OUR SCHOOLS! OUR LIVES! OUR FUTURES!

Editor’s Note

Throughout the state of California, young leaders and residents from all walks of life have been coming together to heal, support and build one another as well as their communities. It has culminated into a movement that has spread immensely and continues to grow.

The passion they have to continue fighting for equitable education, healthy communities and united families continues to burn bright.

Whether the youth are coming together by the thousands to stand at the State Capital’s front door to demand justice for their peers being forced into the school to prison pipeline or marching through the streets to protest for their educational rights.

These determined young people have seen the greater sides of using their voices to speak for what they believe in and will not stop until they have completed their mission.

Young people understand that they are being stripped of their education and pushed out of their schools at an alarming rate, in exodus fashion. They understand that many of their families have come here to fight for their education and secure their futures, only to have it taken away from them.

They understand that no one else will do it for them, that they must stand together in solidarity. That they must be the ones who finally rise up as one to take back what is rightfully theirs.

To take back what is ours.
Our Schools!
Our Lives!
Our Futures!
Who's leading the fight for sanctuary in California schools? Students themselves

By: Olivia Rodriguez - Coachella Unincorporated

SACRAMENTO – Eighteen-year-old Ms. Ruiz remembers when her youngest brother came to her in tears.

"Are we really going to go back home?" her brother asked her at their home in Santa Ana.

Despite her own worries, she reassured him, "Everything is going to be fine. We won't be separated. We're going to stand together."

Ruiz, who declined to give her first name because she is undocumented, was one of eight young people from across California who traveled to Sacramento in early May. Through support from the Movement Strategy Center, Advancement Project, and PolicyLink, the statewide youth team met with representatives from State Superintendent Tom Torlakson's office.

Their goal was to ask the California Department of Education to publish a model resolution that expands sanctuary in schools.

Some schools in California already call themselves "sanctuary schools," which generally means they don't ask for or share information about students' immigration status.

But the model resolution, called Safe and Welcoming Schools for All, would allow schools to take it a step further. It not only calls for protection of undocumented students, but for support and services to make schools safe and welcoming for all vulnerable students. These include students of diverse ethnicities and faiths as well as students who are LGBTQ, homeless, foster youth, English Learners, students with special needs and those who have been incarcerated.

The trip to Sacramento was also a chance to ensure that the State Superintendent's office takes into consideration the views of students themselves.

As an undocumented student, Ruiz said it was important for her to tell her own story.

"I'm letting them know what's really in the community from my personal experience," said Ruiz. "Because I know they're not living it. I'm the one living those stories. I'm here for my community, for myself, and my family too."

"You shouldn't feel like you're targeted in a place that you're learning," explained 17-year-old Veronica Stevens from Richmond, right before she stepped into Tom Torlakson's office.

As they took their seats in the State Superintendent's office, the young people led the discussion, taking turns to share their personal experiences at school.

Twenty-year-old Napooi Shorty, representing Del Norte and the Tribal Lands, described an incident that happened on his reservation, where two young women were suspended for speaking their language at an elementary school.

"From my indigenous experience, I remember boarding schools and the policy was to 'kill the Indian and save the man,'" he said. "We're supposed to keep that language alive. For them to be suspended, that's knowledge being excluded from the classroom. California, our home, has always been welcoming, so why not continue our unique California diversity? It's what California is built on."

Students who identify as LGBTQ said they noticed a change after the elections.

Fabiola Argueta, 17, said she felt targeted in her community in Boyle Heights. "I'm a queer person," she said. "And after the elections people got this boldness. They think they have the right to say slurs to your face and put people down because of who they are and I personally don't feel safe in my school anymore. That's why I really feel like sanctuary schools are important."

Students described a noted difference between sanctuary schools and those that do not have a sanctuary policy.
Living in Fear in a Place you Call Home
By: Luis - South Kern Sol

If my city were to become a safe haven, it would not only benefit my family. Many other Kern families with undocumented members could also breathe a sigh of relief.

Right now in Kern, community members are living in fear just to go shopping at their local supermarkets or to bring their kids to school. A safe haven would change this. It would mean, for example, that I could go outside in my city and ride my bike without being scared of being detained and deported.

My parents brought me to the United States when I was 11. All my life I’ve tried to be a good person. And I think I’ve succeeded at this so far. I’ve never broken any laws, large or small. I have been attending school ever since I’ve lived in the United States, and I am a high school graduate.

I do wish I could go to college, but I’m afraid. I’m still fearful of going outside my house and being sent back to a country that is not my home. So for now, college feels unattainable for me.
Growing Up on the Edge of Homelessness

By: Komenan Armand Brou - Richmond Pulse

Most of the kids I grew up with and went to school with are dead, doing life in prison or in gangs. I feel really blessed to be alive and accomplishing my goal of going to college.

For a while, I wasn’t sure if I was going to make it. I was born and raised in Oakland, but I am originally from the Ivory Coast in West Africa. My parents were born in Africa and came to the United States separately in the 1990s to live a better life. They got married through an arranged marriage and are now divorced.

