

“Excellent!”

A PASSION for NATURE Giving Your Kids a Choice

K-8 • Yuba Environmental Science Charter Academy • www.YES-CA.org



YESCA K-8 Public School Wins High Ratings

YESCA parents respond to first-year survey with **high approval ratings for teachers and quality of education**

Open House!

Saturday Aug. 8 • 10am to 2pm

Map, directions, and more
information on the back page

**“We proudly support YESCA
public school and its effort to
provide a choice in education.”**

Spell-checked names to come....

Don and Nancy Walker, Sandy Grabowski, Arthur and Corrina Craigmill, John and Iva Norris, Susan and Jeff Citron, Pete and Janice Hammontree, Senator Sam Annestad, Assemblyman Dan Logue, Rod Hiskins, Sue Muths, Greg and Linda Holman, Douglas Binderup, Jenny Brown, Crystal Abraham, Franca Cavallo, Bruce Helft, Daneen Phillips, Paul McGovern, Jonathan Bump, Corine Laurijsen, Katie Stockton, Jeniffer Tupper, Constance Murtaugh, Alice Wing, Yael Nizri, Andrea Yokum, Janese Jenkins, Sharon Stephson, Tara Taber, Michael Mathistad, Stephen Tassone, Steve Jenkins, Mike and Michele Lee, Margaret Campbell, Mike Hatherly



Members of our community will show respect and care for each other, for those in the communities that surround us, and for people throughout the world.

Approaching the end of its first school year, YESCA surveyed parents of all students at the school. About forty percent of all parents responded, and the results showed high approval. In the all-important category of “the quality of education your child received at YESCA this year,” the respondents to the survey rated the school “EXCELLENT.”

“Overall experiences with your child’s teacher” was rated equally high. Out of 35 total responses, 28 rated teachers “excellent,” and 4 indicated “OK—neutral,” for a total satisfaction rating of 91 percent.

The safety of American schools has become a major issue for many parents, but YESCA parents overwhelmingly rated their school a safe place for their children. **Ninety-three percent of survey respondents answered “yes” to the statement, “I feel that my child is safe at school.”**

A sample of comments offered by parents who responded to the survey:

“I am grateful for the teacher/parent interactions and open communication.”

“We have three children, in different grades, and we are happy with all their teachers.”

“A good teacher is our main priority. We are happy with staff and programs at YESCA. Thank you for asking!”

“We like the environmental emphasis and would like to see more of it. Our child profited from his nature walks and experiences with adobe and cob, etc.”

“I am very thankful for your nurturing and encouraging environment.”

“We are so thankful to have the opportunity to have our children attending YESCA. This is the first year my children have ENJOYED attending school and are sad to see the school year ending. We feel lucky to be part of such a great school.”

“We feel our child is very safe at YESCA.”

“You are doing a first rate job. Keep up the good work and we will be back next year.”

The Marysville Joint Unified School District academic year begins August 17, 2009. We welcome you to stop by, call us (692-2210), or visit our website (www.yes-ca.org) to find out more about YESCA or to receive registration information.



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Meet the Teachers

By Steve Jenkins

Andrea Yocum
Kindergarten
First Grade



Andrea Yocum came to YESCA with great “excitement about the possibilities” at the new charter school. “If I could have written my own job description, it would have looked just like the one I read for this school,” she says. Public schools had become increasingly regimented, and she was “looking for flexibility with a charter school.” Andrea describes her first year at YESCA as “joyful,” and says, “It’s a complete and utter joy to be with kids. You see them gain skills for life. To help kids solve problems and grow, every day, brings a visceral satisfaction.” The past school year was her first as a credentialed teacher, and saw the completion of her M.A. in Education at U.C. Davis.

The environmental connection at YESCA is important to Andrea, who spent a year working on an organic farm in Grass Valley. She has a garden in the children’s play yard, which is also used as part of her science curriculum. Two three-foot by ten-foot

raised beds are currently sprouting tomatoes, chard, cucumbers, sunflowers, and zinnias. Her students also have outdoor experiences on the school property, using the seasonal creek for science lessons. About every second week, Andrea makes use of the school’s ten acres for nature walks and encounters with frogs, toads, tadpoles, and caterpillars.

Andrea’s dreams for the school’s future include expanding the school’s garden to supply food for the school’s lunch program. She would like to see cooperation with the local 4H club and provide a permanent corral for housing animals. A person of varied interests, she also dreams of an “engineering enrichment program—making pulleys, circuits, robotics, and other hands-on projects.”

