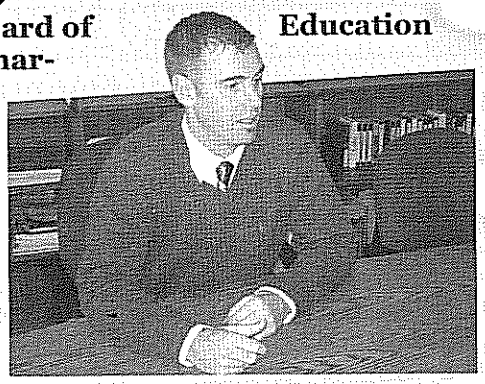
The Paramount Bard Academy - An Early College School

By Brent Malicote, Principal

I write this piece in mid-February, one day after the Kern County Board of Education approved the Paramount Bard Academy (PBA) to open as a public charter school in Delano, CA. The hard work of many local parents, teachers, educational leaders, and PBA employees has finally paid off, and the phone has continued to ring throughout the morning as interested parents and teachers inquire about this very innovative charter school.



The first question I am being asked by local families and educators is, "What makes your school different from any other public school?" Interestingly, I begin by describing how the Paramount Bard Academy and traditional public schools are the same. Our school is free and open to any family in the community. There are no performance requirements to attend PBA. In fact, one of our primary goals is to educate a true cross-section of the community. Another similarity includes our requirement to administer all mandated State testing including CST, STAR, and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Charter schools are typically scrutinized more for their test scores and are shut down when not performing at high levels.

There are three differences I generally point to when talking about the Paramount Bard Academy. First, like many charter schools, PBA will offer small class sizes to allow for individual student attention that is not possible for traditional public schools with higher case loads for each teacher. While local districts offer class sizes of 30-35 students in middle school and high school, PBA will have 16-22 students per class.

The Paramount Bard Academy will also host the Bard College Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program on the same campus as our public school. By having a teacher education training program on our site, we will have the opportunity to have graduate students working in partnership with a highly qualified master teacher throughout the school day. Having an added educator, in the form of a graduate student, further increases our ability to address individual student needs. The MAT also offers another educational choice to college students who may have otherwise decided to take classes in Bakersfield, Fresno, or beyond. Bard's MAT program is uniquely structured to educate teachers as subject area experts and clinical practitioners. **By having Bard on our campus we are also able to offer college courses to our high school students. It is expected that all PBA students will graduate from high school with 30 units of college credit, prepared and motivated to graduate from a four-year college.**

Longer school day and longer school year

Another difference for PBA is a lengthened school day and a lengthened school year. While the current State budget is forcing politicians to think about shortening the school year to save on costs, the Paramount Bard Academy will lengthen the school year by two weeks. **The Academy will also feature a school day that runs from 8AM to 5PM, giving all students the opportunity to finish all class work and "homework" before leaving school.** Over-and-over again I hear from parents how nice it will be for their child to be able to finish their class work with a teacher who will be able to provide the help and expertise as needed.

After parents and teachers take the time to carefully look at what the Paramount Bard Academy is all about, many times their next question is, "How can I become a part of this school?" By the time this article is published, we will be actively recruiting our first class of 100 6th and 100 9th grade students and hiring highly motivated and trained teachers. After doing your research, if you are interested in becoming part of the Paramount Bard Academy team, please visit our website and give us a call. We are truly excited about opening our doors to a dedicated team of students, parents, and teachers in August, 2009. ■

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