When I was three years old, I went to the Ivory Coast with my older brother for five years to visit my family on my mom’s side. My oldest brother and I had a lot of bad experiences living in Africa, from health issues to being scared for our lives living there in the wartime. Living in Africa with my brother was hard because we were away from our parents who were in the States.

When my brother and I came back to the States, we moved in with my mom who was living in Hayward. I was eight years old and my oldest brother was 13. The neighborhood was quiet and there was rarely any trouble. On days we didn’t have school, we played video games with friends in the neighborhood and basketball in the park.

My mom worked two jobs to take care of us. She made sure we had food, a place to stay, clean clothes, entertainment, and an education. My mom figured public schools were a distraction for me and my brother so she moved us to a private Christian school in San Leandro and that school was like a family to us. The times we didn’t have food to eat at home, the school gave us food. And the times my mom couldn’t pay for our tuition, the principal let us go to the school for free.

We lived in Hayward for about two years. Then we got kicked out because my mom couldn’t pay the rent.

We ended up living with her friend William from Ghana. He lived in what was known as “Deep East Oakland,” one of the most dangerous parts of town due to gang violence. Living in that neighborhood was tough because there was a lot of crime.

The way to survive in a tough neighborhood is only leaving your house when you have somewhere you have to go, and then going straight home. Also don’t make yourself too known because you might attract the wrong people. That’s how I survived. I only came out of the house to go to school and run errands.

William took me and my brother under his wing like a second dad. We went fishing, played basketball, went out to eat and he even took us to school every morning. We lived with William for about two years. Then he couldn’t support us anymore, so we went to live in a homeless shelter in Richmond called the Bay Area Rescue Mission.

It was one of the worst things I’d experienced in my life. My mom, my brother and I had to share a tiny room. The bathrooms were moldy, the people were crazy, the food was old and surrounded by flies, and at 7:30 in the morning everyone had to go to Bible study for two hours and listen to a pastor sing and talk about God. By 6:00 pm, everyone had to be inside the shelter or else you got locked out for the rest of the night.

What I learned from living in homeless shelters is that you have to work hard to better your situation. And it keeps you humble when you do become successful.

My mom tried to put my brother and me in schools in Richmond, but my godmother got us into schools in El Cerrito instead because they were safer.

In school, the only problems I had was speaking English. When I went to Africa, I only spoke French because that was the language my friends and family spoke. I had to relearn how to speak English.

By the time I got to middle school, we’d gotten kicked out of the Bay Area Rescue Mission on the Fourth of July for having alcohol. It was my fault, because I gave some to a kid that I thought was my friend, and he ended up telling his mom, and his mom told the shelter, and we got kicked out. I was only 11 years old.

We ended up moving to another shelter in Richmond called CRIP, and stayed there for a while. Then we got kicked out because my mom got into a fight with a lady there. Then we moved to a shelter in Berkeley called the Harrison House. The only good thing about living there was that it was close to my school. We stayed there for a few months and then we got kicked out for not following the rules. My mom ended up finding a room in Central Richmond on 1st and MacDonald Avenue.

It was a run-down building next to a church and the building was owned by a pastor. He made all his tenants go to his church. The bathrooms were dirty, the beds were old and covered with urine stains, and the neighborhood was ghetto. My mom and the pastor looked out for us. They never wanted us walking around the neighborhood because it was filled with thugs, crackheads and prostitutes. We stayed there for about a year. Then my mom moved to San Pablo and rented a room from a lady she met at the pastor’s church because the pastor was raising the rent. The lady’s name was Vanessa but we called her Sister Vanessa because everyone that was part of the church was like a family.

When we first moved into Vanessa’s house she treated us normally. Then after a few months, her true personality came out. She started using my mom for her car and ate the food that my mom bought for me and my brother. She used the church as a business to get people to rent rooms in the house she lived in. It turned out the house

Rosa is a youth reporter at We’Ced. To protect her identity, we have used a pseudonym. This article was originally created in collaboration with YouthRadio for The New York Times.
Should System-Engaged Youth Have “Reasonable Access” To The Internet?

By: Natalie Bettendorf - Youth Radio

Youth in California detention centers, like juvenile hall, are not guaranteed access to technology. Even in the foster care system, there is nothing in writing that gives youth rights to access technology of any kind.

California Assembly Bill 811, which was introduced by state Assemblymember Mike Gipson earlier this year, aims to change that.

The bill would help ensure that youth in out-of-home placements, including the juvenile justice and foster care systems, would have “reasonable access to technology.” Bill 811 is being set to be voted on the Senate floor this September and is being backed by Facebook and the Youth Law Center.

Youth Radio’s Natalie Bettendorf spoke to Lucy Carter, the policy advocate for the Youth Law Center, about what it would mean for youth to have “reasonable access” to the Internet.

The conversation has been lightly edited for clarity.

