools that serve struggling students – can help keep such students in school, learning, graduating, and contributing to a society that needs them.

Easton organizes her ideas into two sections: Culture and Curriculum, and Instruction and Assessment. The final chapter pulls it all together by looking at the effect of school on the whole student. Topics include a testing culture vs. a learning culture; the importance of building relationships and creating community; how principles govern a school better than rules; building a democracy in schools; how really to be standards-based; innovative instructional strategies; and performance assessment for learning.

For over a decade, I have been working with young people who have found success to be elusive in their high school experiences. Few were on track to graduating and many had dropped out. Easton’s book shares realistic and inspiring examples of the kind of engagement that transforms such kids’ lives.

To purchase the book for $40, including tax and shipping, reach Dan Condon at dcondon@eaglerockschool.org or 970.586.7122. All royalties benefit the Eagle Rock School Graduate Higher Education Fund.

DIRECTOR OF AMERICORPS VISITS EAGLE ROCK SCHOOL
by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

Reprinted with permission from the October 19, 2007 edition of the Estes Park Trail Gazette.

On Monday, October 15, Kristin McSwain, director of AmeriCorps, visited with staff and students at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center. McSwain was in Estes Park for the 2007 Governor’s Commission on Community Service Conference held at the YMCA of the Rockies.

AmeriCorps is a network of local, state, and national service programs that connects more than 70,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet our country’s critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment.

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AmeriCorps members serve with more than 2,000 nonprofits, public agencies, and faith-based and community organizations. Since 1994, more than 400,000 men and women have provided needed assistance to millions of Americans across the nation through their AmeriCorps service.

Robert Burkhardt, Head of School, explains, “The ethic of service advanced by AmeriCorps volunteers across this country has helped to shape our thinking and practice at Eagle Rock School, underpinning our school’s philosophy of ‘service to others’.”

The Governor’s Commission on Community Service serves as a catalyst for the promotion and expansion of community service and volunteerism to all Coloradans as an effective means to address civic and social issues and improve the overall well being of communities throughout the state, particularly in the areas of literacy and mentoring.

Since 2002, through a partnership with Public Allies, Inc., Eagle Rock School has hosted 72 AmeriCorps volunteers through the Public Allies Teaching Fellowship Program. The Public Allies Fellowships at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center support new ways of leading that are right for the times and right for a unique youth population. This year-long service and leadership development program provides 12 fellows with a challenging community building opportunity and advanced instruction to become effective teachers, leadership trainers, and youth workers.

Diverse young leaders who wish to advance their leadership skills while creating innovative social change should consider this program. Fellows draw on a beautiful mountain setting to develop the talents and confidence of students, and they support a nontraditional curriculum that focuses on how people learn rather than how teachers teach. Eagle Rock emphasizes active learning, community service, environmentalism, outdoor education, and traditional academic subjects.

For more information about Eagle Rock’s AmeriCorps Program, visit www.publicallies.org/eaglerock

**MEET THE PUBLIC ALLIES TEACHING FELLOWS**

by Margrette Castro, former Director of the Public Allies Teaching Fellowship

Eagle Rock School eagerly welcomed new Teaching Fellows this past September. At a summer barbeque, staff and their families came to greet ER-43 Fellows on their first day at Eagle Rock, sharing stories and getting to know them. This year’s group of Fellows was selected from over 120 applicants. They come from across the country and bring a passion and dedication to education and youth development.

**Brian Counselman.** 23, grew up in Wisconsin and graduated from UW-Madison with a degree in Secondary Education in Biology and Natural Science. During college, Brian had the opportunity to study in Cape Town, South Africa and gained a better perspective of South Africa’s social and environmental issues through teaching in after school programs in townships, participating in classes about local issues of AIDS and social justice, and traveling throughout the region. Brian is excited about Eagle Rock’s holistic and experiential approach to education and hopes to find ways to apply that philosophy outside of Eagle Rock School to make science relevant and engaging for students.

**Heather Dickerson.** 23, grew up in rural New York State. A degree in Art Education and four years in Buffalo, NY led to an important year spent coordinating an after school program, substitute teaching, and...
EAGLE ROCK CO-HOSTS 21ST ANNUAL FALL FORUM
by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

During the second week of November, a sizable crew from Eagle Rock joined over 1300 other educators and students for the 2007 Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) Fall Forum. The Forum was held in downtown Denver. Eagle Rock staff presented a handful of the 330 workshops offered during the conference, and facilitated several of the smaller critical friends groups and focused interest group discussions.

Eagle Rock School hosted a pre-conference visit to campus on November 8th welcoming sixty visitors from across the country and also included several folks from the Netherlands. Former Math Instructional Specialist Jimmy Frickey along with other members of the CES Math Superteam presented a pre-conference session in Denver entitled CES Mathematics Leadership Collaborative: Strategizing for the Future.

Later that night, during the keynote address, A CES alumni panel was highlighted, featuring our very own Ben Shear, Parker Charter Essential School graduate and current Interim Mathematics Instructional Specialist at Eagle Rock. Along with sharing the impact CES had on his education he performed a magic trick that wowed the audience. The opening session concluded with audience members committing what they stand for in writing. The mass of people flowed out of the room with energy and excitement, filling poster boards with their “I Stand For...” statements.

