The Pillar of Aspiration: From Goals to Greatness

As HOPE students pursue academic gains, they have HOPE’s pillars – attendance, affiliation, achievement and aspiration – to guide them. Each HOPE Learning Center leader enjoys encouraging students toward their first success, in any or all of these areas, which assures students that they are capable of more. Learning Center leaders, while committed to meeting the specific needs of their respective students, appreciate that student aspirations often begin by helping learners reach seemingly simple milestones.

Westside Learning Center Director Mark Lopez, for example, purposely starts with the basics when it comes to goal setting for his k-5 students. “First, I challenge my students to master perfect school attendance,” he points out, adding, “If they can master what they may consider the ‘little’ things, then they learn that they have it within their power to also master the skills to achieve even their highest aspirations.”

Ms. Ellis adds that, before any goals are met, “Students need to know, fundamentally, that they are noticed, that their needs are seen and accepted.” In this way, she makes sure that all the groundwork is laid for each student to develop the confidence it takes to set and meet his or her first goals.

Ms. Victoria Aguilar, HOPE at Maranatha’s Learning Center Director, also recognizes the importance of support for setting and reaching aspirations, especially as her students tackle middle and high school. “You can have a lot of desire, but if you do not have the right resources, guidance and role models, aspiration remains just that – a desire.”

She continues, “I completely identify with students who want to achieve but simply don’t know how. “Throughout my own school days, I’d see ‘smart’ kids and think, ‘I want to be smart like them. How do I do that?’ I am eternally grateful for three special individuals who intervened at pivotal points of my life to help me answer those questions and...”

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Greetings from the Chief Executive Officer

Voices of HOPE is, once again, brimming with good news! As you read, you will notice the expanding array of options for HOPE students. These exciting activities are simply the realization of HOPE’s longstanding mission to provide quality student-centered education.

The HOPE vision – our students’ success in the classroom as a blueprint for success after graduation – is more alive than ever. We offer our students many different ways to succeed and answer the spectrum of needs that affect their learning.

As articles in this issue illustrate, HOPE’s student-centered perspective encompasses the physical, social, emotional and academic development of each student. While this is an expanding part of our future, it is also an important part of our history.

When HOPE first opened our doors, we realized that our students were hungry. We aggressively worked with the Colorado Department of Education, the United States Department of Agriculture and Douglas County School District to be the first online school in the nation to participate in the National School Lunch Program. Today, our lunch program is four years old.

It was not long before we recognized that many students did not have appropriate clothing for winter. Today, we have a clothing warehouse for students and their families and a Homeless Coordinator connecting families with additional resources for their shelter, transportation and food needs.

Understanding the significance of academic competition, we incorporated contests and multi-disciplinary showcase events into our curriculum. Today, our annual competitions in persuasive argument, science, art and math are thriving. A mock trial will be a new addition this year.

As we grew, we saw opportunities for our students to express their school spirit. Today, we have prom, sports leagues, ping-pong tournaments, cultural arts programs and a growing list of socially-oriented programs for our students.

We knew, at the outset, that if our innovative model was going to be successful, it had to offer real hope in the face of the challenges our students face. It had to be much more than an academic program.

Thus, you will see HOPE inroads in everything from math mastery to soccer and developing aspirations; you will read about HOPE athletes, star students and members of student senate; you will hear from teachers, specialists and Learning Center Directors. Here at HOPE, our collective expertise and voices give students a whole and relevant blended learning experience.

Thank you for helping us meet our students’ needs by doing your part to share HOPE.

Sincerely,
Heather O’Mara
Chief Executive Officer

The Pillar of Aspiration: From Goals to Greatness

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I gave me the confidence to actually have aspirations. With HOPE’s unique learning model, I get to do the same for my students.”

Similarly, at HOPE’s Roca Fuerte Learning Academy in Aurora, Dr. and Mrs. Linares promote positive behavior, decision-making and goals as k-12 students learn to initiate their own aspirations.

“We demonstrate consistency, hard-work and cooperation for our students to emulate. Through various rewards, motivational talks and opportunities, such as participating in student council, students see that educational goals are profitable,” notes Dr. Linares. “Regardless of their perceived or real limitations, we present our students with a hopeful vision. We ask them to do what they have to do every day so that they can do what they want to do tomorrow.”