Natalie Bettendorf, Youth Radio: What is the current policy for accessing technology in youth detention facilities and youth in the foster care system?

Lucy Carter: Well, there aren’t formal policies in place. So it’s very site-specific and family-placement-specific. So, for example, one foster youth might have ongoing access to [the] Internet in their family but another foster youth who is in a group home might not have any access to the Internet when they are home, making it very difficult for them to do their homework and get their homework assignments. So if you’re in a group home that doesn’t have a computer with Internet access then you have to go to a library or not get your homework done.

NB: There’s definitely a stigma with adolescents and screen usage. What do you say to people who push back on the idea that Internet access is a basic right?

LC: It’s just fundamental to how we live in today’s society. If we don’t help young people learn technology skills, we are not preparing them to be in the world of work. I mean, we use technology every day in our work lives, and if they do not have those skills then they are behind. They already face challenges in being able to have good educational outcomes and to have good careers and to thrive, and the last thing we want to do is take [access to technology] away too. We need them to have the opportunities to learn the technology skills they need to have to survive in today’s work world.

NB: What does “reasonable internet access” mean?

LC: So “reasonable” is left up to the caregiver to determine. So for example a grandparent who’s caring for a grandchild in foster care might not have the means because they’re living on Social Security to buy the latest technology for their grandchild. Reasonable access to technology in that case might mean going to the library twice a week so that their grandchild can get online and get homework assignments completed. Another example would be in the juvenile justice setting where youth who are detained. We aren’t saying that they should be able to communicate with everybody. We are saying that they need to have monitored communications to maintain healthy connections, but we’ll leave that up to probation to determine for each youth.

NB: What’s the financial feasibility of this bill, and how is the state going to fund an increase in access to technology?

LC: We know that there are ways to do this cheaply. The technology is not that complicated. San Diego County’s juvenile hall is using Skype as a way for the young people who are detained to have online visits with their parents. It’s not expensive technology to access. A lot of the court schools have laptops already, but they’re only being used in limited ways and they’re not being used to maintain connections with family. They’re used in very limited educational ways, which isn’t good [use of the resource]. So in some cases they have the technology already in the building, they’re just not using it as they could be.
When students or Schools Fail—Who’s to Blame?

By: Sandy Garcia - VoiceWaves

When people hear the term dropout, they usually assume it’s the student’s fault that they’re no longer in school. But what about the term “pushout”? For some students, the atmosphere in school can be so hostile the best or only option is to leave.

In 2015-2016, there were 609 students who either dropped out of Long Beach Unified or were pushed out, depending on whom you ask. Karionne Stokes was one of them.

Stokes, 18, attended Renaissance High School up until her junior year, the same year one of her teachers kicked her out of class.

“I had a pencil pouch on my desk and she made a big deal about it and she told me to put it away but other students had their phones on their desks so I felt my pencil pouch wasn’t an issue,” recalls Stokes. “She then took me outside to have a conversation and she told me, ‘You are never going to be anything in life.’”

The words “pierced through me like a bow and arrow,” she adds.

That incident happened just when Stokes was struggling with responsibilities at home, including having to look after her twin baby brothers on mornings when her mom wasn’t home or needed her help.

Stokes says her dad didn’t help much. She also describes her home life as “not very caring.” The police would constantly come to the house and her family had several social worker cases that meant Stokes and her three younger siblings were in danger of being put in foster care.

“Home doesn’t really feel like home,” Stokes describes. “My family is always arguing and we barely get along. My family has had several social worker cases and me and my little brothers are in danger of being put in foster care. Well, now that I’m 18 I don’t have to worry about it but I still have to worry for my baby brothers.”

All of that made it tough for Stokes to keep up with her school work, but it wasn’t what she says kept her from graduating. In her junior year she was placed in geometry, even though she had not passed algebra the year before. Geometry also happened to be the class where she had the most absences and she says her teacher didn’t offer to help.

“When I would ask for help my teacher would say, ‘You should be paying attention,’” Stokes recalls.

She felt discouraged and she felt picked on by the teacher. Stokes believes the school should’ve offered more resources and reached out to her. She is now in continuation school and working towards graduating.

Mayra Gonzales is a youth organizer with Californians for Justice - Long Beach, which advocates for things like bettering school climate and educational equality.

They, Gonzales’ preferred gender pronoun, define school pushout as “a consistent feeling of not belonging or not feeling worthy of any support, feeling dumb.” They say when this happens students see “all these ways in which it feels better to not be in school as school can feel toxic.”

Part of that involves relationships with teachers, something Gonzales says they see a lot in their work with students in the district.

Part of that involves relationships with teachers, something Gonzales says they see a lot in their work with students in the district.

“Suspensions and clashes with teachers are a part of pushout, because a student doesn’t have the same motivation to go to school. They might be like, ‘Well, my teacher is just gonna kick me out so I’m just not gonna show up,’” Gonzales says. “If there is no motivation and you don’t feel supported by your teacher then why go to school anyways?”

