



## Entire graduating class enrolled in higher education

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APPLE VALLEY — When Principal Sharon Schlegel asked the nearly 500 Serrano High School graduating seniors to rise if they had plans to enroll in a post-secondary institution in May, all 500 in the Class of 2008 stood up.

For the second year in a row, the K-16 Bridge Program helped the school achieve one of the county's lowest dropout rates and highest rates of entering college, a technical school or the military after high school graduation.

Snowline Joint Unified District Superintendent Art Golden credits the K-16 Bridge Program, an Apple Valley-based effort to increase the number of students who go on to post-secondary institutions, for motivating students to map out their career goals and find out what it takes to achieve them.

“Prior to the program, we had a lot of students who were prepared and capable to go on to post-secondary education and were not doing it,” said Golden. “A lot of kids had plans but they didn’t really know how to implement them.”

Director Chris Piercy, who started the Bridge program at two high schools four years ago, has plans to bring the program to 109 schools and community colleges in Southern California this fall. Next year, the program will extend to grades 4-8, serving an estimated 40,000 to 45,000 students, Piercy said.

Also by 2009, Piercy hopes to expand to community colleges in Annapolis, Maryland and Houston, Texas.

In 2007, about 15,000 students from 17 high schools participated in the program, including Kristin Jernigan, who graduated from Chaparral High School.

Today Jernigan, 19, loves taking classes and playing softball for Victor Valley College. She’s not sure what she wants to do yet — maybe become an EMT or major in mortuary science — but knows she wants to transfer to a four-year college to get her degree.

One year ago, Jernigan was a high school graduate getting minimum wage working for Baker’s without future plans.

It was the K-16 Bridge Program that guided her back to school, she said.

“If I didn’t go through Bridge, I probably would have just been working — not even a 30-hour job — just part time minimum wage and then staying at home,” Jernigan said. “I would not be in school right now without it.”

The Bridge Program revolves around an online system that offers assessment tests, career and college resources and various tutorials through personalized Web sites for every student.

The lessons range from the True Colors test that measures personality traits for ninth graders to the mock registration and virtual college orientation tours for high school seniors. Most lessons take about 15 minutes to complete, and each grade level has between eight to 12 lessons available, according to Piercy. The program also brings college placement exams and registration to the high schools to walk seniors through the process.

The program works so well because it requires close relationships among colleges, high schools, middle schools and elementary schools to connect careers to what students are doing in class, Piercy said. The Lewis Center for Educational Research, EUREKA California Career Information System and Victor Valley College have played integral roles in the program, he added.

The first four experimental years have shown that the program is most successful at schools that do not offer the Bridge lessons as optional, but rather incorporate them into the students’ core classes, said Piercy.

“They made us do it and I’m glad, because if they didn’t I don’t think I would have done it,” Jernigan said.

Jernigan graduated from Chaparral High School with a plan to head to Victor Valley College, but withdrew when she underwent a bad break-up and didn’t think she could afford it. In spring 2008, Jernigan found the Bridge financial aid packet and signed online to find all her records and education plan waiting for her on her personal Bridge site.

“It sounds kind of cheesy, but it gives you a whole new path — it’s like a path just comes out of nowhere,” Jernigan said. “It gives you all of these choices for your life. You can do all these things that you never expected to do.”

Piercy will be hosting the 2008 Bridge program kickoff on Sept. 3 at Victor Valley College at 9 a.m. Registration begins at 8:15 a.m.

Anyone interested in learning more about the K-16 Bridge Program or getting a school signed up should e-mail Piercy at [cpiercy@k16bridge.org](mailto:cpiercy@k16bridge.org).

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