

NOVEMBER 2019

HOME ROOM

FAIRFIELD-SUISUN UNIFIED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Independent Study Diverse subjects, students keep teachers on toes

Pam Brousseau knows a bit of Spanish, so teaching it to high school juniors in Independent Study is not all that difficult. French and German pose more of a challenge, but at least she has the benefit of her father being French and her grandmother German. Google Translate has come to her rescue on a regular basis.

Whoever said variety is the spice of life would love the Independent Study program. Brousseau, Jennylyn Sterling, Leticia Guerrero and Kellie Ramirez have to shift gears from one subject to another as quickly as their students come and go for their weekly one-hour sessions.

Brousseau can attest to that after shifting from a Chemistry of the Earth lesson with one junior to reviewing a French 3 essay with another. A teacher may meet with a student for one hour each week, but the teachers spend far more time creating lesson plans as diverse as their students.

As Sterling explained, "We design the curriculum as we go. It's more individualized. It's more personal. The students get an hour of instruction without the interruptions of a regular classroom, so they can accomplish so much more."

Some high school students opt for Independent Study, which is offered to all grades, because of the flexibility. Alice Herston is taking the minimum



Pam Brousseau

of four courses in Independent Study as well as four classes at Solano Community College. The junior would have just six classes if she had remained at Armijo High School, where she where she is a two-sport athlete, but Independent Study allows her to get a jumpstart on college.

Others come for a course not offered at schools in the district. And then there are those who have been teased or bullied so much, Sterling said, that "they focus on that rather than working on their education."

Brousseau said anyone who wants to question the legitimacy of Independent Study should meet a girl who in seventh grade tried to hide by tying her hoodie tightly around her face. She avoided the other students, often sitting by herself in an empty classroom.

The teachers went to work to pull her out of her shell. Now a sophomore, she no longer hides. In a recent collaborative activity for all the students, she was a team leader.

Independent Study addresses many diverse needs, and the teachers reap just as many rewards for fulfilling them.

Here, there or anywhere

When classes are collapsed, teachers switch sites in hopes of finding a home

Hollywood beckoned to Amanda Finerty when she majored in filmmaking at San Francisco State. Playing it safe, the 1999 Vanden High School graduate also took a few human development classes in case teaching turned out to be better for her in the long run than attempting to make it in the movie industry.

Her degree led to Finerty being hired at DreamWorks, where she enjoyed one brief claim to fame by editing the plane crash scene in “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa.” That was not enough, however, to make Finerty believe she had made the correct career choice.

Teaching felt right, especially after she volunteered in her son’s kindergarten class and talked to his teacher about giving it a try. She attended our district’s summer job fair, where she was offered two long-term substitute opportunities at Dan O. Root II. Anna Kyle trumped that by hiring her to teach third grade - or at least that is what she thought.

Finerty was putting the finishing touches on her classroom Aug. 21, a day before all teachers returned, when she received the news that her class at Anna Kyle had been collapsed because enrollment was below projections. Instead of looking forward to the start of a new career, she was looking at being involuntarily transferred.

“The principal (at Anna Kyle) kept telling me that I was taking it real well. What was I suppose to do, argue with them?” Finerty said. “A teacher at Anna Kyle told me to remember one word as a teacher and that is flexibility. I always try to remember that - be flexible.”

That she found her way to Laurel Creek to teach kindergarten is somewhat ironic



Amanda Finerty is teaching kindergarten at Laurel Creek after her third-grade class at Anna Kyle was collapsed.

because after helping out in her son’s class, she devised kindergarten lesson plans just in case a potential employer asked her to do so.

If she had taken the substitute work at Dan O. Root II, she would have spent half of the year in Kate Palmer’s fifth-grade class. Palmer knows all too well about losing a class. She got her start at Dan O. Root II in 2014 when the school had three fifth-grade classes. When one class was collapsed in 2015-16, Palmer had the choice of going to first grade or switching sites.

