



Far West Student Brianna Rogers

Meet One of Our Students

Amid the familiar banter and laughter that typify the close of a school day, what sets Far West High School's campus apart is the way each student stands out. One sits sketching a silhouette for Fashion Class; another shuffles out a new dance step, drawing nods from peers. Above the eclectic scene floats the sound of an acoustic guitar: the stop and start, uncertain but determined, of notes slowly becoming a song.

"Yeah, I'm kind of in a band sort of thing," says senior Brianna Rogers, seated in art teacher Tonia Herrero's classroom. "Me and my best-est friend – that's her guitar plinking outside – we're trying to write a new song." Their band, *The Catalyst*, has a week to hone their craft before performing at Far West's *Lights On After School* event. "We spell it with a K 'cause we're cool," grins Brianna.

Mission and Focus

OSSF is dedicated to promoting excellence in Oakland's public schools so that *all* our students have the opportunity to achieve.

OSSF is the only private organization focused on securing and managing resources and providing expert operational and fundraising services for those Oakland public schools that serve primarily low-income students, are results-oriented and data-driven, are led by innovative, entrepreneurial leaders, and have a strong emphasis on personalization, collaboration, and family involvement.

"I'm not so good at *genre-lizing* music," says Brianna when asked to describe the band's style. "But I'm good at making up words. I'm a little eccentric." A talkative, witty free-thinker, Brianna fits right in at Far West, whose arts-integration focus fosters a spirit of genre-defying diversity and self-expression.

"Kids here, for the most part we're really close-knit because the school's so small," she explains. "I'll wear something super-couture and strange, and it doesn't matter because people expect that of me. They'll be like, 'Mm-hmm, it's Brianna... just another Wednesday.'"

The staff does its part to cultivate this creativity. "All the teachers are extremely supportive," she says. "[English teacher] Ms. Driscoll, she's like a rocket. She'll say, 'You're gonna get it done, I'm gonna help you be super-intelligent, and we're gonna do it!' Even if we don't have as many resources as other schools, we still figure out a way to make it work."

This year, with the support of OSSF, Far West secured a major multi-year grant to host a Fashion Academy. The Academy – essentially a school within a school – offers Far West more specialized instructors, materials, and tools.

"What I'm really passionate about is fashion design," Brianna says. She's idealistic, but realistic. "I want to do something I love *and* be able to sustain my life and travel." Brianna's college search reflects this depth of thinking, too. "I'm applying to [California College of the Arts], prepping my design portfolio. But I want to get a master's, that's my goal," she says. Since CCA has no master's degree program, for grad school Brianna plans to head to UC Davis, which, thanks to Far West's college visits, she's toured twice. "It's just really homey and great there, and the master's design program sounds pretty substantial."

She's applying for a scholarship, and hopes her array of extracurricular activities helps her chances. In her first year at Far West, "[the school] didn't have [as many clubs and programs] as we do now," she says. But as the school has branched out, so has she. Just for starters, she's now a member of the Student Council, Dance Committee, Youth as Facilitative Leaders, and Literary Guild.

Continued on next page

API SCORES GROW

As the “Extra! Extra!” insert in our last newsletter detailed, Oakland public schools – especially those in the OSSF network – made great strides on the 2008-09 California Standards Test (CST), outpacing state averages in English Languages Arts (ELA) and Math.

Achievement was in the spotlight again a month later, when Academic Performance Index (API) scores were released. The API, which crunches CST scores for ELA and Math into one number between 200 and 1000, measures academic growth from year to year. Schools in our network **improved their API scores by an average of 35 points in 2008-09, outpacing both district and state averages** (19- and 14-point improvements, respectively)!

The two most improved schools in Oakland were both OSSF schools: **Futures Elementary had the district’s greatest API growth**, jumping 118 points to 701, and **East Oakland Pride Elementary rose 112 points to 657. Think College Now**, a founding member of OSSF, jumped 80 points to reach an historic 848 – **the first school in OSSF’s network to break 800!**

Overall, 12 of our network’s 33 schools topped 700, compared to five in 2007-08, growth that reflects an encouraging district-wide trend: Oakland is the most improved large (20,000 students or more) urban school district in the state of California over the last five years. Congratulations to our schools!



Student at Futures Elementary



Students at East Oakland PRIDE

Continued

“I don’t know how I got into all this stuff! I will admit, sometimes I’m over-ambitious.” She sighs and shakes her head. “But, you know, it’s fulfilling because I get so much out of all the experiences. I feel accomplished, and feel like I’m the one you can depend on to help you with all your stuff.”

