



# EducationFirst

The University of Iowa College of Education Newsletter  
May 2008

## Alumnae Finds Alternative School, Writes Nation's First Improvement Plan

### Remarkable Firsts



*Vierling crusades for her students.*

Using education as a tool for empowerment, **Deb Vierling** (MA '03) has been dubbed everything from an advocate to an angel. And the name of her school sums up her life's mission perfectly.

Crusade High School, the alternative school she founded in 1996 and has served as principal of since 2003, epitomizes her commitment to offer students stability and structure that will help them succeed in academics and life.

"My philosophy is based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," Vierling explains. "Once students have food in their stomachs, they can see, and their teeth don't ache, they can concentrate on algebra, biology, and community service."

Her commitment to these students is so strong because Vierling has walked in their shoes. Growing up in Burlington, Iowa, Vierling was touched by alcoholism, poverty, and abuse at an early age. Education became her ticket out.

Now the 53-year-old mother of five and grandmother, who went back to school at age 45 for a master's degree in educational administration, is on a mission to help students who encounter the hardships she experienced.

Vierling's students are predominantly poor. Some are raising children, others have served prison time, and many have been abused. Of 40 students enrolled—from Morning Sun, Wapello, Winfield-Mt. Union, and Mediapolis—10 are homeless.

Crusade High School is a model of alternative education and has been recognized nationally. It is the first alternative high school in the United States to have written its own Comprehensive School Improvement Plan.

Many alternative programs have the same curriculum, rules, and buildings goals as the traditional school. But Crusade serves four school districts with four different curricula and plans, so Vierling and her staff developed their own plan.

The plan, which the four superintendents accepted, includes sections on administration; students, parents and guardians; staff; curriculum and instruction; vocational, technical, and career assessment; community and social services; personal, social, and life skills; facilities; and homelessness.

Vierling and her staff have presented at numerous state, national, and international conferences teaching others how to develop their own plans.

Based in a one-room schoolhouse, Crusade students work on different subjects independently. Since the school's inception, more than 200 students have graduated and have gone on to become respiratory therapists, business managers, and even educators themselves.

"I've learned that you're never too old to reach for a dream," Vierling said. "I just want to help my students reach their own dreams."

## Enriching Iowa's Math and Science Curricula

Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA) sat on a stool at the front of a Williamsburg Junior High School class and learned about an honors program he helped support.

The **Iowa Excellence Program** provides enriched mathematics and science curriculum to more than 500 high-ability 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students in schools across Iowa, including Williamsburg, Shenandoah, Cedar Rapids, Marion, Des Moines/Saydel, Ft. Madison, Clear Creek-Amana, St. Ansgar, Winterset, and Mediapolis.

The self-funded program, operated by the Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, began in 2003 with a grant secured with Grassley's help from the Funds for the Improvement of Education.

**Susan Assouline**, associate director of the Belin-Blank Center, said she sees the program as an extension of the center's summertime offerings. "It's taking what we do in the summer and bringing it to the school for an entire academic year," she said. "We're proud that Sen. Grassley can see how successful it is for himself."

The Williamsburg students shared stories about their enriched coursework, including a rocket unit and interactions with Israeli students. Most reported that they plan to take Advanced Placement courses in math and science and may even seek college degrees in those fields.

Grassley told the students he was pleased they were pursuing math and science, especially in today's increasingly global economy.

"We need more people of your talent to be involved in keeping our country economically viable," he said.



*Grassley sees Iowa Excellence Program success at Williamsburg.*

## Remarkable Accomplishments

### Online AP Academy Recognized as Nation's Best

The U.S. Department of Education selected the Belin-Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development's **Iowa Online AP Academy** as one of the nations' top six programs to feature in its report, "Connecting Students to Advanced Courses Online: Innovations in Education."

### Lagos-Lavenz Named Associate Dean



Prof. Susan Lagos-Lavenz

**Susan Lagos-Lavenz**, a clinical associate professor in Educational Administration, has been named the new associate dean for teacher education and student services. In her new

position, Lagos-Lavenz (MA '75/PhD '85) will work not only with teacher education, but also be responsible for overseeing admissions, grievances, databases, placement, and the curriculum library.