HOPE’s Learning Center leaders prioritize teaching students academic discipline today to support their aspirations for meaningful achievement goals. They all agree that, when it comes to student success, inspiration and instruction go hand-in-hand.
Poudre Valley Hospital Nurse Dawn Gavaldon engages New Hope Academy students in a wonderful book.

Hillcrest Academy Volleyball Team members model their team T-shirts.

Field Day participants, HOPE's Melanie Stone and All Sports' Paul Anderson, are happy the day was special for nearly seven hundred students.

Robert contains his laughter as he rushes to pass the egg to his classmate on Field Day.

Hillcrest Academy Volleyball Team members enjoy a Metropolitan State University game.

Firemen Marc Jones and Keegan Spect read to New Hope Academy students on Literacy Day.

Team Roca Fuerte Red was a strong contender in the HOPE Athletics Soccer League.

Renewal Academy - Thornton Soccer Team members pose with Coach Chelsea.

Soccer League hopefuls cheer their favorite HOPE teams from the sidelines.
HOPE Special Education: A Model Team

HOPE’s small community-based classrooms offer a nurturing environment for every student. For HOPE students with unique learning challenges, our blended learning model, with digital resources and personalized instruction, has particular advantages.

Under HOPE Special Education Coordinator Paula Arduini’s expert guidance, the Special Education (SPED) team of learning specialists, speech/language pathologists, psychologists, social workers, a behavior specialist and records administrators works cooperatively to provide students with the customized online and offline curriculum and individualized instruction they need to achieve.

“As our assessment of HOPE students is aided by technology, students with specific learning needs are being promptly served through SPED instructional strategies,” notes Ms. Arduini. “Without a doubt, technology has expanded the possibilities for the SPED discipline.” (See “The Teaching Tool of Technology, page 6.)

Noting the value of SPED methodology for all students, Ms. Arduini adds, “At the same time, we also share our specialized knowledge with all the members of the Learning Center teams because much of it can be applied across disciplines and subjects with other students. Our team, of course, prioritizes critical interventions for special education students, but SPED strategies can benefit general education students, classrooms, schools and school systems.”

At HOPE, SPED professionals have the opportunity to direct technology and customize a student’s lessons according to his needs and how he learns. “After initial assessments, HOPE students receive quality, research-based instruction,” Ms. Arduini explains. “We are constantly exploring new theories and strategies for student development, learning and growth.”

“If a student is not engaged with a particular learning tool, the SPED team approach calls for applying another method right away, rather than waiting for failure,” Ms. Arduini clarifies. Once learning gaps are identified, effective tools and helpful habits of mind build upon a student’s strengths. Foregoing “canned” tactics, SPED team practices revolve around a student-centered, restorative approach.

As dedicated members of HOPE’s instructional staff, the SPED team continually moves toward demystifying learning issues to focus on a student’s strengths through strategy, instruction, environment, approach or self-awareness. Ms. Arduini summarizes, “Whether through research, experience or promoting fidelity in the way instructional resources are implemented, we are committed to ever-expanding outcomes from the instructional efforts at HOPE.”

Even More HOPE Activities!

Proudly attired in their “HOPE Athletics” t-shirts, approximately one hundred forty students played in volleyball and soccer leagues this fall. Basketball rosters are already being compiled for this year’s middle and high school boys and girls teams, an expansion from our foray into the sport in the 2011–2012 school year. Together with Field Day, which involved seven hundred k-8th graders, these activities make it apparent that athletic and special events are a mainstay of HOPE’s unique blended learning program.

“It is hard to capture the experience in words,” begins HOPE Director of Activities and Operations Melanie Stone, “Our students are so thrilled to participate in sports activities. HOPE offers many opportunities, and the fun part is doing things in our own special way.”

Ms. Stone is referring to HOPE’s strong partnerships with community organizations and the voluntary efforts of many dedicated staff members and individuals who pitch in to make extra-curricular programs a reality for students. This “team” understands that students benefit – health-wise, socially and academically – from involvement in positive activities and sports.