Gonzales points out that when it comes to conflicts with teachers, the blame isn’t always or only with the student. They add that solutions can include a relationship-focused approach to education, where teachers are given training on how to connect to students better so they have the capacity to have a conversation with students on the issues affecting their lives.

The graduation rate for Long Beach Unified in 2015-2016 was 84 percent, up from the year before and higher than the state average of 82 percent. But the district still had a dropout rate of almost 10 percent for the school year, and according to a 2016 study by The Children’s Defense Fund, while suspensions dropped by 53 percent in Long Beach Unified from 2011 to 2015, black and special education students in LBUSD were still suspended “well beyond the rate of any other subgroup of students.”

The study noted, “Black students are also disproportionately pushed out of comprehensive schools to alternative settings.”

Gonzales says, “Even though the district says it’s not as bad as other districts, this is not a good enough standard. We should not have school pushout at all.”

For Stokes, her experience with her unsupportive teacher has become an ironic source of inspiration.

“Looking back on my experience I can now see that it has helped me grow as a leader and an achiever,” she says. “I refuse to step down to her low expectation for me because I’m better than that.”

“I would advise other students that experience discouragement from teachers, staff, or anyone to use that as motivation to strive forward and excel, to show people that they are way more than the standards.”
14 Back-to-School Self Care Tips

By: Juliana Taboada - Coachella Unincorporated

With school starting so soon, I feel that as students, it's very easy for us to forget the importance of prioritizing our well-being. I know for me, personally, I tend to forget that I am a human being who needs as much attention as my school work does. In fact, I probably need more. It seems like when it comes to educational institutions, self-care practices are never in the picture. In fact, many of us may not even know what self-care means.

If this is your first time learning about what self-care is, it is the practice of taking care of yourself and your well-being. In other words, it's about doing what makes you feel good both mentally and physically.

Self-care is a revolutionary act. Being able to step back and take time for yourself is one of the strongest things anyone can do. The idea that taking care of ourselves is selfish is ignorant and negative. Don't allow this view to change your need to take care of yourself.

I believe the more attention I give to my body, the more successful I am in everything. Keep in mind, self-care isn’t a one-time act. Self-care is a constant activity that helps balance the mind, soul, and body. So, here are my favorite tips for helping you start off the school year or everyday life on a brighter note:

- **SLEEP**
  - As students, we tend to not sleep due to an amount of work we receive. Change that and take a nap every so often!

- **EXERCISE**
  - Take a walk, run, swim, dance! The options are limitless!

- **SPEND TIME OUTSIDE**
  - Being outside is calming for both your soul and mind. Whether you’re feeling down or happy, nature helps calm and clear your mind.

- **UNDERSTAND YOU DON'T HAVE TO PLEASE ANYONE**
  - It's impossible to please everyone and make anyone happy. Focus on making yourself happy!

- **ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL WHATEVER YOU'RE FEELING**
  - It's okay to be sad. It's okay to cry. It's okay to be happy. Let yourself feel all of these emotions.

- **KNOW THE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION**
  - It can be hard to see the difference between a bad moment and a constant depressed feeling. Learn the signs for your benefit and reach out for support.

- **DECLUTTER YOUR SPACE**
  - It can be as simple as cleaning out your backpack or room. Decluttering helps give a sense of control when it's sometimes lost.

- **LISTEN TO MUSIC AND DANCE**
  - Dancing and dramatically singing along to your favorite songs is one of the best things to do relieve stress!

- **DRAW OR COLOR**
  - Even if you think you aren't an artistic person, just putting a pen or brush to paper can help relieve stress and awaken your creativity.

- **DRESSING UP**
  - If dressing up helps boost your confidence, then do it! Sometimes just dressing up can help bring a lighter mood.

- **HANGING OUT WITH LOVED ONES**
  - Hanging out with people you love is one of the best ways to feel better! Whether they are your family, friends, or partner.

- **AFFIRMING YOURSELF**
  - Understand that we are people, and we can't do everything. Our effort is enough. We are enough.
Early Childhood Education: A Matter of Access
By: Yesenia Aguilar - South Kern Sol

For Blanca Casillas, the choice to keep her young children home with her mom instead of sending them to preschool wasn't an easy one.

The Bakersfield mother of two tried to enroll both her children into preschool, but “the same thing happened with both,” Blanca states. “For my second child, I tried community action, but I was put on the waitlist for a long time and they never called me because we need to meet prerequisite criteria and one of them was if you were a single mom, so I was put on the waitlist and then was never called back. For Ivan, my first child, I was called back by community action where they help you with a certain percentage, but I didn’t qualify because of my income.”

In Kern County, if a parent does not meet the income guidelines to enroll the child into public preschool the next option is private preschool education, which can cost parents more than $7,000 a year.

Casillas, who holds a B.A. in psychology from Cal State Bakersfield shared that her income pushed her over the income eligibility threshold to qualify for state funded preschool, but her income was not enough to pay for a private high quality preschool either.