Under the coordination of Katie Miller, Public Allies Fellow in Professional Development, Eagle Rock also staffed a booth in the exhibition hall that featured the most recent book written about Eagle Rock entitled Engaging the Disengaged: How Schools Can Help Struggling Student Succeed by Lois Brown Easton, former Director of Professional Development.

On Friday morning Michael Soguero, Director of Professional Development & Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development presented ABCD: And We Aren’t Talking About the Alphabet. On Friday afternoon Russ Rendón, World Languages Instructional Specialist, was joined by Jimmy for a presentation entitled Proportional Reasoning Across the Curriculum: Less is More. Jimmy also led a couple of Math Interest Group Gatherings. Eagle Rock Alum Erin (Saunders) Martinez was joined by Ben for a CES Alum Panel entitled How I Learned to Take a Stand. Michael also led a session called How Do We Build Youth Leadership in our Schools?

Friday was also the premiere of CES's EssentialVisions third and final DVD, featuring Eagle Rock. The DVD, School Culture, captures the principles “tone of decency and trust,” “democracy and equity,” “goals apply to all students,” and “resources dedicated to teaching and learning.” Eagle Rock students Hutch Bercow, Delicia Jones and Jordan Miller joined 170 educators at this screening and saw themselves on the big screen.

On Saturday morning Learning Specialist, Mohammed Elgazzar and Society and Cultures Instructional Specialist, Donnie Adams led a session entitled Education Fetishism in the Classroom: Hegemony vs. Freedom of Thought. Donnie explained, “It was great to see so many people dedicated to making the classroom a better place for young people.”

Jen Morine, Human Performance Center Instructional Specialist explains, “One of the CES sessions I attended on brain research helped me modify some of the assessments I’ve been using in my classes. It was great to hear about unique assessments that other small schools around the country are using.”

The Fall Forum Closing Session featured the documentary Méndez vs. Westminster: For All the Children/Para Todos los Niños, which told of the historic court decision prohibiting school segregation in California in 1947. The filmmaker, Sandra Robbie, and one of the plaintiff-protagonists, Sylvia Méndez, were in attendance for a post-show Q&A session.

The Fall Forum also presented an opportunity for the CES Small Schools Network to touch base for a day and meet with their mentor or mentee schools. Staff from Eagle Rock and Skyview Academy and Odyssey – The Essential School met to reflect on their partnership, and to make plans for professional development for the coming months including a Critical Friends Visit to Odyssey in SeaTac, WA that occurred two days later.

To learn more about the CES Fall Forum visit www.essentialschools.org.
On December 14, 2007, Tahira Ali walked the stage as the sole ER-43 graduate. While she has traveled around a bit, Tahira hails from East Oakland, CA. When considering her high school options in 2005, Tahira felt that she was out of options and desperately needed a change of environment to get away from some bad habits and behaviors. Although she originally came to Eagle Rock out of desperation, she has stayed on because each trimester, she has always experienced an increasing amount of personal growth. As she grew stronger at Eagle Rock, her friends back home were either in or on their way to rehab, jail or prison. Over time, Tahira saw less and less hope in her old life and a new life at Eagle Rock.

Her first impression of Eagle Rock was: COLD. She experienced some of her first snow in the mountains. Unfortunately for her, it was during her 25-day wilderness trip. She managed to persevere and overcome her temperature struggles. Besides the weather, she also remembers feeling that the school was different from what she had known before. It was so different from her home that she felt truly out of her element and alone. She was nervous, scared and definitely uncomfortable here in the beginning. Tahira has seen change and growth is school and in herself since embarking on her educational journey back in ER-37. From buildings to rules to the juice machine to the student population itself, the campus has been changing in little ways throughout her time here, but overall not too much has changed in her eyes.

Life at Eagle Rock has not been all fun and games for Tahira. Her lowest point was getting kicked out and facing her struggles with personal growth. She returned to campus, but faced the challenge of living in a different house. She has worked hard to find the support that she needed. Her lowest point has also helped her focus on her favorite thing about Eagle Rock. She explains, “All of the opportunities available for those who look for them and apply themselves.” She took advantage of her own advice by applying herself and was rewarded by being able to go on the school’s Guatemala trip. Her favorite memory from her time there was landing in Guatemala for the first time because she furthered her love for traveling and had the opportunity to connect with people that she had lived with there as a baby. As corny as it sounds, it was like a scene from a daytime television talk show reunion, but has served as a powerful lesson for Tahira throughout her Eagle Rock career.

Tahira’s future career plans have changed drastically through networking contacts and the growth for college she has experienced through internships that she has found through Eagle Rock. She credits her college acceptance to the fact that she met a contact through a presentation of learning panelist, who works at the college she wants to attend. She also met a Hollywood producer through an Eagle Rock contact, who subsequently connected her with a summer internship to pursue her passion in filmmaking.