Fashion, of course, has been a thread throughout. She’s the teaching assistant for Tonia’s fashion classes, assembling PowerPoint slideshows on couture and other fashion trends, and she’s sent designs down the runway in four campus fashion shows.

Her design style reflects a Japanese influence. “I’m kind of a nerd – I love me some anime and manga,” she says. She points to the Cherry Blossom Festival in San Francisco a few years ago as a turning point. “That was the first time I was immersed in so much Japanese culture,” she recalls. “I always

tell everybody, ‘That’s when my insides turned Japanese.’ That was the day.”

Even with all these varied pursuits, Brianna keeps her grades up – way up. “Last year was the first time in my whole life I got straight As,” she says. “I have a goal: This year I’m hoping I can stay at the top, because it’s like, ‘Oh, that’s the highest school GPA chick, look at her!’ And I wanna be like, ‘Yeah I am!’”

Meanwhile, the sounds of the guitar outside remind her she’s got a song to write – and sing. “When I hear my own voice I get super self-conscious and I just freeze up,” she says, wincing. “So now I’m trying to get up the courage. I just gotta believe I can do it. We’re gonna write a new song, and we’re gonna make it work.”

Learn more about Far West at www.smallschoolsfoundation.org/farwest.

WHO WE SERVE

OSSF was instrumental in **Far West High School** being awarded an \$80,000 annual California Partnership Academy grant for its Fashion Academy, helping the school secure an invitation to apply and then collaborating on the written proposal. Our marketing and fundraising support also help Far West send its students on their frequent visits to college campuses across the Bay Area.

As **Melrose Leadership Academy (MLA)** grows to become a K-8 school, it is also developing a unique and ambitious **dual immersion bilingual program** in which all students will learn both English and Spanish. MLA is also home to one of Oakland’s most bountiful school gardens (see page 3).

Piedmont Avenue Elementary is new to OSSF as a member school, but has a rich history in Oakland. The school opened in 1892 and has served generations of families. Students speak 17 different languages on this diverse and dynamic campus.

To ease the transition from middle to high school – and help maintain a college focus emphasized from 6th grade on – **Coliseum College Prep Academy (CCPA)** is expanding to become the district’s first 6-12 school. The staff takes its middle and high school students on several college tours every year.



Students at New Highland Academy

Garden and Nutrition Programs Flourishing in Oakland Schools

In these pages a year and a half ago, we wrote of the fledgling OSSF-funded garden and nutrition programs that were getting started on a handful of our schools' campuses.

We expressed hope, then, that “experiences with healthy food at school [would] carry over to home for our students and become lifelong health habits.” Through our grants monitoring and other site visits, we’ve been excited to see this play out. Students are choosing newfound salad bar items like cucumbers and beets over “the greasy food [we had before],” and are planting their own gardens at home. Melrose Leadership Academy’s Cooking and Gardening class, says 8th-grader Trevor, “helps me learn how to do things I’ll do when I’m an adult, like cooking and gardening, and I can share this with my family and they can benefit from it.”

To support the budding enthusiasm for nutrition and garden-based learning, OSSF has been busy collaborating with community organizations like the East Bay Asian Youth Center – EBAYC has set up Produce Stands on ten campuses – and partnering with the district’s Nutrition Services Department to help install salad



Student at ASCEND

bars in 12 school cafeterias. We’ve also continued to work with the East Bay Community Foundation, securing grant funding for gardens on ten campuses.

Building on the momentum of these collaborations and the great work happening on our campuses, OSSF hopes to deepen its work with schools as their “green” initiatives take root alongside related areas such as science, recreation, and environmental awareness. Stay tuned for more developments!

THANK YOU

A big thanks to the 24 local businesses that have joined our 100:100 Club! By donating \$100 to OSSF, these companies and organizations have shown their support for schools in Oakland.

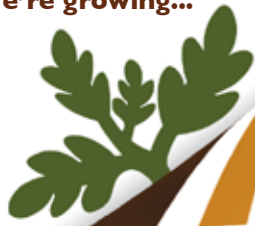
100:100 Club Members:

- Advantage Microsystems
- Law Offices of Barbara M. Beery
- Butterfly Direct Marketing and Communication LLC
- Coleman-Smith LLC
- Copy Grafik
- Corsair Press
- Garrett C. Dailey, Attorney at Law
- Donahue Gallagher Woods LLP
- Douglas Parking
- Elkhorn Consulting
- Hermosa Salon
- Informatica
- Inner City Advisors
- Johnstone Supply of Oakland
- Meyers Nave
- Oaklandish
- Platt Inc. Real Estate
- Porboys German Automotive Services, Inc.
- Queridomundo Graphic Design
- ReceiverGroup
- Rockridge Cafe
- Small Thyme Cafe and Catering
- Soi Four Bangkok Eatery
- Van Every Construction
- www.rickandernie.com

It’s not too late to join! For more information on becoming a member of our 100:100 Club, visit: www.smallschoolsfoundation.org/100.