“When I looked into a private preschool, I found it to be too expensive. I called a local church and at the time their fee was $825 per month for full-time— and they shared they were at capacity, but could add my child to the waiting list,” added Casillas who works at a local health care insurance provider.

As of 2014, 49.2% of children ages 3-5 in Kern County were not enrolled in preschool or kindergarten compared to the California average of 39.6%.

Children across Kern County are facing the issue of accessibility to early childhood education and this results in impacts later in life.

According to First 5 Kern’s annual report, “a child’s brain develops more in the first five years than at any other time in their life. How children are nurtured and cared for during their first years influences their emotional, physical and intellectual environment and has a profound impact on how the brain is organized. The relationships and contacts a child has with parents and caregivers significantly influence how a child will function in school and later in life,” and more than half of children here in Kern County are missing out on the opportunity of attending preschool.

Casillas has seen the effects of her children not attending preschool, she says “No, I don’t think they’re ready for kindergarten because she [her mom] doesn’t really do school stuff with them. I think if they would’ve gone to preschool they would have worked more on their social skills and made friends and they would have learned structure and how to be ready for kindergarten.”

Christine Lollar, the communications specialist at First 5, says that there is an issue with accessibility in Kern County because “we have a shortage of spots, there’s not enough child education spots for as many children as Kern County has. There’s not enough childcare, there’s not enough transitional kindergarten spots, there’s not enough in home care preschool slots.”

Additionally because Kern County is composed of several rural communities, poverty is a problem when families have to enroll their children into preschool. Low-income parents might find preschool a burden because of lack of transportation and undocumented parents might not enroll their children in preschool for fear of being deported or it counting against them in future immigration hearings.

Additionally because Kern County is composed of several rural communities, poverty is a problem when families have to enroll their children into preschool.

This is an education inequality issue, which is impacting children of color at higher rates.

According to Kidsdata.org, in Kern 33.6% percent of children live in poverty and Latino’s have a poverty rate of 38.7 percent, poverty rates for African American children living in Kern were not available, but the state poverty rate for African American children is 36.5 percent, compared to the state average of 22.7 percent.

Availability and poverty aren’t the only issues regarding access to childhood education, in Kern County. Advocates also say a significant lack of early education teachers means centers are understaffed, resulting in less placements available.

“We have a shortage of people that are going into the early childcare field, Lollar said. “It’s not known as a high-paying job, many child care workers make $12 to $14 an hour.”

Tammy Burns, the coordinator of Early Childhood Council of Kern agrees with Lollar, “centers require staff to have college level units and so for the amount of training and education that’s required, the pay hasn’t really kept up, so what we’re fighting is there are fewer people going into the field and those that continue on the education field, oftentimes move into elementary education and get their teaching credentials especially since transitional kindergarten came along.”

Child care providers who educate and nurture children through the early stages of life are making nearly the same as someone who works in fast food. The fact that there are not enough facilities for children and that those facilities are not paying teachers enough, makes college students not want to delve into the early childcare field.

Despite the many issues regarding access to early childhood education in Kern County, Lollar asserts that things “are improving. The more investment we make into the child, we are proactive, we are investing into their future so if we do that now, when these children are adults they’re going to be more stable and have a more balanced mental health.”

The Early Childhood Council of Kern has taken up the issue of the lack of access to early childhood education in Kern County to legislators, “we have been working diligently to bring awareness to legislators about the issue and encourage them to to create legislation that would improved Childhood Services for Families,” Burns states. “There has been a lot of focus on improving the quality of the existing programs, we haven’t done a lot of capacity building, but we do have a lot of programs that are addressing and improving the quality of those programs.”

First 5 is helping children across Kern learn even though they might not be enrolled in preschool. If parents go online, they can access songs, poems, coloring pages, handouts and online books. Lollar suggests that parents can even “reach out to United Way, [they] give at home libraries and [parents] can get those in Spanish.”

Additionally, Burns says that Child Development Centers advertise their programs through social media, especially the subsidized programs, so that families who are income eligible can apply.
Should Schools Implement Calm Rooms to Lessen the Rate of Willful Defiance?

By: Jazmine Justice-You - Access Sacramento

Regardless where they are, one thought plagues the minds of most aspiring principals in the nation: How can I improve my school by decreasing out-of-school suspensions?

Unlike other suspensible offenses, are as difficult to define as willful defiance. Carl Pinkston, a member of the Sacramento-based Black Parallel School Board, summarizes willful defiance as to “Willfully defy an authority (e.g., teacher, principals, SRO’s and school personnel) to perform their duty.”

“A student comes into class late, wearing clothing that displeases(s) the school official, non responsive to a question, rolling of eyes, dropping of pencil, etc,” explains Pinkston. “In fact, it’s a question of implicit bias of authority view of a student and the failure of classroom management.”

While the subjective nature of willful defiance continues to confuse school administrators across the country, one New Jersey school seems to have found their own creative solution.