Equipped with specialized knowledge of photography and film from her classes and internship, Tahira combined her passion and talent in her legacy project of a searchable database of photos since ER-16. Tahira has organized them so that people can search for specific people doing a variety of Eagle Rock activities including wilderness, intramurals or the school musical.

With so much work invested in completing her legacy project and finishing all of her graduation tasks, one may ask: how did she actually feel about graduating? She explains, “It couldn’t have happened sooner.” The excitement of graduating is just now starting to set in, but she doesn’t feel like a real graduate yet. It’s hard to imagine that only three years ago, she was sure that she would never be heading off to college, let alone graduate from high school. She has grown more in her two years here than she has in her whole life thus far.

While Tahira was eager to move on, she will definitely miss the friends she has made during her time here and the connections she has made with different staff, students and visitors that have come through the Eagle Rock gate. Additionally, how could she not miss free food and an unlimited supply of coffee? Regardless, she is set to start college during third week of January in just four short weeks after her graduation. She is enrolled at San Francisco State University and plans to transfer to UCLA and pursue a Cinema major. She is looking forward to spending some time in L.A., interning in Hollywood, and the ultimate symbol of independence: a new apartment.
working as a barista. This combination deepened her passion for education that encourages the question “why?” As the Curriculum Fellow, Heather is looking forward to gaining a broad understanding of Eagle Rock’s approach to working with young people. In her future here, she is determined to learn, grow, laugh, and play...plus teach a class and get a better handle on high altitude baking!

Rob Fraser, 29, received an Outdoor Recreation degree from Western State College of Colorado and worked for companies such as Outward Bound and Aspen Achievement Academy, before defining his purpose: to help teenagers realize their potentials using wilderness as the tool. Following this passion has led him to Eagle Rock School where the wilderness orientation program is partly about preparing students to find their strengths and later using them within the communities they live. Rob is at Eagle Rock School to learn more ways to serve his purpose, and later, hopes to create his own program that provides opportunities for young adults to improve their lives.

Laura Kaplan, 26, grew up in Madison, Wisconsin and graduated from Wesleyan University where she studied Social Studies and Latin American Studies. For the past few years, Laura has made her home in Brooklyn, NY, working as a counselor in a dropout prevention program in a public high school in Queens. Laura has also worked in outdoor education in Connecticut, and spent the past summer coordinating an internship program for future staff members. As the Societies & Cultures Fellow at Eagle Rock, Laura is excited to make connections with students around global issues that are both relevant and empowering.

Katie Miller, 24, grew up in Hagerstown, MD and graduated from Bradley University in Peoria, IL with a BA in International Studies and German. To improve her German, Katie spent two years in Austria as an English Language Teaching Assistant working in four different high schools to learn about the Austrian educational system. As the Professional Development Center Fellow, Katie is excited to work with visiting educators by orienting them to the mission and philosophies of Eagle Rock School. Katie hopes to involve students in PDC activities and learn more about how the education field can encourage and teach citizens to participate in their communities.

Melissa Page, 25, a Cincinnati, Ohio native graduated from Colorado State University with a major in Language, Literature, and Cultures with a concentration in Spanish. Her work experience includes being a college preparatory counselor, environmental and outdoor educator, classroom tutor, and Ropes Course Facilitator. Her experiences have inspired her to be an advocate and facilitator of positive youth development through the realm of education. Melissa has also spent time living and traveling in Western Europe, the South Pacific, and Latin America. As the World Languages Fellow, Melissa is excited to share her passion for world cultures and the Spanish language while also learning how to be an affective leader for youth.

Hannah Richardson, 24, grew up in Maryland and received a degree in Cultural Anthropology from the College of Wooster. After completing her degree, she spent six months volunteering in Biloxi, Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. During this time, she not only gained tangible skills, but also acquired a strong appreciation for the effectiveness and strength of volunteerism. Thanks to this experience, Hannah went on to spend six months studying and volunteering in Ecuador. As the Service Learning Fellow, Hannah looks forward to challenging herself and others to incorporate service work in their everyday lives in order to understand the impact that a single individual or group can have on an entire community.

Michael Rose, 24, grew up in Snellville, GA, and is a graduate of Asbury College in Kentucky where he earned a BA in International Business and Economics. Before coming to Eagle Rock School, Michael began working on his Masters of Education in an international program and taught ESL in Taiwan. Michael was drawn to Eagle Rock’s approach to education as well as its focus on community. As the Mathematics Fellow, Michael is working with students to develop mathematical understandings as well as their reasoning skills. He is excited about taking what he learns during the Fellowship Program and applying it in other educational settings.

