ito Chiala has a not-so-secret dream for his students. “I would love to see every student who enters this school graduate ready for college,” says Chiala, principal of William C. Overfelt High School. “College is the outcome—it has to be, because any student you’re graduating who’s not prepared for college you’re setting up for an inferior life.”

It’s a bold piece of goal setting for Chiala, who is in his sixth year as principal at Overfelt, historically one of the lowest performing of the 11 comprehensive high schools in the East Side Union High School District.

But Chiala has surprising reason for optimism. Some 400 of his school’s nearly 1,500 students are enrolled in one of 13 Advanced Placement classes. And while 80 percent of Overfelt’s students are Latino (and 92 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch)
Impact

Natalia Baldwin (both Lurie College alums) Lurie College of Education. Once they throughout their careers as educators and learn about the outstanding contributions graduate, this stored energy powers them growth. Whenever I see the first crocuses, are transforming the lives of hundreds of and students. Like the flower bulbs, our students are edge and skills during their time in the teaching staff in the San Mateo-Foster City School District. The seedling of good ideas can also be found in stuff member Sami Monsur’s part partnership with Hilary Nixon, a professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning in the College of Social Sciences. They and Social Sciences alum Zach Lewis created Garden to Table, which brings community members together to build and tend urban gardens while providing fresh fruits and veget ing to a neighborhood that needs greater access to good nutrition.

Here in the Lurie College, Prof. Patricia Swanson has created opportunities for local area teachers to develop their skills in teaching K-8 math aligned with the new Common Core standards. Schools are expected to implement these new standards in the next year, but struggle to support all of their teachers in learning how to do this. Her Advanced Teaching Certificate program fills this need while helping teachers work towards a master’s degree at a pace and in a way that fits their busy working lives. Like many of our professional development efforts, the Lurie College continues to meet the intellectual and professional needs of our local communities, so that ev ery year we can be assured of a continual blossoming of effective educators.

Elaine Chin, Dean
coe-education-group@sjsu.edu

Natural Resource

ALUMNA DONNA LEWIS EMBRACES NEW PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

For me, it’s hitting the balance between being respectful and firm, get ting people to change when they need to change. I’ve been told I do that well. Encouraging people in tough conversations, confronting people over tough things, but in a really respect ful way—that’s rewarding.”

Lewi

Spring is a time for renewal and new growth. Whenever I see the first crocuses, daffodils and tulips of the season, I think about the outstanding contributions made by Lurie College alumni, faculty, staff and students. Like the flower bulbs, our students are busy storing up their professional knowl edge and skills during their time in the Lurie College of Education. Once they graduate, this stored energy powers them throughout their careers as educators and life-long learners. Think of this issue of Impact as our flower show, where you can learn about the outstanding contributions made by Lurie College alumni, faculty, staff and students.

At William C. Overfelt High School, Principal Vito Chiara and teacher leader Natalia Baldwin (both Lurie College alums) are transforming the lives of hundreds of high school students through the creation of small learning communities.

Unlike at most large comprehensive high schools, these small learning communities create more personalized experiences for students and keep them from getting lost in the system. This approach has enabled nearly 400 of the school’s 1,500 students to enroll in Advanced Placement courses and prepare for college.

Alumna Donna Lewis exemplifies the can-do spirit and energy that character ize so many of our graduates. Her drive and persis tence enabled her to navigate her way through a variety of careers both in and outside of education (although it is in education that she has had the greatest impact). First an elementary teacher, then school administrator and now an assistant superintendent of human resources, she plays a key role in hiring and developing the teaching staff in the San Mateo-Foster City School District. The seedling of good ideas can also be found in stuff member Sami Monsur’s partnership with Hilary Nixon, a professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning in the College of Social Sciences. They and Social Sciences alum Zach Lewis created Garden to Table, which brings community members together to build and tend urban gardens while providing fresh fruits and vegetables to a neighborhood that needs greater access to good nutrition.

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Natural Resource

ALUMNA DONNA LEWIS EMBRACES NEW PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

Everyone knows that in an era of tight budgets, making due with less is the name of the game in public education.

Donna Lewis, who lives with these limitations every day in her role as the assistant superintendent for human resources at San Mateo-Foster City School District, calls it her greatest challenge. “It is lack of the resources that you need,” explains Lewis, a member of the Lurie College of Education alumni advisory board. “California teachers aren’t very well compensated right now. It’s tough, and the cost of living goes up and up.”

But for Lewis, the challenges are matched by the rewards of a varied educational career that has taken her from the classroom to the administrative suite.