The Yorship Family School in Camden, New Jersey has restructured some classrooms into “calm rooms”-typically used as safe spaces for anxious students—a type of group counseling room where students who are sent out of class on grounds of willful defiance can communicate their problems and learn how to better handle their frustrations in the classroom.

“After looking at the number of students being suspended at such a young age, sent home for misbehaviors in the classroom and decided that we weren’t approaching the whole child,” Linda Brown-Bartlett said in an interview with NewsWorks. “So we created this calming room which is a safe space where students can come if they’re anxious or agitated (or) starting to lose control...we’ve changed the question when they come into the calming room so to not ‘What did you do?’ but ‘How did this happen? What’s going on?’ and trying to make it a little more personal for the child.”

So if one school was able to decrease suspensions with this method, should California schools implement calm rooms as well?

Mariachi Conservatory Sets the Tempo in Boyle Heights

By: Joshua Solis - Boyle Heights

A full voice can be heard singing La Cucaracha, while little hands strum decorated guitars.

The simple and cheerful melody played by 7-16-year-olds fills the room.

Parents watch as director Richard Mata leads their children. There is a productive feeling in the air as the 13 students in an intermediate class at the Mariachi Conservatory work hard at learning and understanding the music.

The students are taking part in a tradition that is close to the hearts of many, especially Mata, who, along with his wife, Esperanza, began the non-profit conservatory in 2007 because of his love for mariachi music. Mata, who also teaches music at Salesian High School, and his wife and two daughters give beginning to advanced mariachi lessons throughout the week.

“The music of my people”

“I’ve just always enjoyed music and wanted to learn,” says Carlos Cruz, 17, who has been playing with the Conservatory for the past three years. “It’s the music of my people, and I find it important to know about my culture. I have a lot of family that played mariachi as well, so that pulled me into wanting to play more.”

Students can learn vocals, guitar, guitarrón, trumpet, harp or violin in classes held Tuesdays through Thursdays. Mata often has students play a section of a song, after which he provides extra explanation and guidance to those who need it. His wife, and their daugh-
Should School Days Start Later?

By: Jannai Simmons - VoiceWaves

The first day of school is easy. That I know. The clothes are already laid out, my shoes are at the end of my bed with my cute, fresh socks tucked in them neatly. None of my siblings got any sleep last night even though we all went to bed at 9:30 p.m. But I mean, how could we? We’re too nervous about this school year. Still, we wake up an hour earlier to arrive on time and proceed on our day, nervous yet still floating with excitement. Like I said, the first day is easy. However the rest of the school year might not be so smooth.

Throughout past school years, I noticed I became more groggy, cranky, and an all-around monster at the sheer thought of school as the months pass by. This is because my sleep was snatched from under me like a thin carpet! BOOM! It’s next Wednesday! I’m well into school now and the routine is already imprinted in my brain. Wake up an hour earlier, get dressed, brush my teeth, comb my hair and the rest of my time is spent looking for that one shoe I said I’d look for this morning. It was 2 a.m. last night when I lost it, because I was barely finishing that 10-page essay my lunatic teacher thinks I have the time for. The school year is further in now and a full eight hours of sleep is laughable.

It’s no secret that people should get a full night’s sleep in order to be their best selves for the next day. But when teenagers have at least two hours of homework each night and are expected to be involved in sports, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, have a job and still maintain a social life, it becomes evident how quickly we forget about the importance of sleeping well.

According to a 2014 National Sleep Foundation poll, sleep deprivation affects about 90 percent of American high school students, as they get far less than the recommended eight to 10 hours, and the amount of time we sleep is decreasing—a serious threat to our health, safety and academic success. By definition, sleep deprivation is the situation or condition of suffering from a lack of sleep, and according to sleep researcher Wendy M. Troxel in a TED Talk, she called the problem of tired teens a “public health epidemic.” It increases the likelihood that teens will suffer a variety of negative outcomes, such as the inability to concentrate, poor grades, car accidents, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts, the researcher argues.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, a health and research organization, recommends that middle and high schools delay the start of class to 8:30 a.m. or later. Doing so will align school schedules to the biological sleep rhythms of adolescents, whose sleep-wake cycles begin to shift up to two hours later at the start of puberty.

I asked a couple of 18-year-old Long Beach Polytechnic High School seniors about their opinions on school start times and to my surprise, I got a lot of mixed answers. I asked all of them the same two questions: How has the school’s regulation of early start times affected you and do you think you would do better with later start times?

“Tired is an understatement,” said Jackie Lopez. “‘Sometimes I feel like I’m rushed and when I’m rushed, I don’t put out my best work.’ She went on to explain the high expectations as a student in the Program of Additional Curricular Experiences (PACE) — the highest and most rigorous academy at Polytechnic High School — and how that contributes to stress as well.

Next was Kendra Villora. She didn’t mind waking up as early as we do. “If it started later, I would probably do the same [routine],” Villora said.