Andrew Runyan, 24, graduated from James Madison University with a M.A.T in Kinesiology. Before joining Public Allies, Andrew spent a year serving with another AmeriCorps program called City Year in New Hampshire. With City Year, he mentored “at risk” youth in grades 6-10. Andrew joined Public Allies and Eagle Rock School Fellows. He is excited to be part of the Eagle Rock Fellows Program as the Professional Development Center Fellow, and to serve his purpose, and later, hopes to create his own program that provides opportunities for young adults to improve their lives.
It is 12:30 pm on Monday, October 28th and I’m flying to Baltimore to join a team of researchers studying the needs and aspirations of out-of-school youth (OSY). The Kellogg Foundation has launched a national initiative known as New Options Initiative to provide an alternative pathway for OSY. The foundation scoured the country to find experts to conduct research on various issues related to students dropping out of school. Dean Oliver, lead statistician for the Denver Nuggets and Jenifer Fox, author of the book “Your Child’s Strengths,” are amongst those experts. I am not. Instead I am getting to observe another group of experts contracted by Kellogg and watching them at their hard work. This group is trained in the use of statistics as well as less quantitative methods such as shadowing, field observation and interviewing. They discover information about OSY that even Mr. Oliver and Ms. Fox are not able to obtain. They are ten Eagle Rock students who are using their insight and expertise as young people to discover what young people from around the country tell them how they got to where they are, what visions they have for their lives and what unrecognized skills and talents they can offer the world.

The team arrived yesterday and worked through dinnertime to prepare for interviews they would conduct today at a community based organization known as Living Classrooms. With interview protocols in hand and video cameras set up on tabletop tripods, paired interviewers spend one and a half hours with each OSY participant striving to discover what life these youth want for themselves, what’s most important to them and what makes them tick. Statisticians at Stanford University and researchers from John Hopkins University will use this information to inform Kellogg’s work on the New Options Initiative. Eagle Rock students conducted these interviews, analyzed more than 40 hours of video tape, read and discussed news articles and current research on OSY, and will present to the Kellogg Foundation during the week of December 12th in Battle Creek, Michigan at the foundation headquarters.

New Options for Youth, the course developed to support this effort, is part of a growing movement around the country to meaningfully engage youth in their own education. The essence of this movement is a belief that young people are experts in their own right about a great number of things that adults are not. Youth understand better than adults the life of a teen, they know what the day to day reality of school is and they often have key inside information about why things took a wrong turn for them or what was responsible for taking the right turn. Since the project began our student researchers have visited programs in Baltimore and Oakland. Young people such as the OSY our students are meeting are much more open with our students and more willing to disclose details of their lives and thoughts. Beyond providing valuable information for the New Options Initiative, our students are learning skills in real world math application, interview processes that generate new information and community action projects. They also collaborated with author, Kathleen Cushman, to produce the presentation that will reflect the experiences and insights gained through this project.

Student Amanda Hansen explains, “I enjoy this type of education because its hands on and I get to explore interdisciplinary subjects with real life situations. That was one of the main reasons I signed up really fast for New Options. We are dealing with a real life situation where we get to develop skills in finding a solution. I love how I can relate to a lot of these out of school youth. One of the ladies I interviewed said that their teachers were educating her but not teaching her I don’t think she feels like she’s getting what she needs in school. I feel like the public school system failed me as well. Now I get a chance to talk to the youth of the US who feel the same way and our class gets to help out with a project that is trying to do what Eagle Rock does in some ways. Offer a different route to getting the same thing but different and better ways. In ways that youth want to be apart of, that get them excited about learning and being alive.”

Student Sarah Katz added, “When I heard about the New Options class I jumped at the chance to be in it. I thought it would be an amazing opportunity to give something to the youth who are in the same situation I used to be in. I wasn’t sure exactly what the New Option Credential was going to look like, but I knew I would have appreciated another option if I wasn’t at Eagle Rock. I also thought that I could have a lot of my input on my experience and connect to the youth we talked to. It’s been an incredible class, and project, so far.”

Other researchers include Asha Thompson, Ashley Trunck, Benjamin Fust, Clara Valdes, Haleigh Jackson-Oakley, Jordan Miller, Peter Herlihy, and Tatianna Vinzant. Together we thank and acknowledge the following organizations for graciously hosting us and supporting this work: Living Classrooms in Baltimore, MD; Oasis High School, MetWest, Youth Radio and East Bay Conservation Corps in Oakland, CA. The Kellogg Foundation provides financial support for our travel as well as support staff such as Charles Buki, president of Kela Associates, a community of practitioners working for social change and Crystal Collet from the Atlanta-based strategy firm, Matter.

Learn more about the project here: http://tinyurl.com/2uxjh4
No one can deny that Shaun Royer is a formidable presence on campus. Although new to Eagle Rock, Shaun has already had impressive experience in the music industry. He began working literally as soon as he was born and hasn’t slowed down since. He was featured in a commercial as the first baby born in the US that year. He grew up in Riverdale in New York City and began his first off-Broadway show at the age of nine in *Really Rosie*.

Already involved in musical theater, Shaun was constantly surrounded by creative people, including some of his childhood friends including Alfonso Rivera, Sarah Jessica Parker and Rick Schroeder. On the other hand, his parents were not that supportive of his passion for theater, dance and music, but his great grandmother encouraged him and brought him to audition after audition. Despite his parents’ opinions, Shaun and both of his sisters are in the entertainment industry.

