

Santa Barbara's Recipe for Academic Success



The Santa Barbara Education Foundation is not your normal nonprofit supporting students. Rather it is like an educational Robin Hood, matching donors with students who need it most.

Students like Antonia Mollo. During her freshman year, Mollo's mother died of an overdose and her father was sentenced to 12 years in jail.

"I grew up so angry at the world, constantly asking 'why me?'" Mollo says. "Gangs and violence became my sense of peace. My crazy life spread through the halls at school, and for once I was placed in a program that was meant for me."

That place was the Academy for Success, a program developed by Dos Pueblos High School Math Teacher Kelly Choi. When some of her students weren't showing up to class, Choi took the time to ask why. Some were hungry, while many others, like Mollo, had turbulent home lives.

The program identifies struggling students in the 9th grade. Instead of taking courses from different teachers year to year, students stay with the same cohort of students and a team of teachers to take the classes they need to graduate. And the group "becomes a family," says Margie Yahyavi, executive director

of the Santa Barbara Education Foundation. With additional mental health services and counseling, the students flourish: there is a 95% reduction in disciplinary action; 98% of Academy students graduate high school; and 92% enroll in some type of post-secondary education.

But this is only one of many programs that Yahyavi and the Education Foundation's generous donors support. The nonprofit raises private funds to assist students in three ways: funding programs like Academy for Success developed within Santa Barbara Unified schools by faculty or administration; supporting outside programs that want to work within the schools; and finally by sustaining programs that the Education Foundation developed themselves.

Yahyavi is particularly proud of the work the Foundation is doing to ensure that vulnerable students stay on track through long summer months. "We are tackling summer learning loss with our robust summer programs," she says.

With nearly 60 percent of southern Santa Barbara County's students enrolled in the Santa Barbara Unified School District, giving to the Education Foundation is one of the most clear-cut ways to lift up educational outcomes for the community as a whole.



Bridging the Digital Divide

Even before the pandemic, Santa Barbara Education Foundation Executive Director Margie Yahyavi had heard that the parking lots around Santa Barbara schools were full at night. Why? Parents without Internet were driving their kids to pick up the school's Wi-Fi so they could do homework.

With students forced online to learn during the pandemic, the digital divide has shown even more stark.

The Education Foundation jumped into action, raising funds so that internet accounts and hotspots could be set up and noise reducing headphones are provided – making education accessible to the thousands of lower income students who need it. But, as Yahyavi points out, this is a problem that won't go away.

"How are kids supposed to learn without access to Wi-Fi after this is all over?" she says. "How can they be competitive without having the information available over the Internet?"

To help meet the demands today and tomorrow, please make a donation at: www.sbefoundation.org/donate.

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Santa Barbara Education Foundation

www.santabarbaraeducation.org

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Expanding Students' Cultural Horizons



The "late" Léni Fé Bland, 2013

"I admire the Santa Barbara Education Foundation because of their work to provide empowering resources to students, especially those often underserved. I founded the Léni Fé Bland Performing Arts Fund with SBEF so that all students would have the opportunity to attend live theater. Today, students kindergarten through 12th grade are visiting our historic downtown theaters. Imagine, a senior in high school attended his first live play – and loved it! I'm so grateful to SBEF. Together, we ensure our students have powerful and exciting experiences and exposure to the performing arts."

– Sara Miller McCune

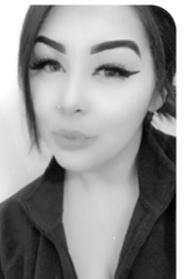


Sara Miller McCune, 2015



Antonia Gives Back

"My grades went from all F's and a GPA of 0.0 to graduating Dos Pueblos High School with a 4.0 and getting a \$10,000 scholarship to attend a CSU. I had never even imagined myself graduating high school let alone going to college. The Academy for Success completely changed my life and I'll forever be grateful for that. Proudly, I'm in my last year of school at Santa Barbara City College and have been interning with the Academy for Success the past four years in hopes to spread the same hope the program provided for me."



– Antonia Mollo
Academy for Success Student