"Each of these domains are critical to the overall success of the College," Dean **Sandra Damico** said. "Susan brings a wealth of experience as a teacher and principal, as well as expertise and leadership to this important position. She is well connected across the state. I know she will represent us well."



Professor Linda Fielding

Lagos-Lavenz replaces Associate Professor **Linda Fielding**, who will remain active in the College by continuing to teach literacy courses and pursue research on making literacy instruction accessible to all students.

Damico praised Fielding for her accomplishments as associate dean, including securing a five-year approval from the Iowa Dept. of Education for the Teacher Education Program.

### Faculty Excellence



Professor Vilia Tarvydas

Rehabilitation Counseling Professor **Vilia Tarvydas** received the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association's James F. Garrett Distinguished Career in Rehabilitation Research Award and the National Council on Rehabilitation Education's Distinguished Career in Rehabilitation Award.



Professor Saba Ali

The University of Iowa honor societies of Omicron Delta Kappa and Mortar Board selected Counseling Psychology Assistant Professor **Saba Ali** as recipient of the 2008 James N. Murray Faculty Award for her dedication and service to students.



Professor Sherry Watt

Student Affairs Associate Professor **Sherry Watt** was selected associate editor of the *College Student Affairs Journal*. She was also accepted to the Courage and Renewal Facilitator's Preparation Program, where as a member of this distinguished group she will design and facilitate workshops for those who lead difficult dialogues intended to eradicate social oppression.

Native American Concerns elected Counselor Education Associate Professor **Tarrell Portman** to a three-year term as vice president.

### Graduate Student Awards

Language, Literacy, and Culture doctoral student **Tyrone Geronimo "Nimo" Johnson** has been awarded the Graduate College's Presidential Fellowship worth \$150,000. He is the fourth LLC student in the past six years to receive this prestigious fellowship.

Higher Education Administration doctoral student **Marsha Saddler** was one of 25 graduate students selected from across the country to participate in the Asa G. Hilliard III and Barbara A. Sizemore Research Course on African Americans and Education. Saddler is currently investigating African American students' access into teacher ed. programs at predominately white institutions.



Marsha Saddler

The Association of International Education Administrators honored Student Affairs Admin. Research graduate student **Mark Salisbury** with the Harold Josephson Award for Professional Promise in International Education. Salisbury examined how international activities on campus can lead to a more globally aware, interculturally proficient campus community.



Mark Salisbury

Rehabilitation Counseling doctoral candidate **Sara Johnston** was recognized as exceptional for providing pro bono consulting services on smoking cessation for people with mental illnesses to the the UIHC Department of Psychiatry.



Sara Johnston

## Remarkable Outreach

### Enriching Iowa's Math and Science Curricula

Deb Mahoney scanned the displays at the 21<sup>st</sup>-annual Invent Iowa State Invention Convention, pausing to look closer at a few that caught her eye.

"These kids, they're phenomenal," she said. "It's like, where can we get some of this stuff?"

Mahoney was among the approximately 1,500 people who attended the Invent Iowa 2008 State Convention in Iowa City at the Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

The convention, sponsored by The University of Iowa and Iowa State University colleges of engineering and the Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, drew 357 inventors in third through tenth grades from across the state. These inventors represented the top one percent of students who participated in the program on a local and regional level.

"Invent Iowa is about celebrating inventive talents," said **Clara Baldus**, Belin-Blank Center administrator and Invent Iowa coordinator. "In school, students are handed problems to solve every day. Invent Iowa encourages students to decide what the problem is and to solve it themselves with whatever technical skills they have at that point."

Mahoney's son Brian, a seventh grader at Cascade Junior-Senior High School, participated in the convention for the first time this year. He invented the "PVC Caddy," a garage organizer that can hold rakes, brooms, shovels, or any other long-handled tool that gets in the way.



*Davis County fourth graders Mercedes Thomas-Murillo and Madeline Nelson share their invention, Arithmetic, a fun, alternative to practicing math, reading, and everyday thinking skills.*

"We'd always put the brooms against the wall and they'd fall down on one of the cars," he said.

Deb Mahoney said the convention was an extremely positive experience for her son.

"It's a great learning opportunity for the students," she said. "Not only do they enhance their creative skills, but they learn to speak in public, follow outlines and timelines, and how to document their research and projects."