Eventually, Shaun decided to refocus his energy and pursue academics when his family moved to Texas during his high school and college years. Shaun still found a way to involve himself in choreography as a cheerleader for the University of Texas. This also opened another opportunity for him to move to L.A. and teach at cheerleading camps. One of the cheerleading camp directors encouraged him to try dancing and soon after that, he was on tour dancing with Paula Abdul. Shaun can be seen in other music videos with Debbie Gibson, Marky Mark, and Gloria Estefan.

Despite his remarkable dance resume his true love is musical theater and his dance forte is ballet lyrical, yet he finds most of his work in hip-hop. Inspired to do something different, he went back to Texas to open a musical theater studio that focused on singing, dancing and acting. He still attracted the entertainment’s rising stars and some big names have come through his studio including Hilary and Haley Duff, Curtis Holbrook (Hairspray), and Lindsey Blaufarb (Avril Lavigne’s choreographer). This venture also led to his move to Florida to work with the Mickey Mouse Club superstars like Brittney Spears, Justin Timberlake and Christina Aguilera. If he wasn’t busy enough, Shaun also taught at the Broadway Dance Center and Professional Performing Arts School and choreographed tours.

Yet again, Shaun had the urge to try something new. He was called to work in Massachusetts at a residential high school facility putting together summer shows. While Shaun thought it would be more like a Summerstock event working with professionals, it was more work than he had anticipated. Despite this, he stayed for the summer, but decided the best thing he could do was to return to Texas and go back to school to become a licensed chemical dependency counselor. He worked in San Antonio for a year at the Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse, but the Massachusetts boarding school was not far from his mind. Back in Massachusetts, he collaborated with students to write a musical theater show called “Inappropriate.” The show went off-Broadway for three months, then to LA for three months and on tour for two years, including TV appearances on CNN, The Queen Lateefah Show and the Today Show.

After “Inappropriate” wrapped, Shaun answered a call from Harvard, where he taught theater and dance, in addition to coaching the dance team for three semesters. His next venture was the opening of a new business called RTF Productions that produced meaningful media for tweens aged 9-14 with a cool, positive message behind it. While a popular success in Europe, it was not an immediate hit in the US. Taking a short break in Texas, Shaun began to reflect on his time at the school in Massachusetts and decided to look for something similar that would challenge him in new ways.

All of this has led him to Eagle Rock, where he is the Music Instructional Specialist and he is now in charge of music, theater, and dance, as well as creating meaningful quality classes incorporating these essential elements into his curriculum. Being in the heart of the Rocky Mountains has not stopped Shaun from being involved in as many things as he can. He is also the head of two non-profit organizations. The Love and Prayers Foundation raises money for kids whose parents have passed away in Iraq. The other is Dancer’s Relief, which holds dance conventions and scholarships for dance classes in New Orleans.

Eagle Rock is excited to have Shaun’s expertise and musical passion and would like to officially welcome him and his dog KO to campus.
EAGLE ROCKER TRAVELS TO JAPAN
by Jeff Liddle, Director of Curriculum

In October 2006 Robert Burkhardt forwarded me a call for proposals for a unique professional development opportunity to visit Japan. I immediately applied. The program called Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund (JFMF) Teacher Program is an opportunity for primary and secondary school educators in the U.S. to travel to Japan for three weeks in an effort to promote greater intercultural understanding between the two nations. The JFMF, based in Tokyo, oversees all aspects of the Teacher Program. The program is sponsored by the Japanese government and was launched in 1997 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the U.S. government Fulbright Program, which has enabled more than 6,000 Japanese citizens to study in the U.S. on Fulbright fellowships for graduate education and research.

Four hundred educators from all 50 states and the District of Columbia traveled to Japan in June and October of 2007 (200 in each group). To date, more than 5,800 primary and secondary educators have visited Japan through the JFMF Teacher Program. Upon return, program participants share what they have learned about Japan with their students and communities through a variety of outreach projects.

I was informed of my acceptance to the program in April and immediately began receiving materials on Japanese education and culture. The program divides the 200 participants into small groups of 20 and sends them to different parts of the country. I was fortunate to be chosen to go to Hiroshima.

On October 14th I boarded a plane headed for San Francisco. I spend two days in California before heading to Tokyo. Tokyo is an amazing place. I’ve read about how the rebuilding of Japan after the war was nothing short of a miracle. I must say having been there that I cannot deny just how impressive the country is for having been essentially burned to the ground 62 years ago. I found the city to be very clean, efficient and huge. Everything I’d heard about Japanese people being very helpful and friendly was confirmed. There were many times on the streets of Tokyo where we were hopelessly lost and someone would take us where we needed to be. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Tokyo.

Part of the program in Tokyo involved a number of seminars. We learned about Kabuki and Cryogen theater, heard from members of the Diet (Japan’s house of representatives), the President of the National Institution for Academic Degrees on issues and challenges in Japanese education, and Takahiro Miyao on Japan’s economy. Of particular interest to me was a peace seminar. We heard from a couple Hiroshima residents including a hibakusha (survivor of the A-bomb). Evenings were spent on our own experiencing Tokyo. We enjoyed great food and had some exciting adventures finding our way around the city by the complex subway and train system. One interesting adventure involved me trying to keep up with Yusiguro Sensei as we navigated the subway system during rush hour on our way to his aikido dojo. At one point he blended in with a sea of Japanese men in black suits and I was completely lost. We ended up getting to the dojo and I had a great time working out with his students.