Like the other faculty members, Andrea recognizes the difficulties of the new charter’s launching, but says she “loved the first year’s spontaneity.” She finds life at YESCA “challenging, inspiring, and meaningful. We’re trailblazing.” Asked for a concluding remark, Andrea thinks for a moment and states with calm conviction: “I feel very grateful that we’re all here at this exact spot at this exact time.”

Constance Murtaugh
Second Grade
Third Grade



Known mostly by the title, “Ms. M,” Constance has been teaching for 26 years, the last 17 in the lower primary grades. She earned her teaching credential at Salem State College in Massachusetts and recently finished work on her Masters degree in Instructional Strategies at the University of New England. My own family knows her as “Connie” since she’s been my son’s teacher for the better part of three years, the only public school teacher he’s ever had.

The outstanding feature Ms. M brings to YESCA is her deep philosophical convictions about the connectedness of the living world. “To see that everything has its place and belonging is a foundation for respecting the planet we live on and the communities we live in. We’re all in the same galaxy and the same solar system and the same planet.” Asked about her teaching plans for next year, she comments that

she would like to “start with the theme of connectedness more vigorously; to deepen the understanding through experimentation and observation, that our actions have an effect, that we are all connected, and with that connectedness comes responsibility.”

Connie’s classroom is alive with spontaneity and playfulness. Nature features prominently in her lessons, and she uses the school’s ten acres for almost daily nature walks. Asked what her class had witnessed recently, she speaks of the students observing a deer, how they hid, lay down and watched the way its head came up when they made noise, and how it went back down when they became quiet. Nature, she says, teaches children how to be quiet. “You can’t understand your environment if you’re always moving.”

“The other thing I feel passionate about is the integration, not addition, of technology in the classroom. This would help differentiate instruction, giving opportunities for the gifted to advance and providing support for those who need more help. Our lower elementary team is already discussing ways to do this.”

Ms. M likes the diversity of faculty at the new charter school. “Every person here has a different focus, a different strength.” She notes that faculty members offer skills in science, in working with the earth, in organic gardening, as well as exuberance for teaching and an ability to “think outside the box.” She says, “Bringing these focuses together, they become a cohesive outlook for our teaching, like a circle.”

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Originally slated to be YESCA's "swing" teacher, assisting in both K-1 and 2nd-3rd grade classrooms, Tara Taber was asked to teach 4th and 5th grades following the first eight weeks of the fall term when the original teacher was forced to leave due to a family emergency. "I was a brand new teacher at a brand new school," she says. "It was tough—I had to give it all or nothing."



Tara Taber, *Fourth Grade - Fifth Grade*

Describing herself as too shy to ask how to go about registering for college, Tara became a registered dental assistant and by January 2000 had found the confidence to enter the Liberal Studies program at Chico State, followed by completion of the teaching credential program—"I loved it!" she exclaimed. She also loves teaching: "Who could complain about hanging out with kids all day? Even on our toughest days, they're still fun!"

One advantage of teaching at YES-CA is flexibility. "We're able to teach kids who have trouble keeping up with curriculum schedules. We can make some choices even though we follow the district's curriculum."

The school's emphasis on the environment is a big plus for Tara. "I've always been a litter cop," she says.

"Environment means 'our world.' My focus is to get environment into the curriculum—I'm always showing students how what we study relates to the environment." Her fourth and fifth graders help to teach the K-1 students, and worked with the younger children to make sundials out of "cob," a mixture of clay and straw used as a building material since prehistoric times.

Another strength of the new school is the faculty: "We work together, we get along. I can go to any of them. We have a lot of work in front of us. Summer will be spent planning. With our emphasis on the environment, we need to learn more about our locale."

Asked for a closing thought about her first year of teaching, she said: "I love working with children—all day long they're in a safe place where they can learn. I love watching my students learn."

Margaret Campbell, *Special Assistant*

Asked about her official title, Bruce Helft, YESCA principal, said, "This year Margaret was instructional consultant to middle school students in algebra and U.S. Constitution, PE coach, and technology department head. Next year she will work with special projects such as our five day a week after school program, our grant writing team, marketing and promoting YESCA, advancing our home schooling initiative, and continuing to coordinate the technology program."

Known to one and all as "Mr. T," Stephan Tassone, YESCA's sixth through eighth grade science and math teacher, spent his entire teaching career prior to last fall at St. Mary's Academy in Grass Valley where declining enrollment finally forced severe salary reductions. Mr. T likes the stimulation of older children. "A lot of people don't like junior high kids—as if they were from another planet," he says, "but I like the searching; they need input and guidance—they want independence but need structure. I find them exciting and challenging. I like making a difference in kids' lives."