Some might think that starting school later would be a regression. One theory is that this new schedule could push the entire day back and that kids would still go to bed late. Although this sounds plausible, it is highly unlikely to come true. The time in which we turn in to bed would be the same because only the wake-up time would change. The majority of school officials think of adolescents as being lazy and having no ambition, and this is one-sided point of view that is the root of many problems in our school systems.

In summation, the next time the topic of how adolescents are moody and aggravated pops up in conversation, know that it is because the ridiculous school system deprives us of sleep. It just straight-up sucks.
THE KNOW WEIGHS IN: Racism in Clovis Unified, in Communities

Clovis Unified School District has recently come under fire as screenshots of Clovis student’s racist conversations have gone viral. On Friday September 29, twitter user @lysdesa posted conversations that fellow Clovis Unified students posted in a group snapchat.

The conversations are beyond disturbing and have many weighing in on what should be done to combat this kind of ignorance. The reporters of The kNOW had their own thoughts on the issue, read below to find out what they had to say.

"It's a disappointment to see the way others see people based on the color of their skin." - Ricardo A. Reyna (22)

"To the students who participated in this racist conversation and anyone who thought it was funny: you disgust me." - Danyeal Escobar (17)

"This doesn't make me angry. It disappoints me. Now I know just how much work needs to be done and that ignorance of problems is what can create them in the first place. To the people who made these posts, please consider how dehumanizing your comments on people are. Because that's who you're talking about people." - Bryanna Rivas (17)

"This blatant display of racism and ignorance is disheartening, but not surprising. Especially compared to the trend of public racism that I've witnessed. To the members of this group chat, please educate yourself on tolerance and sensitivity." - Rocky Walker (17)

"Racism needs to be addressed. It won't die out and we can't ignore it. We have an obligation to fight against racism. We can't stay silent." - Miguel Bibanco (22)

"You can deny it and say things are getting better, but things won't change in this generation unless we communicate about why why what they said was wrong." - Zyanna Maynard (18)

"When you post racist shit online and see nothing wrong with it, it just shows how fucked up our nation is. Anyone defending this racist bullshit needs to reevaluate their life. Disgusting." - Johnsen Del Rosario (25)

"Your comments are dehumanizing to any person of color, those with dialysis and Down Syndrome. You call yourself Future Farmers of America, but you set such an appalling standard for this community." - Gabrielle Rivas (21)

"These high schoolers seem to be so disconnected with the feelings of others and have no regard for what is right or wrong. Maybe it's time to bring the breaking of the racial divide and disconnection into the home and schools." - Patrick Osborn (26)
Learning to learn: Young Men From Across California Come Together to Heal, Honor the Earth and Each Other’s Growth

By: Ricardo Reyna - The kNOw Youth Media

Imagine enduring a bus ride for 8 hours into the Sierra Nevadas, in the middle of the summer’s heat, then being told to wake up at the crack of dawn to participate in a water ceremony the next day. Sounds a bit ridiculous right? But it was quite the opposite. As 150 youth of color and adult allies made their way down on a Monday morning to a nearby pond to take part in a Native American water ceremony normally held by women. The purpose of the ceremony is to show respect to and honor water and acknowledge its importance to the life it gives us.

This ceremony was a teaching not many of the young people had been a part of before. It opened up a new way for all of the people in attendance to learn about how critical it is to respect the Earth and show appreciation for all it provides us. It also brought to light a few of the personal experiences, as well as dilemmas, with water that many people around the world experience.

Standing in a circle, youth from across California shared their stories while presenting a sample of water from their hometown that was then poured out into the nearby pond to be filtered back into Mother Earth.

One of the strongest stories that stood out to me was from an individual who is a member of the Hoopa Valley Native American tribe, known better amongst themselves by their endonym, Natinixwe, which translates to “People of the Place Where the Trails Return”. It was when this man shared his story that I truly got to see things from a different perspective. He talked about remembering being a young boy and being told to go talk to, and listen to the water if ever he was having troubles.

At first, he thought the elders that were suggesting this to him probably didn’t know what they were talking about. Yet after facing various struggles throughout his life, he realized that his elders were right all along. One day as he sat by the water, not knowing what to do with his situation at hand, he took a moment to listen to the smooth currents of the moving water. He found that the water had shared with him a song in his native language of Hupa (an endangered Athabaskan language of California, part of a larger family of indigenous languages throughout North America) that he then proceeded to share with all of those who were attending the ceremony.

Although many, if not all of us, could not translate what was being sung, you could hear and see the emotion and passion that flowed through him as he sang away. After finishing his song, he shared with us how, after living and experiencing this for himself, he believes water can speak to you and teach you things that no one else will be able to.

His story truly inspired me that day and showed that no matter where we are from, we may all face similar obstacles in life. That if we open our minds up to new ways of learning, it could have a great impact on our lives and the lives of those around us.