After a week in Tokyo, we were off to our host cities. I spent the next nine days in Hiroshima. Hiroshima is known as the city of peace, and that was indeed very evident everywhere we went. Our first stop was the Peace Memorial Park dedicated to victims and survivors of the bombing. Words cannot express the feeling of standing at the hypocenter thinking about what happened on August 6, 1945. It is one thing to read about the event in a book and quite another to be standing in the city itself. It is not a feeling I will soon forget. It is hard to fathom what it would have been like when the first atomic bomb in human history was detonated above Hiroshima. The city was essentially incinerated as temperatures of 5,000 to 7,000 degrees Fahrenheit leveled the city.

As a group of educators, much of our time was spent learning about schooling in Japan. We visited Hiroshima University, met with the Hiroshima Municipal Board of Education, visited Yasunishi Elementary School, Kabe Junior High School, and Funari Senior High. We had a great interpreter that afforded us the opportunity for a lot of questions. While there are many cultural differences and language challenges to transcend, in the end it was affirming to experience the human connection. As Mr. Keijiro Matsushima, a hibakusha said so powerfully in his peace presentation, “people are just people, no matter where you come from.” I had an amazing time and would highly recommend any K-12 educator consider applying for the program. You can check out pictures at my blog http://jeff-japan.blogspot.com/. I am looking forward to my next trip to the land of the rising sun.

Primary and secondary school educators throughout the United States can apply to take part in one of the two trips to Japan scheduled for 2008, as guests of the Japanese Government. Teachers of all disciplines, including art, physical education, English, ESL, history, geography, math, science, and special education, from every region of the United States, are encouraged to apply. Applicants are not required or expected to have previous knowledge of Japanese or Japan. For more information about the 2008 competition, please visit fulbrightmemorialfund.jp
FROM EAGLE ROCK TO SAN QUINTON
by Martin Mulvihill, Former Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Science who is currently in his fifth year of a PhD program in chemistry at The University of California, Berkeley

I show my identification, sign in, walk across the parking lot, show my identification, then though the metal detector, sign in, walk across the yard, sign in, wait for the guard, through two more gates, a pad lock, and one more sign in sheet, now I can almost see the whiteboard where I will teach tonight. The hardest thing about teaching in San Quinton Prison is remembering what clothes I am allowed to wear and where all the places I have “sign in” are located. Although San Quinton Prison rests on what would otherwise be a scenic peninsula on the San Francisco Bay, the feelings I experience walking through the gates there are antithetical to the serenity I remember feeling walking through the lower gate at Eagle Rock School. But once you get past the initial shock of prison guards with guns, iron gates, and institutional uniforms, I have found a very important parallel between the learning environment at San Quinton and ERS - education provides access to social and personal freedom.

How else can I explain why my students at San Quinton, even the individuals with life sentences, engage so fully with the process of learning algebra? Like students at ERS, the students at San Quinton commit to come to class because they see education as a way to work toward a different life from the one that brought got them to this point. Upon making this commitment to learning, they face a number of challenges both personal and institutional. Most of my students have been out of the classroom for many years, and their first challenge is to develop study habits and the ability to ask questions. We all know how hard it is to ask questions in front of peers, and I am endlessly impressed by the courage and respect demonstrated by students in the classroom, especially given their institutional surroundings. When first teaching at San Quinton I was surprised by how easy it was to develop a safe environment for asking questions and learning inside the prison. More so than possibly anywhere else, the classroom at San Quinton represents freedom; this is as close as they can get to the outside world while in prison. So while some people find classrooms oppressive or boring, this is not the case inside of a prison where everywhere outside the classroom is literally oppressive, making the classroom a sanctuary in comparison. I think that the credit for this lies first with the students who value the educational opportunity, and secondly to the administrators of the Prison University Project who have maintained clear and high expectations for all of the students involved.

Like the Professional Development Center at Eagle Rock sharing the practices of the school nationally, the Prison University Project directors hope that by creating a successful on-site college program at San Quinton they can encourage others to adopt similar programs in prisons across the country. The program at San Quinton is the only on-site college within the California Department of Corrections, and currently has 200 inmates enrolled in college classes working toward their associate’s degrees. In addition to providing all of the material, financial, and administrative support for the college program, they work to increase public awareness of criminal justice issues around the nation. The program has opened my eyes to the reality of our criminal justice system. I have had to confront my own prejudices and preconceptions about inmates and the prison system. My experience at San Quinton scarcely resembles the violent caricature of prisoners depicted in the news and movies, and has made me more acutely aware of the inequity inherent in our current criminal justice system.