Her decision was made easier when one fifth-grade teacher announced she would retire in June 2016 as Palmer weighed her options. All Palmer had to do was survive one year of first grade.

“It was like starting over. I had just figured out what key went to the bathroom,” said Palmer, who is on leave after giving birth to her daughter Violet. “By the end of the year, I felt I could do it. I don’t know how well I did it, but I did it.”

Finerty is happy at Laurel Creek because “I’ve been blessed with the best class. I love the kids.”

Granting her wish

Laura Obando applied last June for a \$250 music and arts grant from California Casualty Insurance, then had to wait until September to find out if her wish would be granted. The Fairview Elementary School teacher found out she won when California Casualty agent Tami Phillips Jimenez recently visited the school.

Budget cuts have forced schools to eliminate or reduce arts and music programs, California Casualty is offering the grants to “help students soar with music, dance, fine art and other creative outlets,” California Casualty executive Brian Goodman said. For more information, go to www.calcasmusicartsgrant.com.



Tami Phillips Jimenez (left) and Laura Obando



Orange makes our pride impossible to hide

Polos, V neck and crew T-shirts with short or long sleeves, sweatshirts, zip and pullover hoodies, a baseball jersey, beanies and a cap – you can show your pride in our association by purchasing FSUTA gear in our online store. Go to

<https://www.agpestores.com/skylinedesigns/groups.php>

and select the Fairfield-Suisun Unified Teachers Association. The access code is FSUTA. And you do not have to pay for shipping. Click “pick up in store.”

Once all the orders are ready, they will be delivered courtesy of FSUTA. If you have any issues with your items once you receive them, call Skyline Designs at 707-447-5901. If one of your items needs to be replaced, return that item to the FSUTA office and we will deliver the new item once it is ready.

The store will reopen Monday, Nov. 4 and be open through Friday, Nov. 15.



CONFERENCE CALENDAR

LGBTQ+ ISSUES / Dec. 13-15, 2019 Hilton Financial District, Santa Clara

This conference will serve as a forum to discuss a variety of subjects affecting the entire membership and our children. There will be interactive sessions and opportunities to interact as a group. Email questions to lbgtqconference@cta.org.

ISSUES / Jan. 17-19, 2020 Tropicana Hotel, Las Vegas

Tackle challenges such as school funding, member outreach, engagement and organizing. There will be keynote speakers, session presenters as well as opportunities to network and collaborate. Email questions to issuesconference@cta.org.

GOOD TEACHING / Feb, 7-9, 2020 Fairmont Hotel, San Jose

A variety of workshops will focus on curriculum content areas for K-12 teachers. There will be opportunities for professional development and to share ideas with experts and colleagues. Email questions to goodteachingconference@cta.org.

NEW EDUCATOR / Feb. 21-23, 2020 Marriott Hotel, Santa Clara

Sessions for educators in their first three years of teaching will address areas such as classroom management, the new state standards, assessments, navigating IEPs and special education CTA resources. Email questions to new@cta.org.

EQUITY & HUMAN RIGHTS / Feb. 28-March 1, 2020 Marriott Hotel, Irvine

The conference will capture the essence of CTA's Mission Statement to ensure the dignity and civil rights of all youth are protected and secure a more equitable, democratic society. Email questions to equityhumanrightsconf@cta.org.

CTA/NEA-RETIRED / Feb. 28-March 1, 2020 Marriott Hotel, Irvine

Whether you are retired or considering retirement in the next few years, you will benefit from attending this 16th annual conference. Email questions to cta-retired@cta.org.

Register for conferences at www.CTAGo.org

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Alex Diaz
alex.fsuta@gmail.com

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amhorel@yahoo.com

Christina Kling
cmkling707@gmail.com

Dan Pozzesi
danpoz19@gmail.com

Art Sullivan
arthurs32@aol.com

Jamie VanWart
thecaddie@hotmail.com



www.FSUTA.org