The co-valedictorian of her high school graduating class, Lewis earned concurrent college community college associate degrees in dance and theater arts, married and had a child and started a successful career as a loan officer, but knew something was missing. “I had begun volunteering in my daughter’s classroom, where she had a teacher who wasn’t very good,” Lewis says. “One day I really got mad and I thought, ‘If this lady can do this job, so can I, and I can do it better!’ So I came home and told my husband that I wanted to teach and I was going back to school.”

She earned her bachelor’s degree in creative arts from San José State University then got her multiple-subject elementary school teaching credential from the Lurie College. She landed her first job teaching a special education day class in the San José Unified School District. “It was trial by fire, learning the ropes,” Lewis recalls.

A master’s degree in special education soon followed and she wound up working in the Mountain View schools as a resource specialist. “My principal said, “You ought to be a principal,” Lewis says. She enrolled in the Lurie College’s administrative credential program and served as an assistant principal in three schools in the Union School District.

“There’s a really strong program here,” Lewis says of the Lurie College. “I always want my student teachers. I know that my teaching is going to come through when they come through this program.”

Soon Lewis was ready for another career change. She was hired by the Carlm an School District as director of personnel. She had little professional preparation for the job. “There was a huge learning curve,” Lewis says. “I’m a risk taker, willing to try different things. I’ve jumped from different arenas and reinvented myself again and again.”

She drew on skills she had already developed as a school principal. “You’re hiring people, you’re overseeing people, you’re evaluating people,” she says. “You have to learn who can do what and bring them up through their credentialing.”

Meanwhile, she was enrolled in a doctoral program at Pepperdine University in Malibu. She flew to the graduate campus in West Los Angeles once a month and submitted her work online.

In assuming her current position 18 months ago, Lewis moved to a larger dis trict with nearly 12,000 students, 1,100 employees and her own support staff. “For me, it’s hitting the balance between being respectful and firm, getting people to change when they need to change,” Lewis says. “I’ve been told I do that well. Encouraging people in tough conversations, confronting people over tough things, but in a really respect ful way—that’s rewarding.”

Despite the challenges, Lewis says her greatest satisfaction as an educator lies in seeing students succeed. As a human resources administrator, “It’s helping employees through difficult times,” she says. “For me, it’s hitting the balance between being respectful and firm, getting people to change when they need to change. It’s tough work,” she says. “For me, it’s hitting the balance between being respectful and firm, getting people to change when they need to change. I’ve been told I do that well. Encouraging people in tough conversations, confronting people over tough things, but in a really respect ful way—that’s rewarding.”
“I want that Latino student who's struggling at another school in the neighborhood to say, 'If I want to go to college, I want to go to Overfelt.'”

Vito Chiala

By the middle of Vito Chiala’s second year, 28 of 30 students had gotten their GEDs and many were enrolled in community college.
Mary McVey punches a code into an electronic lock and opens the door into Sweeney Hall 332, a conference room whose concrete walls, gray linoleum floor and asbestos ceiling date back to the building’s construction in the early 1960s.

“This place was awful—like a closet, and no one would use it,” says McVey, associate dean of the Lurie College of Education. “For a relatively inexpensive amount of money we transformed it.”

Now, the room is equipped with an interactive SMART board, 10 portable white Huddleboards, tables on wheels and 26 orange molded-plastic Move chairs from Steelcase. It’s easy to envision groups of various sizes moving the furniture around to create workspaces that suit their needs.

“The whole goal of what we’re going for is flexibility,” McVey says. “We have multiple types of rooms now, depending on what a faculty member needs.”

Over the past 3½ years, McVey has overseen the renovation of all of the Sweeney Hall classrooms managed directly by the Lurie College (the rest are allocated by the university).

Now SJSU’s Undergraduate Studies department is drawing on McVey’s expertise as it seeks to upgrade classrooms across campus with new technology to meet 21st century needs. SMART boards, for example, can be used as projectors or, linked to a teacher’s laptop, can display Internet content.

“I think for day-to-day classrooms, what we have is really good,” she says. “I would say it’s highly competitive nationwide.”

McVey steps next door into room 331, where the floor is carpeted and the walls have been painted pale blue. Eight Akira multifunctional tables are lined with black chairs and in one corner a U-shaped media:scape conference station is set up with two large LCD displays.

“This room was transformed just before the start of Fall 2012 semester,” McVey says. “We use this for faculty retreats, professional development, our forum and to facilitate faculty collaboration.”

Higher seats set around the perimeter of the room enable users to see over the heads of the people in front of them. Meanwhile, the SMART screen is compatible with Apple TV, meaning the presentation could be controlled with an iPad or iPhone.