As I stood there watching the rest of the water ceremony unfold I started to wonder. Why did we have to travel such a far distance to learn this kind of information? Why have we never been taught these practices in school? Why is it so hard for students to understand these concepts inside of a classroom?

To answer that, we must first examine and try to understand the seven different learning styles that people use to attain information.

These seven learning styles include:

- Visual (spatial): You prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding.
- Aural (auditory-musical): You prefer using sound and music.
- Verbal (linguistic): You prefer using words, both in speech and writing.
- Physical (kinesthetic): You prefer using your body, hands and sense of touch.
- Logical (mathematical): You prefer using logic, reasoning and systems.
- Social (interpersonal): You prefer to learn in groups or with other people.
- Solitary (intrapersonal): You prefer to work alone and use self-study.

A study from Learning Styles Online states that everyone has a different combination and mixture of learning styles that they use. You may use a specific learning style more than others and your preferred way to learn may vary based on your environment and surroundings. There is no perfect mixture, nor are these methods fixed or set in stone. You may even find over time that you better develop a style that you use less often, or strengthen one that you may already prefer to use.

In an environment where hundreds of young people are being taught at once, schools often form a general standard of how students are taught. Which can make it difficult for students to grasp what is being taught to them.

California education officials talked proudly about the seventh year in a row where they saw improvements in the state's graduation rates. An article on EdSource stated that California reached 83.2 percent in the year 2016, which was 0.9 percent greater than that of the previous year. From afar, this number may seem like growth. But it's not even a full percent of improvement. What about the other 16.8% of students who did not graduate?

To find out more, I asked twenty eight campers who attended the water ceremony how they felt they learned best (using the seven different learning styles listed above) and if they felt they learned better inside or outside of a classroom.

Out of twenty eight campers:
- 4 felt they learned Physically.
- 8 felt they learned Visually.
- 3 felt they learned Aurally.
- 4 felt they learned Verbally.
- 5 felt they learned Socially.
- 2 felt they learned Logically.
- 2 felt they learned in Solitary.
The number of campers who prefer to learn outside is nearly twice as high as those who prefer to learn inside.

Of the ten students who preferred to learn inside a classroom, Joshua Barrientes, 22, said, "I guess it's because I've been in a classroom setting for so long that it's nothing new and it's a bit more structured."

When asked how he felt about learning outside of a classroom for the week, in the unfamiliar circumstances of Portola CA, he said, "One thing I've learned from being out this year is that when your life seems to be getting cluttered or out of control, take a step back and relax a little bit. Clear your mind of worries and when you return to the responsibilities you will approach them more confidently, and know how to accomplish these barriers. At least that's how I helped myself into learning."

Still, the other 18 preferred to work outside of a classroom because they felt the environment was set for learning through experience rather than a set curriculum. The belief that physically working together to accomplish something as challenging as a ropes course helped them learn far greater than any paper test or workbook ever could.

Chao Xiong, 19, said, "The learning experience was great. Each obstacle was about facing certain fears. I wish that there was more team bonding because it's important to understand your team in order to achieve more."

When asked how he felt about the water ceremony that took place that morning, Chao said, "The water ceremony was great. I learned that there were all kinds of people from all different places, with different hardships that they need to conquer. It feels like we became one at that ceremony."

I couldn't agree more.

My time spent at camp that week and my participation in the water ceremony showed me that, with the awareness of different learning styles and openness to how others experience the world, young men of color from 15+ communities across California - all with different cultures and languages - can come together with respect and unity. And with this as a foundation, the goals we set together can be achieved faster and with an even greater impact.

We have heard from students, but what does high school staff think about mental health in their schools? According to the 2013 California School Climate Survey by the California Department of Education, only 3.9% of high school staff say mental health is a "severe" issue for students. Another 17.1% see it as a moderate issue, 60.5% see it as a mild issue, and 18.4% see mental health as an issue at all.

A 2014 study done by UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, showed that 20.8% of California youth ages 12-17 reported needing mental health services for feelings of sadness, anxiety or nervousness. In Merced County alone 24.8% of youth in that age group reported needing mental health services.

A 2012 study done through Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, showed that an average of 62.7% of youth aged 2-17 received the care they asked for whereas sadly in Merced County only 54.3% of that same age group received care. That's about 1 out every 2 youth who got the care they needed and that's not right in my eyes.

After seeing all the data and finding out that only half of Merced students actually receive care, our schools need to do more to help our youth who have to deal with these mental health issues. A small percentage of educators and staff see mental health as an issue in schools, but our young people are saying otherwise.

We can't expect students of any age to be able to excel in their education when they also have to deal with depression or anxiety caused by an number of things happening both in school and out. We must make sure that there are mental health services available to all students so that schools can be a place of learning.
“I didn't think I could make a difference in my community but by being a youth reporter at Coachella Unincorporated I learned how to bring my community together through the power of storytelling.”

Karla Martinez’s experience as a youth reporter for Coachella Unincorporated helped her strengthen the writing and communication skills she needed to advocate for positive change in her community.

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