“We hear from parents, students, coaches and staff that everyone is excited about HOPE leagues and special events,” Ms. Stone elaborates. “Parents and grandparents are delighted to watch their children and grandchildren compete, and coaches see their athletes invigorated by teamwork and the chance – for many, their first – to play league soccer, volleyball and basketball.”

Though competitive sports are an exciting option that students enjoy, HOPE offers a variety of other events from which they may also choose. For example, a ping-pong tournament will take place again this year, a talent showcase will debut in winter events from which they may also choose. In addition, the perennially popular Dancing Across Cultures program, expanding this year to include music and visual arts (Arts Across Cultures), will be offered at three Learning Centers, culminating in an exhilarating performance.

“Actively engaging our students in a school community is an essential part of our strategy,” points out CEO and Founder Heather O’Mara. “Through activities that require their commitment to good attendance and achievement, students’ affiliation with HOPE and their Learning Centers is building. These programs foster in our students aspiration to set and reach meaningful goals, and they are making friends and having fun in the process.”
As she considers her growing list of accomplishments, Arianna, a freshman at HOPE's Belmar Academy, remains most proud of becoming a disciplined student. “I have learned to be focused here,” explains the poised 14-year old, concluding, “Now, school is really important.”

HOPE Teacher Jon Russell and HOPE at Belmar Academy Learning Center Director Charles Wright echo the enthusiastic student’s testimony of change from unmotivated to unstoppable.

“Arianna has learned to work hard whether concepts come easily to her or not,” affirms Mr. Russell. “I truly admire how she tackled algebra. While, at first, she believed that she could not succeed with the challenging math lessons, Arianna responded by putting forth even more effort. Her perseverance spoke volumes about her work ethic and character.”

“Belmar has a lot of hard-working students,” adds Mr. Wright, “But, Arianna is truly outstanding in the way she relates to others. She is a very respectable and dependable young lady. Her exceptional character will take Arianna far, especially combined with her desire to excel in academic knowledge.”

Arianna humbly credits Mr. Wright and her Belmar classroom mentors for the standards – punctual arrival to classes, superb effort in academic studies, orderly behavior in gym class and activities as well as considerate interactions with students and adults – to which she and her classmates are held throughout the day. Arianna believes that these standards helped her learn the value of respect and its positive impact at school.

Mr. Russell also gives his praise to the Belmar Academy staff. “Arianna is supported by very accommodating and dedicated mentors. They are consistently well prepared to utilize HOPE's many blended learning options – online curriculum and lots of hands-on learning – for all their students.”

As do her classmates, Arianna likes to have fun, enjoying her many interests. A competitive athlete, Arianna has basketball at the top of her list, followed by baseball and swimming. She is also an animal lover with an affinity for dogs. When not playing with her friends or pets, Arianna is content keeping

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The Teaching Tool of Technology

HOPE teachers recognize that technology is only a tool in the hands of dedicated educators. The HOPE learning model pools the critical contributions of a HOPE general education teacher, a reading specialist, a special education learning specialist and a classroom mentor at every HOPE Learning Center and makes online instruction one of many distinct elements that maximize technology in the learning process.

“Technology will never substitute what I do,” emphasizes HOPE Reading Specialist Kerri Rink, “but it certainly expands my options for approaching a student’s learning obstacle, allows my students many opportunities for guided skills practice and, through completion of online assignments, captures invaluable data that helps me further accommodate a student’s immediate and long-term needs.”

In the blended learning environment, Ms. Rink and her fellow HOPE teachers have many positive options. Through their selection of learning methods and effective pacing, they address identified learning gaps of individual students.

“Our instructional field has definitely benefitted from digital applications and online options that give us many paths of addressing learning gaps in a way that is objective, not subjective,” notes HOPE Special Education Learning Specialist Michele Dean. “And, these tools actually give us more, not less, time for meaningful one-on-one instruction! Assessment is more efficient and effective so instructional time can be focused on the irreplaceable relational components of teaching.”

Ms. Dean attests that technology has improved communication between parents and teachers as well. “Parents are busier than ever and, rather than waiting to schedule a meeting or even finding time for a rushed phone conversation, many prefer email correspondence. Without delay, technology allows me to share vital information and data with parents so that they are actively engaged in their child’s learning process.”