With thirty-one years at St. Mary's, Mr. T got to see the difference he made in many students' lives by watching them grow up and join the adult community. Among his students were his three children, now all college graduates. "We have a wonderful relationship," he says.

His biggest challenge since joining the new charter has been its emphasis on "project-based learning," which he describes as a problem-solving approach involving partnership with other teachers. "I wasn't trained in this method of instruction," he says, but he enjoys working with other faculty members. This year his class partnered with the second/third graders. "We met for 1/2 to 1 hour per week. We planted seeds in our garden beds, painted designs on bed walls, picked up litter, studied local animals and shared art projects. It was a time both groups looked forward to and a very rewarding experience." Since Mr. T teaches science, his subject matter is closely tied to the school's emphasis on the

environment. Along with the required state curriculum in science, his students have worked on the garden project, studied weather issues, and learned the uses of earth materials. In the coming year he wants to develop a project on pond life and use the school's ten rural acres to study local plants.

"So far our real strengths have been our principal's openness to new ideas, our committed faculty who have worked through problems with opening a new charter school, and our ten acres that give us room to roam."

Mr. T would like to see the school's enrollment population grow. He favors strong academic standards and hopes that next year will see the development of a student council and a larger "base of kids who really support the school." Glancing around his clean, orderly classroom, he remarks, "This year we had so much to do to get the school off the ground; it was pretty amazing."

Stephen Tassone, *Science & Math Sixth through Eighth Grades*



“Excellent!”



Building for the Future

*The Environmental
Curriculum at YESCA*

by Steve Jenkins

A charter school, as the name implies, is based on a “charter” that explains the special ideals and organization of the new public campus. The YESCA school charter emphasizes important ideas like environmental studies, learning about the natural world by raising vegetables and animals, service to the community, and building individual responsibility. But the effort to open a brand new school began with more basic issues: What to do when it rained; how to control events on ten rural acres; how to nourish hungry kids who arrived on buses before school opened, and so on. Staff and faculty were energetic and committed, but mostly new to each other and to the idea of a curriculum centered on environmental issues. As one experienced teacher put it, the first few months were “pretty amazing,” but as staff and faculty learned to work together, early problems were resolved, and attention increasingly turned to the ideals of the school’s charter, especially the environmental curriculum.

Now that the first year is over, the YESCA faculty is clarifying and emphasizing the principles the school was built around. A community outreach has begun, and the school is already benefiting from the services of several local businessmen who have volunteered as board members and consultants. A major project is underway to increase the numbers of parent volunteers. Grant money will be sought for the purchase of a fifteen-passenger van, primarily for environmentally related field trips.

Last year, a temporary garden was constructed, and during the fall 2009 term, plans call for permanent fenced area of raised beds for fruit and vegetables. A chicken coop is also planned, along with an internal composting project. If the budget allows, the school plans to construct a greenhouse and outdoor classroom area later in the coming year.

This summer, YESCA teachers will undertake training in the “Love and Logic” program, designed to encourage individual responsibility among students. Teachers also agree that discipline problems tend to decline while individual responsibility rises when students learn to work with plants and animals; so more time in the garden is on the agenda for the coming year.

The school’s faculty is currently at work creating a central environmental focus for YESCA that will use “fundamental environmental science concepts as thematic units school-wide.” The goal is a “unique curriculum” for the whole school that also incorporates the current science framework mandated by the state.

In the long run, YESCA aims to fulfill the spirit of its charter with projects that benefit the entire community—students, families, neighbors, and the region as a whole. One idea commonly heard from faculty members is the use of school farm produce to help the school sustain its projects, contribute to the school lunch program, and support local food closets for the hungry. The YES-

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OPEN HOUSE

Saturday August 8, 2009

10am - 2pm

YESCA invites all **interested families** to enjoy **hot dogs**, visit the school, walk the campus, and **ask questions**.

The Yuba Environmental Science Charter Academy invites interested families to stop by the school’s campus and facility at 9841 Texas Hill Rd. in Dobbins on August 8 between 10am and 2pm. On hand to answer questions will be YESCA Council members, the school’s executive director, teachers, and some of the parent-volunteers who have helped to make the new charter school a reality. **(530) 692-2210 • www.YES-CA.org**



CA garden is being conceived as a potential learning laboratory in sustainable farming. The school hopes to work with the neighborhood community center, now in its last stages of construction, to sponsor community lectures on environmental issues of interest to the public. The community center, located across the road from the school, sits on twenty rural acres, and one idea being floated at YESCA is construction of a nature trail featuring exhibits related to the natural life of the foothills. Much is left to be done, but the mood at YESCA is upbeat and energetic as the new school enters its second year.