“We’re piloting the use of that in these classrooms,” McVey says. Upstairs, in Sweeney Hall 448, McVey has installed 24 bright green Node chairs, mobile seating units that feature a writing surface and an under-seat tray for backpack and personal effects. The chairs can be pushed together so that their desktops create a virtual table.

Huddleboards enable students to gather into groups to work on tasks, making the classroom decentralized. “This is an example of where there’s no front or back of the room,” McVey says.

The classroom upgrade process was launched in 2008 when alumni Donna Lenz Rooney and Marla Duino Lenz made a gift to the Lurie College to enable creation of a SMART board-equipped classroom—a first for the San José State University campus.

“That really started the whole thing,” McVey says. When the college faculty was polled about their priorities, “they expressed a desire for more interactive rooms,” she says.

Twenty-five Lurie College faculty members have been trained to use the SMART boards, McVey says. Their use is still evolving in higher education, but familiarity with them is a must for would-be teachers going out into local public schools, which are increasingly equipped with the technology.

“It’s important for our student teachers to know how to use them,” McVey says. “The districts are looking for people with these skills.”

In Sweeney Hall 446 McVey has created a soon-to-open student collaboration workspace that has been equipped with a scanner and a long bar with multiple power outlets, perfect for setting up laptops. Lounge chairs and red couches complete the décor.

Down the hall, McVey enters an empty university-operated classroom that is being converted to a “lecture-capture” suite, equipped with video cameras and microphones embedded in the ceiling.

“Everything that goes on in this classroom can be recorded,” says McVey, who selected the furniture. “This is one of the few lecture-capture rooms on campus.”

With only a few university-operated classrooms left untouched, the Sweeney Hall classroom upgrade process is nearly complete, McVey says. She expects it will pay dividends in the form of a better experience for Lurie College students.

“We’ve made an investment,” she says. “When you create an atmosphere that shows you care about the people in it, then the people respect that and the people in it.”
The Common Core includes a focus on mathematical fundamentals, such as persistence in problem solving and developing the academic language necessary for success in mathematics. "The social-emotional dimension for teaching and learning intersects with the language of math and with mathematical knowledge for teaching," Swanson says. Credential program graduates were surveyed as the certification program was being developed, Swanson says. "Forty percent of respondents said, ‘Wow, I would like to come back to do this,’" she says. "The challenge for us in filling the courses is whether teachers can afford to pay tuition." With the help of a pilot grant from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Swanson wants to build professional learning communities for participating teachers. She hopes to attract groups of teachers who work together. "I really would like to encourage teams of teachers to come so they could support each other," Swanson says.

An added attraction is that nine units from the certificate could be applied toward a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. "We hope it will serve as a vehicle to grow our master’s program," she says.

Swanson says implementation of the Common Core "would be a big change" for most classrooms. "Whether we can pull it off is all in the hands of teachers," she says. "I believe we can pull it off."

Meanwhile, students develop negative attitudes toward math early, leading to steadily declining performance in grades 4 through 8. "Kids’ belief that they can do math, and their belief in its relevance also declines," Swanson says. Her new courses take up this challenge. While the primary focus is on developing teachers’ mathematical knowledge for teaching, the courses also address teaching resiliency in math, persistence in problem solving and developing the academic language necessary for success in mathematics.

"Creativity was in the air in the week leading up to Thanksgiving," as the fourth annual Marion Cilker Conference for Arts in Education brought together students, teachers and arts educators for a two-day whirlwind of workshops.

Co-sponsored by the Lurie College and the Santa Clara County Office of Education (with support from the College of Humanities and the Arts, the California Kindergarten Association and Montalvo Center for the Arts), the event kicked off on Friday, Nov. 16. Some 350 Lurie College of Education students gathered on campus for a keynote speech by Louise Music, head of the Alameda County Arts initiative.

Then everyone headed to workshops on how to incorporate theater, music, dance, digital storytelling and fine arts into classroom instruction, says conference co-organizer Robin Love, an associate professor of Child and Adolescent Development.

The next day, 125 preschool-through eighth grade teachers met at the Santa Clara County Office of Education for their own round of workshops.

They viewed a presentation memorializing the late Marion Cilker, a San José State University alumna and arts patron, whose gift made possible the arts education conference. "She had a real joy in terms of seeing the arts and participating in the arts," Love recalls. Cilker’s gift pays for undergraduates and Title 1 teachers to attend the conference for a nominal fee, Love says.

This year’s program also featured an arts expo that drew two dozen representatives from local arts organizations, such as the San José Museum of Art and San José Jazz. “They came just to show the kinds of resources they have for parents and teachers,” Love says.

Presenters included arts and resource teachers, San José State faculty members and representatives of the San Francisco Opera and TheaterWorks of Silicon Valley. "We have been really fortunate to have a rich pool to draw from," Love says.