HOPE General Education Teacher Barb Pagano agrees but acknowledges having to adjust her mindset when she began teaching at HOPE. “I thought I was computer literate because I logged my students’ grades online,” she shares, laughing. “Like so many teachers, I did not grow up with technology, but I knew that blended-learning would be the wave of the future so I was thrilled to become a HOPE Teacher almost 5 years ago. My initial resistance gave way to the thrill of learning how to teach in this exciting new way that gives our students so many options to prepare for their lives in today’s society.”

While Ms. Pagano does not see technology as a cure-all to any student’s obstacles, she is encouraged that, through it, she has reached some of the most challenged students of her career. Many of her students now believe in their own capacity to learn.

“The immediate feedback that blended-learning offers struggling students is essential to their aspiring toward achievement,” she observes. “I use data from my students’ online work to guide students as they establish learning goals. We often fortify their skills through offline work. As my colleagues have already stated, technology is just one of our tools.”

Capturing one of the greatest benefits that technology brings into the classroom, Ms. Dean affirms, “I believe technology helps students see that there really are many different paths to understanding a concept and building a skill. That, in and of itself, is an invaluable ‘aha’ for teachers and students alike.”

The Year of Math

One Year Later

“Get to know your students so you can understand their strategies and see their strengths,” was HOPE Math Specialist Sandy Fritz’s call to action at the first 2011-2012 professional development training, as reported last year in the fall edition of Voices of HOPE.

Looking back on the larger benefits of HOPE’s “Year of Math” initiative, Ms. Fritz recently elaborated on how this academic focus influenced math instruction at HOPE Learning Centers.

“We definitely saw more engagement in math studies overall, as HOPE teachers and mentors implemented a broader range of learning tools accessible through moodies, forums and resources,” affirms Ms. Fritz. “Still, though, our greatest achievement is our complete alignment with the Common Cores State Standards. A good portion of our time was dedicated to longer-term, foundational changes through a significant re-engineering of HOPE’s online curriculum.”

Ms. Fritz emphasizes HOPE’s concentrated efforts on the first six years of math skills development in curriculum restructuring.

“In this important effort, we focused on instructional tools for grade levels k-5 because those are the foundational years. Our work there will support even higher grade levels with critical skills and concepts.”

“American curriculum is considered a ‘mile wide and an inch deep’ in math knowledge,” she points out, adding, “With this tendency to introduce such an expansive range of topics, there is much less opportunity to master foundational concepts and skills at a deep level of understanding. We concentrated on designing content that reinforces mastery rather than just exposure. We identified lessons and activities within our online curriculum that aligned with the Common Core State Standards and placed them strategically in the flow of our overall mathematics instructional plan for grades k-5.”

To achieve this, Ms. Fritz and two HOPE teachers, Lindsay Small and Kristian Poole, worked vigorously and evaluated curriculum for k-5th grade students. Studying each specific standard, which included a special focus area per grade level, they carefully assessed the actual student learning that needs to happen.

Next, they identified which standards required

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HOPE at Hillcrest Academy (Hillcrest) students prepared well to cast important votes this election season. The Hillcrest Student Senate race, featuring candidates who qualified to run for office and then presented platforms to their voting classmates, energized the students about the right to vote.

“Only a few of our students are voting age,” notes Hillcrest Learning Center Director Ms. Amener Williams, “Yet, we believe that educating our young people about the civic responsibility of informed voting prepares them to become engaged citizens in the community. This being an election year, we timed our Student Senate race to parallel the presidential election as a study of the election process.”

One senior running for president of the Student Senate, Ianna, also voted in her first presidential election this month. She was aware of the “misconception that we were only selecting a president” when, in fact, “there were other important laws and leadership roles – judges, for example – on the ballot that require voters to be informed.”

Applying the critical thinking skills she has learned, Ianna reflects, “With every voting decision I made in the national election, I had to answer for myself, ‘what is the potential outcome for my community, my country?’ I had to think about the consequences for the next generations as I participated in this election.”

Similarly, Hillcrest students considered their votes for Student Senate carefully, based upon candidates’ platforms, not their popularity. Students appreciated learning about the importance of informed decisions, leadership and using one’s voice for good.