A special thank you to our amazing photographer, **Hasain Rasheed**. Most of the images in these newsletters and our schools’ newsletters were captured by him. Thank you for helping us tell our schools’ incredible stories! Check out more of his work at: www.hasainrasheed.com

We're growing...



AND
SCHOOLS
FOUNDATION
Resources > Opportunity > Excellence

SEASON'S GREETINGS from our Executive Director

It seems we find ourselves saying this every year: The first months of school have rushed by, and yet again the holidays have reached us with a surprising quickness. As ever, things are moving fast, but as I read through this newsletter, I'm excited about their direction. The pieces in these pages tell a story of growth and new opportunities, both for the schools already in our network – and for those soon to be.

As our mission states, we “promote excellence in Oakland’s public schools so that *all* of our students have the opportunity to achieve.” The italicized *all* is what drives us, and it’s what drove our decision – reached after nearly a year of discussion and planning – to become the **Oakland Schools Foundation**. A shorter name for a wider reach, OSF will retain the same focus on supporting schools that emphasize personalization, are led by entrepreneurial principals, are results-driven, and value collaboration and family engagement.

To support excellence and equity for *all*, we plan to expand our network of schools as well as deepen our services to help Oakland continue the growth we see not only in our test scores, but in whole-child efforts such as gardening programs, eclectic after-school activities, and innovative ideas like Far West’s Fashion Academy. We believe OSSF – soon to be OSF – plays a key role in supporting all this forward-thinking progress. Oakland’s schools are poised for even greater things, and we will do whatever we can to help them get there. Our name will change, but our focus on equity, rigor, and dedication to schools will not.

If you’d like to help us grow into the ambitious role we’ve set out to play, please consider a one-time or recurring tax-deductible donation to support OSSF operations. When you donate to OSSF, you are supporting more than 14,000 children who deserve great schools and access to the same resources as students in wealthier neighborhoods. Help us meet our operations donation goal of \$50,000! A big thanks to all who’ve donated in the past year, especially in these challenging economic times.

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday season!

Holly Babe Faust, Executive Director

...find out more at:
www.smallschoolsfoundation.org/OSF

“The Oakland Unified School District is excited to have the Oakland Small Schools Foundation transition to the Oakland Schools Foundation in the interest of helping all schools in Oakland be great. We value our partnership with this organization and the important work they’re doing.”

Tony Smith, Ph.D., Superintendent,
Oakland Unified School District

SAVE THE DATE FEBRUARY 25, 2010

Thanks to all who turned out for our 2nd Annual Teacher Fishbowl in September! We believe it proved just as compelling as the first, and we expect more of the same during our **2nd Annual Principal Fishbowl**, when we assemble 10 dynamic leaders to discuss the ups and downs of running their schools. The evening will also feature the official announcement of our new name: Oakland Schools Foundation. Please join us in supporting our principals, the hardest-working leaders we know.

Now More Than Ever Invest in Oakland's Public Schools

With the help from all of you, we will continue working to give *all* of our students an equitable opportunity to succeed.
Make a one-time or recurring tax-deductible donation:
www.smallschoolsfoundation.org PO Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

OSSF Board of Directors:

Jonathan Klein, President
Robyn Gould, Treasurer
Vanessa Coleman, Secretary

Samir Bolar, Member-At-Large
Lillian Cordova-Lopez, Member-At-Large
Brendan Cullen, Member-At-Large
Brian Rogers, Member-At-Large

Libby Schaaf, Member-At-Large
Robert Spencer, Member-At-Large
Sedrick Tydus, Member-At-Large
Jason Dolan, Board Fellow, Haas School of Business

TO CONTACT OSSF:
PO Box 20238 Oakland, CA 94620
(510) 534-7613 (phone) (510) 225-3350 (fax)
info@smallschoolsfoundation.org | www.smallschoolsfoundation.org
Holly Babe Faust, Executive Director

**OAKLAND**
SMALL SCHOOLS FOUNDATION
Resources > Opportunity > Excellence