

2004 People Helping People Business Awards

Nominee – Hewlett-Packard Company

Category – Hands on Sacramento Award

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Submitted by:

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Nomination Details:

1. Program Name: Main Avenue Elementary School Mentors
2. Collaborators: None
3. Start Date: 2001
4. Employees Participating: 35-40
5. Employee %: 1% site
6. Participants: All
7. Who Benefits: Students, teachers, staff, mentors

Description: Main Avenue Elementary School is in the Robla School District. It has about 400 students, of which 90% qualify for free lunches. Between 30% and 40% of the students come from homes where English is not the native language; there are a total of 13 languages spoken. Robla's families represent this country as well as Eastern European, Middle Eastern, Asian, African, and South American. A significant proportion of students come from single-parent homes or are being raised by the grandparent(s) or other relatives. Some are homeless.

This program has evolved to offer four ways for HP employees to become involved: classroom mentoring, one-on-one mentoring, playground mentoring, and special events. We hope to add email mentoring soon.

Classroom mentors are teamed up with a teacher to focus on the students in that class. They spend four hours per month working with the students in small and large groups on math, science, reading, art, and social skills (as assigned by the teacher).

One teacher said, "When you come to the school and interact with the students; being open to them and interested in them; you can change the whole dynamic of this school. We have about 20 students that, if you could reach them and convey to them that they are important, that they matter, you will do wonders for this school". Because of this, the one-on-one mentoring is taking shape. Mentors spend one lunch period per week with their students.

Playground mentors stay on the playground (in pairs) each day of the week to plan and facilitate games and events during lunch/recess. This is in an effort to enhance social, negotiation, and conflict management skills. Much of the classroom disruption that impedes the learning process begins on the playground when conflicts arise. Mentors are encouraged to use and reinforce the School's Three Essential Rules for all students in their speech and actions. "Be respectful of yourself, others and school property; Be kind in your talk and your behavior; Behave in a way that is safe for you and for others."

The HP mentors have also held three successful events for the students: a book drive and two school supply drives (one in for Fall 2002 and one for Fall 2003). For the book drive, HP partnered with an elementary school in Fresno and collected over 5,000 books. Each student at Main Avenue took home 5 books, right before Spring break, to read and keep. The school supply drives were held each summer. We collected supplies and distributed them to every student in the school. All events relied solely on the generosity and support of fellow HP employees and contractors. We didn't request donations from any local companies or organizations.

Technologically, HP has supplied the upper grades (4th-6th) with 12 PCs and 6 printers. Two mentors from our program (in special events) connected all of the PCs on their own time, and made sure they were up and running prior to this school year. This year, we purchased four additional printers for various classrooms that needed them. We are trying to more fully integrate technology into their classrooms, providing opportunities for teacher training sessions specifically focused on technology integration later in the school year.

Impact: At the beginning of each school year, we hold a roundtable conference between the mentors and teachers to confirm what worked and what didn't work from the previous year. During that meeting, one teacher shared: "It was so nice to have someone from 'the real business/working world' to witness and acknowledge the job we do every day with these children". It is evident that this program is helping teachers as well as students.

Mentors actually act like friends, tutors, playmates, and, most importantly, as an adult who is truly interested in them. Students at Main Avenue have the opportunity to work in small groups with their classroom mentor to review skills or learn new ones. The mentors also listen to students read. With such a high percentage coming from non-English speaking homes, many of these students don't have the opportunity to read to anyone at home.

Playground mentors have organized soccer games (40 students played one day!), jump-rope and hula-hoop marathons, and catch with footballs. Some days, just bringing our random balls and buckets and toys from their equipment closet creates an environment in which the students devise their own games.

A picture says a thousand words, but unfortunately a picture can't be added here. As the students walked through the Book Drive, their faces proved their delight and enthusiasm. They were stunned they got to pick out the books they wanted. They were amazed that they got to keep the books. Their faces made it all worthwhile. One student said, "These are the first books I've ever owned."

Because of the school supply drive, each student was assured the necessary supplies to begin the school year. The teachers even had reserves from the drive, to accommodate students who join their school mid-year. Families are somewhat transient in this district, so many children do not stay at one school for the entire year. When we were delivering the supplies, the principal said, "I don't know why I am surprised; this HP Mentor Group always comes through."

With the brand new PCs and printers, the upper grade teachers are now able to integrate technology into their curriculum. Before, they had PCs they brought from home. They were old and inefficient to run the software required for these students. Now, the students can spend time on the PCs and the teachers can actually access the Internet for class assignments.