According to Ms. Williams, Student Senate program staff sponsors thoughtfully defined the Senate’s scope of influence. She adds, “We established criteria for potential presidential candidates, who had to be seniors and had to choose a vice-presidential running mate from the junior class. Additionally, only students with letters of support from staff members, affirming the student’s ability to participate in Student Senate without compromising their studies, were approved for candidacy.”

At Hillcrest, Student Senate encompasses public speaking training, instruction on formally presenting a bill and the process for its passage or defeat. Students follow a similar process to participate in effective decision making. “One of our mentors, Mr. Ramsey Stewart, is a retired attorney. He infuses students with knowledge and inspiration so that they envision ways that they can have impact in the community and affect change,” Ms. Williams shares enthusiastically. “We will also invite civic and community leaders to share with us about their commitment to responsible citizenship and how they made a positive influence.”

Whether in the national election or their Student Senate election, HOPE at Hillcrest students now understand the purpose and power of an informed vote.

Students Make Informed Election Decisions

First-time voter Ianna and HOPE at Hillcrest mentor Ramsey Stewart were satisfied with their voting preparation efforts

HOPE at Hillcrest Senate Candidates surround their Learning Center Director, Ms. Amener Williams

PING PONG AT HOPE

2nd Annual Tournament

Thursday, December 6, from 2:00 – 5:00 pm
Roca Fuerte Learning Academy
3449 N. Chambers Rd., Unit F, Aurora 80011
Open to all high school and middle school students.
3 levels of play — Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced
$3 to enter
RSVP to Melanie Stone: Melanie.Stone@HOPEonline.org

HOPE ONLINE BASKETBALL

2012/2013

NOW FORMING TEAMS FOR:
Boys & Girls High School (9th – 12th)
Boys & Girls Middle School (6th – 8th)

Contact Melanie Stone for questions and to register:
Melanie.Stone@HOPEonline.org
The Year of Math One Year Later
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research, a purchase or development (e.g., games, vocabulary, teacher-led activities, manipulatives or reinforcement exercises) in order to provide students the best opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the concepts.

Ultimately, HOPE has created instructional units with a variety of options to meet the learning needs of students as they concentrate on mastery. Ms. Fritz, along with her dedicated math team, is hopeful that their efforts will ensure an array of blended learning options for all HOPE students as they reach for a personal best in their own “year of math” success.

Arianna Aims High
(Continued from page 5)

company with a good book, fiction being her favorite. A history-buff, she is particularly glad to be studying American history this year since her grandpa fought bravely in World War II.

This determined HOPE student’s many talents and strong character traits will propel her to future achievements. Arianna thinks she may pursue forensic investigation, a career that sounds exciting to her. Whatever she chooses, Arianna has learned something that will always be true. “To be given respect,” she shares, “You have to give respect, and you have to be responsible.”

HOPE is proud of Arianna – a true student success story!

HOPE Learning Centers

Below is a list of all 2012-2013 HOPE Learning Centers. Learning Center visits are a hands-on way to learn about HOPE’s unique model, allowing community members to see firsthand how blended-learning is helping Colorado students. To arrange a Learning Center tour, please call 720-402-3000.

Action Learning Center
Ambassador’s Academy
Awaken Academy
Belmar Academy
Bridges of Silence Academy
Center of Hope Academy
Chapel Hill Academy
Cherry Creek Learning Center
Cornerstone Learning Center
Crescent View Academy
Dinosaur Community Learning Center
Front Range Academy – Arvada
Front Range Academy – Broomfield
Front Range Academy – Elmira
Front Range Academy – Westminster
HOPE at Hillcrest Academy
I AM Academy
JMJA Learning Center
Little Sailors Academy
Maranatha Learning Center
New Beginnings Learning Center
New CHANGE Academy
New Hope Academy
Over the Bridge Academy
Pathway Learning Center
Redeemer Learning Center
Renewal Academy – Aurora
Renewal Academy – Mountain View
Renewal Academy – Thornton
Roca Fuerte Learning Academy
Solid Rock Academy
Tetra Academy
Trinity Learning Center
Tubman Hilliard Global Academy
Universal Learning Center
Victory Academy
Vision Academy
Westside Learning Center