

## MELROSE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



*Education should build confidence, integrity, limitless imagination, and promote social justice*



*Students present their work at the Melrose Expo*



*Melrose 6th-graders in the classroom*

# Expo of Student Work: A Time to Shine

"The Expo of Student Work is always an exciting time because the community comes out to see the students shine in a variety of ways," says Rosa Gonzalez, who has been on staff at Melrose for six years. The Expo takes place twice each year, with students presenting their work from academic classes and from Community Bridges.

The Student Council played a big role in the proceedings this year, selling food in the cafeteria to begin the event, and later hosting the performance section of the program. The Melrose community didn't miss an opportunity to showcase student work: Even the informal "meet and greet" portion of the evening featured student-scored music from the Beats and

Flows class piped in over the PA system. Performances included salsa dancing, samba, capoeira, and percussion.

Melrose's mixed media art teachers adorned the hallways with students' visual art. Among the eclectic genres represented were painting, collage, self-portraits, and even hand-painted chairs. Students proudly pointed out their work as they walked with families to their respective classes. In the Math and Humanities Core classrooms, students shared individual and group presentations to highlight some of their best work during the year. "Some students, like 8th-grader Lupita, had a very big night, sharing their talents in multiple areas," says Gonzalez. "Lupita performed samba, salsa, and percussion, then transitioned quickly to her academic classes, where she is also excelling."

## 8th-Grade Portfolios: An Academic Rite of Passage

Three years ago, Melrose staff introduced portfolio presentations as a way to challenge departing 8<sup>th</sup>-graders and allow them to put their middle school tenures in perspective. Students present three examples of academic work, reflecting on the skills, knowledge, challenges, and areas for improvement connected to each. "They also use a visual art portfolio as a talking piece for describing their middle school career, themselves as learners, and their goals for the future," relates Rosa Gonzalez.

"As someone who has sat on the panel for the last two years, I am always particularly moved by seeing parents witness the new growth

and maturity of their child. It is also exciting to see how students react so respectfully to each other's presentations and ask extremely thoughtful questions of their peers."

"I would describe the portfolio presentations as a meaningful academic rite of passage," says Gonzalez, "linking students' school and home lives with their long-term goals for success." Presenting select academic work to a panel of peers, family members, and faculty, "students have a chance to prove they are ready to move on to high school either by clearly showing that they have learned

*[continued on page 2]*



Melrose Leadership Academy is a member of the Oakland Small Schools Foundation Network.  
[www.smallschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org)



*8th-graders working on their portfolios*

["8th-grade Portfolios" continued from page 1] from their mistakes, and/or by illustrating their academic successes." The experience also carries an emotional weight for students and families. "Tears are commonplace at portfolio presentations where students reflect deeply on their middle school career."

Gonzalez points to 8th-grader Daisy's portfolio as an example of the unique, heartfelt approach some students take. "Daisy took the portfolio presentation as an opportunity to honor various members of her family who have supported her throughout her education," reflects Gonzalez. "She became a bit teary-eyed when she announced that her long-term goal is to become an architect because she wants to follow in the footsteps of



*Photos copyright 2008 Hasain Rasheed*

her hardworking father who is in construction."

Since the emphasis is on reflection as well as academic achievement, "Anyone can have a successful portfolio presentation where the key is honest, thoughtful reflection," explains Gonzalez. A prime example is Justus, who has struggled academically throughout middle school but earned the highest grade of any student for his portfolio presentation this year. "His fully memorized presentation, in which he eloquently recounted his middle school career and expertly explained three pieces of his best work, was a birthday gift to his mom," describes Gonzalez. "She was overjoyed by the end of his presentation and proudly stated that she would be framing his grade sheet to always remember this momentous occasion."

## Yosemite Excursion Highlights 2007-08 Field Trip Schedule

Each year since its opening, Melrose has been proud to offer extended, overnight field trips at every grade level. Locally, students have gone to the Marin Headlands Science Institute, and staff have even taken kids as far as the Grand Canyon. This past October, 45 out of 60 8<sup>th</sup>-graders set out for Yosemite National Park and a four-day, three-night stay at a group campground. The first day was spent driving, then setting up camp. The next morning, the campers ventured to Yosemite Valley, where they had a choice of activities, from low-impact to strenuous. The more adventurous chose a rock scramble, climbing up imposing boulder fields. The more leisurely activities included a flat hike to Mirror Lake. Because water levels were low in October, students were also able to play in the river.

The third day featured a long hike to Vernal Waterfalls, a big challenge for kids not physically fit. "The goal was to get them all to hike to the top of the first waterfall," says Debbie Lenz, Yosemite chaperone now completing her fifth year of teaching at Melrose. "You can look right over the edge, see all the water going over it and feel the mist." Students looking to push themselves hiked on to a second waterfall. On the last day, they took a short hike to a grove of giant Sequoia trees, the tallest trees in the park.

The rewards of this extended field trip are hands-on, varied, and rich, says Lenz. "The kids get to experience and learn about geology, water systems, animal and plant life, cooking responsibilities, cleaning, getting along in a group, and more. It's a bonding experience for the kids, and it stays with them," she explains.

"They make references to it all year during math and science lessons – they make that connection by having experienced it. For a lot of them, it's the life experience they take home. Being away from family, taking care of yourself, doing your own cooking and setting up your own living space. And they get to get out of Oakland and see beautiful places outside of the concrete city. For some it's the only time they've left Oakland." So memorable have these trips been for students that some have even gone back to their favorite spots with their families on vacation!

From food to facility rentals to transportation (especially at current gas prices!), a field trip is a pricey proposition. If you'd like to make a tax-deductible donation to help fund future Melrose excursions, visit [www.smallschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org) and click "Donate Now" (designating Melrose), or write and send a check to "OSSF/MLA," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620. Thank you for your support!