As a teacher I have revisited many of the same challenges that I first faced at Eagle Rock, and have found myself employing many of the same techniques to meet these challenges. Every student comes to class with a different skill set, although all of the students are required to have a high school diploma or equivalent, my students often struggle with the fundamentals—fractions, negative numbers, order of operations, etc. I saw the same pattern at ERS and found that my most frustrating and rewarding memories occurred while trying to explain a concept like “the variable” to a struggling student. This process forces me to examine my own knowledge, often under a more scrutinizing lens, and distill the fundamental ideas into a jargon free language. More so than my students at UC Berkeley, it has been students at ERS and San Quinton, who have helped deepen my understanding of fundamental concepts and challenged me to abandon the comfort of jargon for the clarity of shared language.

The Prison University Project is a great example of the values of Eagle Rock being put into practice without the resources or freedoms inherent in a place like the Eagle Rock campus. More important than any material difference is the shared vision of empowerment through education, and freedom though learning. Learn more about the Prison University Project at www.prisonuniversityproject.org.
PLACE BASED EDUCATION
by Janet Johnson, Instructional Specialist in Science

Set the scene: It’s the final week of classes at the Rock. Emotions run high; work is all due; everyone is at their breaking point. Students and staff alike are searching for the light at the end of the trimester tunnel. And from the darkness emerges a familiar voice, “Janet, go to the light. Go to the Bahamas.” Can it be true? It’s Robert, our head of school, encouraging me to visit The Island School on Cape Eleuthera, Bahamas. What could I do? I’m a life-long learner. I want to expand my knowledge base. I want to develop my mind, body, and spirit. I was on the next plane out.

After three planes and twenty hours I was finally there. I found blue skies, ocean water, and a unique independent school focused on place-based education and sustainability. Chris and Pam Maxey founded the Island School in 1998. When I asked Chris why he founded the school, he told me the purpose was to provide “a connection to place with opportunity for change and leadership.” In addition, Chris established the Cape Eleuthera Foundation that provides funding for the Cape Eleuthera Institute. The Institute is a fully functioning scientific research facility. Scientists come not only to conduct oceanographic research, but also to teach students at The Island School. The science curriculum at the school is built on the actual scientific research occurring at The Institute.

Students come to the school for a semester long experience in the fall or winter. The Island School draws students from all over the United States, as well as from the Bahamas. While the experience is self-contained, often the academic credit earned from classes at The Island School transfers back to a student’s home school. Students are typically in their sophomore or junior years when they enroll, though classes at The Island School are typically not tracked.

The curriculum at The Island School is thoroughly place-based. David Sobel (2005) defines place-based education as “the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens.”

Students start their day with morning exercise, an hour-long challenge of running on the beach and swimming in the ocean. They move on to classes that focus on the local. In art, students study Andy Goldsworthy and create their own pieces using materials collected from their surroundings. During humanities classes, students investigate how the physical geography of the Bahamas influenced the cultures that developed there. Students practice service to others when they teach Bahamian students from the local elementary school about native plants. The entire academic curriculum is grounded in Cape Eleuthera.

While The Island School has an explicit environmental science classes, much of the curriculum is implicit and is centered on living sustainably. The school has the largest solar array in the Bahamas. These panels, along with a small wind turbine, generate enough electricity to power The Island School; the excess electricity is sold back to the grid. In addition, The Island School heats all of its water using the sun’s energy. Though they are situated on an island, fresh water is in short supply. The Island School captures all the water it uses from rainfall. Everyone on campus takes “navy showers” - wet down, turn off water, soap up, rinse off, turn off water. Students report on water consumption during daily gatherings. And, of course, if it’s yellow let it mellow; if it’s brown, flush it down. Through daily practices, students at The Island School are forced to confront their consumption and to develop an ethic of environmental stewardship.

For me the most exciting part of the school is its science program. Students are teamed with scientists who are studying local marine organisms. The students do field work, collect and analyze data, and write research papers based on their findings. These papers are submitted for publication in Bahamian science journals. In addition, students present their findings to a panel of Bahamian officials at the end of each semester. In the past student findings have been used to make decisions about natural resource use and conservation in the Bahamas. This experience not only connects students with the local critters, it also encourages them to engage in the process of scientific inquiry through authentic work.

The Island School’s focus on place helped students to connect to the world around them while learning contextually based curriculum. I walked away from my visit with the realization that place-based education can ground curriculum everywhere, not just in the Bahamas. Whether the place is a New York City, the plains of Kansas, or our own 640 acres, each place is compelling in its own uniqueness. Through the exploration of each place we can find “the joyful realization of the ties that connect a person with nature and culture in her place... the realization that love- love of nature, love of one’s neighbors and community-is a prime motivating factor in personal transformation.” (Zucker, 2004)
Rock School because he believes in the school’s approach to education, in particular, the emphasis on service learning and human performance. Andrew hopes to take advantage of the endless opportunities offered at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, which are limited only by his own initiative.

Eva Rupert, 27, originally from Connecticut, has called everywhere from Washington to southern Utah to Queens, New York home. She graduated from Emerson College in Boston with a BA in Film Production and Photography. Since her time working in film, commercial photography and as a fencing coach, Eva has been in outdoor education. For the past 5 years, she has focused on designing and implementing wilderness empowerment programs for women and girls, primitive skills programs for home-schooled students, and laying the groundwork for a fledgling non-profit organization. Eva is passionate about the connection between self-expression, creativity, and empowerment, and is looking forward to learning and teaching in the visual arts classroom at Eagle Rock.