While Cilker’s original gift provided for supporting the conference, "Our goal is to find funders or enough partners so that it could become self-sustaining," Love says. Planning is underway for the 2013 Cilker conference, which is scheduled for Nov 15-16, she says. “I don’t want to see this end in five years,” Love says. “We would like to see this go on forever.”

It’s probably a safe bet that most elementary and middle school teachers have grappled with the principles of arithmetic and basic mathematics. But as Patricia Swanson likes to say, “The knowledge for teaching math is not the same as, ‘Can I do math?’” Which is why Swanson, an associate professor of elementary education, has recently won approval for a certificate for teaching the new Common Core math standards.

Beginning this summer, Swanson will teach four related courses in the Lurie College of Education, two for K-3 teachers and two for those who teach grades 4 through 8. Those pursuing the Advanced Teaching Certificate in Common Core Mathematics would need to take three of those courses, she says.

California is beginning to implement the new standards, which have been adopted by 45 states. “This is a move toward education,” she says. “They could use more background tools and modeling with mathematics," Swanson says. "TheCommon Core is trying desperately to be more coherent, and go deep. If we can really make it happen in classrooms it will be a great improvement in math standards.”

The Common Core includes a focus on mathematical fundamentals, such as persistence in problem solving, learning to use tools and modeling with mathematics, Swanson says. “It is hoped this will lead to a deeper engagement with the discipline,” she says. “That would be a big change for most classrooms.”

The problems with math education start with teacher preparation, Swanson says. “Math probably does not get enough emphasis in their education,” she says. “They could use more background in math instruction.”
Growing new connections

URBAN GARDENING PROGRAM BUILDS COMMUNITY

It all started three years ago, when Sami Monsur, a resource analyst for the Lurie College of Education, replaced her front lawn with raised planting beds built from recycled wood, then invited three neighboring families to grow vegetables there.

Immigrants from rural Mexico, they have harvested corn, squash, beans, peas, tomatoes and onions, Monsur says. “It takes them back to the land,” she says. “It’s really, really nice to see.”

Imelda Rodriguez, community director for ComunUniversity, got wind of what Monsur was doing. “She said, ‘Hey, let’s see if we can do something with this,’” Monsur says.

That’s when Hilary Nixon, a professor of Urban and Regional Planning who grew up on a small farm on Canada’s Vancouver Island, got involved. Nixon and some of her students joined Monsur and other community members to form a steering committee within ComunUniversity that evolved into Garden to Table.

“We wanted to provide a more regular contribution of fresh fruit,” Nixon says. “This is fruit grown in our neighborhood to help neighbors in need.”

In addition to the nutritional benefits, the gardening program builds a greater sense of community, Nixon adds. “They’re interacting with their neighbors, face to face, several times a week.”

In the past few years, the group has built 19 home gardens, two of which are shared with neighbors who do not have their own land. Over the past nine months volunteers have also installed gardens at three apartment complexes, Nixon says.

Garden to Table is also building a community of students and faculty in the College of Education. The group recently recognized as a sterling example of San José State University employees.

Project Coordinator Zach Lewis, who recently completed his master’s degree in Urban Planning, plans to plant a 5,000-square-foot experimental plot in the Willow Glen section of San José. “That will be where Zach tests some of the techniques he learned at his job,” Nixon says.

Meanwhile, plans are afoot to organize Garden to Table as a freestanding non-profit organization that is capable of sustaining itself (until now it has been funded through grants). “That will be a big piece as we go forward for the urban farm,” she says.

When the Garden to Table model was entered into the social innovation category of this year’s Silicon Valley Innovation Challenge, the idea won second place, Nixon says.

That prompted Lewis to launch a Kickstarter fundraising project with a goal of collecting $15,000 to help cover operational costs, which is needed to fund the project. “We will also serve as the University of San José State University (October 2014). Michael Kimbarow served as president of the Academy of Murals of Communication Disorders and Sciences (2013).

As the 2013 inaugural Visiting Scholar of the School and College Outcomes and Prevention Macrosystems, Jason Laker will provide education and mentoring for the American Education Research Association. He will also serve as a reviewer for the AERA 2013 Conference Program Submissions, International Studies (SIG 24) and Critical Examination of Race, Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Education (SIG 24 x 24) and assets in developing the conference program.

Elisa Maldonado-Celis serves as a member of the Association of American Colleges of Teacher Education Meetings and Professional Development Committee.


Nadia Sorkhabi co-authored “Prologo” published a chapter titled “Encuentro con el autor, en el café,” for the Annual Congress of Latin American Studies (2012).

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