One of Deb's favorite inventions was the

Super Slicer, created by fifth graders Aubrey Melvin and Molly Lanz of Wapelo. The slicer is a metal apparatus that cuts equal slices of baked goods in one motion.

Brian said one of his favorite things about the convention was seeing other students' ideas. His favorites included the Dead Animal Picker-Upper, invented by sixth graders Lucas Hanlin and Arlen Hunt. "It's fun because we're getting to be creative and to meet new people," Brian said.

### Helping K-6 Math Teachers Boost Performance

Mathematics Education Clinical Associate Professor **Vicki Burketta** and Mathematics Associate Professor Walter Seaman received a three-year, \$447,831 grant to train 50 K-6 elementary school teachers in high-need districts to improve math teaching and learning. The grant will also help reduce the math achievement gap, especially for those who qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Called the Elementary Mathematics Partnership Opening Windows to Excellence, Rigor and Relevance—or EMPOWER—Project, the initiative will provide more than 100 hours of continuous professional development to 50 grade K-6 teachers and principals in Anamosa, English Valleys and Iowa City. Funding is provided by the federal Mathematics and Science Partnership Program, the Iowa Board of Regents, and the Iowa Department of Education, which jointly

administer Title II grants authorized by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Title II grants are intended to increase the academic achievement by helping school districts ensure that all teachers are highly qualified to teach. Partnerships between high-need school districts and the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics faculty in higher education institutions are at the core of Title II improvement efforts.

EMPOWER will offer educators professional development via summer workshops, academic year seminars, ongoing lesson study, Web-based learning, and on-site implementation assistance. Seaman and Burketta said they believe this is critical to helping improve the quality of math education in Iowa.

"EMPOWER's work helps further The University of Iowa's strategic goal of enhancing community service outreach

activities for Iowa and its education system," Seaman said.

"Our goal is that EMPOWER results in institutional and systemic change, not only in the three schools involved, but that the change will propagate to other Iowa schools."

Burketta agreed, adding that real change has occurred in teacher practice as well as district-wide adoption of the lesson study model.

"EMPOWER brings powerful teaching and learning resources to an expanding set of teachers and students," she said.



*Professors Seaman (L) and Burketta*

## Remarkable Grant Support



## College of Education Ranks 21<sup>st</sup> best Public, 31<sup>st</sup> Best Overall

In its 2009 report on the nation's best graduate school programs, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked The University of Iowa College of Education 21<sup>st</sup> best among public schools granting doctoral degrees. Among all schools assessed, both public and private, the College ranked 31<sup>st</sup>.

Specialty programs within the College of Education also continue to rank highly, according to the "America's Best Graduate Schools 2009."

Top ranking programs as compared to other public universities include:

- Rehabilitation Counseling #4
- Counseling/Personnel Services #12
- Higher Ed Administration #16
- Psychological and Quantitative Foundations #36

"These rankings reflect the outstanding caliber of our programs and the commitment of everyone involved to providing a world-class education," UI President Sally Mason said. "Academic

excellence is a collaborative effort, and the rankings are a real tribute to everyone—from our deans and faculty to our staff and students—for the expertise and dedication that they share daily through teaching, research, and service."

UI Interim Provost Lola Lopes agreed.

"It is encouraging to see the rankings move us toward our aspiration to be one of the nation's top 10 public research universities," Lopes said. "The fact that we have a number of programs so highly ranked reminds us of how fortunate we are to have outstanding educational opportunities here in the heartland that draw students from across the state as well as the nation and the world.

John Keller, dean of the Graduate College, said he's pleased that a number of the university's graduate program offerings have again been recognized as among the best in the nation.

## Remarkable Rankings

"This recognition is an excellent indicator," Keller said, "of the strength of many of our graduate programs that have a major impact on improving people's lives and contributing to the academic vitality of this campus and the community."

To determine the rankings, this year *U.S. News & World Report* surveyed more than 1,000 graduate programs and nearly 9,100 academics and other professionals based on two types of data: expert opinion about program quality and statistical indicators that measure the quality of a school's faculty, research, and students.

**Education First** is produced monthly by The University of Iowa College of Education Office of External Relations, Jill Fishbaugh, director, N452 Lindquist Center, Iowa City, IA 52242-1529/ [educationiowa@uiowa.edu](mailto:educationiowa@uiowa.edu).

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