Libby Widlic, 27, was born and raised in Chicago near the neighborhood of Wicker Park. She is a graduate of Northland College in Ashland, WI where she majored in Environmental Studies and Sociology. Wanting to combine her passion for social justice, environmental ethics, and animal welfare, Libby decided to pursue her teaching license with the future goal of earning a Master’s degree in Humane Education. Libby worked in a Chicago public school for three years with elementary and junior high students where she taught language arts, social studies, science, and math. As the Writing/Literature Fellow, Libby is excited about helping Eagle Rock students find and explore their own voice as writers and agents of change.

Learn more about the Public Allies Teacher Fellowship Program at http://www.publicallies.org/eaglerock/

GRADUATE PROFILE – WHERE IS SHE NOW?
by Katie Miller, Public Allies Fellow in the Professional Development Center

Erin Martinez strolls effortlessly down memory lane about her Eagle Rock School experience. Originally from Georgia, Erin came to Eagle Rock in ER-6 to take the opportunity to escape her teenage rebellion and classroom boredom. She visited schools in California and Colorado, but they were mostly fancy rehab centers and not for her. Then fate intervened. She eagerly accepted the chance to come out to Colorado to visit Eagle Rock as a prospective student. To this day, she holds a fond memory of the morning gathering on Robert’s birthday from her short visit. He turned the same age as the number of crayons in a pack (you can do the math) and it was a memorable crayon themed gathering. Experiencing and admiring this creative freedom, Erin knew Eagle Rock was the place she wanted to be.

One of the best things that happened to Erin during her time at Eagle Rock was meeting her husband of 9 years. Together, Erin and Jeremy went on to attend Maryville College outside of Knoxville, Tennessee. While there, Erin became involved in the Bonner Scholarship Program and ultimately became involved with the Boys & Girls Clubs. Erin explains, “I started volunteering at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Blount County as part of my Bonner service requirement. My first day was chaotic, scary, messy – and tons of fun. I was immediately hooked. I continued volunteering at the club, working there during the summer throughout my time at Maryville College.”

Eventually, the call of Colorado beckoned and Erin answered it by returning to Denver to work part-time at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver (BGCMD). This experience compelled her to take her next professional step by completing her master’s degree in nonprofit management in order to better serve the organization she loves so dearly. She has also found a way to connect her Eagle Rock values to her current position as Human Resource Manager at BGCMD. Erin appreciates 8+5=10 so much that she has it posted in her office and as a bumper sticker on her car. She is also truly enjoying her job. She explains, “I am one of those fortunate people who loves my job. I find it challenging and fulfilling on an intellectual and emotional level and I am surrounded by competent people and wonderful club members.” In addition to enjoying her work, Erin also loves motherhood. She has an adorable 15 month-old daughter named Zyanya.

Erin still holds Eagle Rock dear to her heart. She treasures the relationships that she made here and continues to “live intentionally.” She feels like she owes it to Eagle Rock to live a good life and strives to use this philosophy in both her life and career decisions. Eagle Rock has given her a lot, and she is proof that a small, rigorous, residential school in Colorado can work for young people who were finding success elusive elsewhere.
EAGLE ROCK FEATURED IN NEW DVD SERIES
by Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) EssentialVisions project released the third and final DVD in the series this past November at the CES Fall Forum held in Denver, Colorado. Eagle Rock is featured in this final edition of the project. Each DVD captures how the CES Common Principles have been implemented, illustrating how students engage in their own education and how teachers develop as professionals. Focused segments include school tours of each campus, and benefits and challenges of implementing the principles in addition to the featured pedagogical pieces.

Eva Frank, Director of the EssentialVisions project explains, “What excites me about working with Eagle Rock is seeing a group of individuals on a continual quest to become better persons. That failure is deemed success if you learn from it and make changes going forward.”

A downloadable professional development toolkit provides discussion questions, schools documents, and lesson plans as tools educators can use to drive improvement. The first DVD: Classroom Practice captures the principles “less is more, depth over coverage” and “student as worker, teacher as coach.” The second DVD: Student Achievement captures the principles “personalization,” “demonstration of mastery,” and “commitment to entire school - teacher as generalist.” The third DVD, featuring Eagle Rock, School Culture captures the principles “tone of decency and trust,” “democracy and equity,” “goals apply to all students,” and “resources dedicated to teaching and learning.”

Eva continued, “The efforts at Eagle Rock can help educators understand that intellectual, social, and emotional messiness is all part of the hard and rewarding work of developing character, passion, and civic engagement - for kids and adults! There is so much focus on control and power by single individuals in schools and Eagle Rock shows us that the most productive learning environments are ones where power is distributed to each member of the community.”

By viewing these DVDs in their entirety or in individual segments over time, individuals are seizing the opportunity to reflect on topics most pertinent to educators today. The Eagle Rock segments can be viewed online by visiting www.eaglerockschool.org and more information about the CES EssentialVisions DVD project may be found here: http://tinyurl.com/2ys7lu