

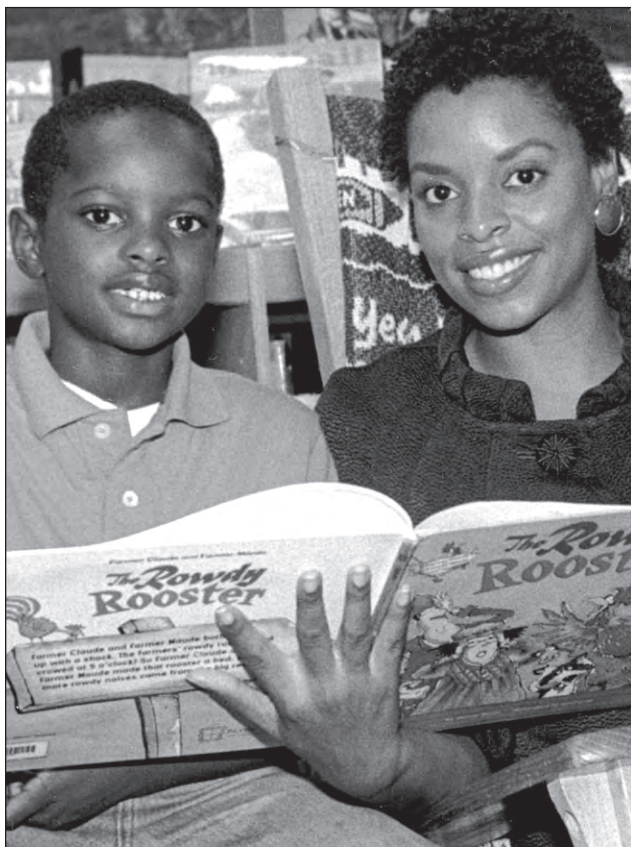
vicc volunteer

Highlights of the St. Louis Student Transfer Program

Second Generation VICC Students Derive Benefits, Just as their Parents Did

Even Challenges Viewed as Positive

by Peggy Magee



Lauren Buckner, a 1995 Pattonville graduate, enjoys a book with her son Larry, a first grader at Valley Park Elementary School. Buckner, a lawyer from the Central West End, is one of many former transfer students whose children now participate in the VICC program. "I want the same benefits for my children that I had," she explains. *Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman*

Many former voluntary transfer students, knowing the extent to which they benefited from their education, have likewise chosen to send their children to county schools. These parents are as pleased with their students' experiences as they were with their own decades earlier.

Kenya Duff Broomfield, who started in the Hancock Place district in 1987 when she was in third grade, reports that her brother and four sisters all attended school in Hancock. "And now my mom has something like 10 grandkids out there," including her two daughters -- Kayla, at the elementary school and Carolyn at the middle school. "I liked it so much I send my kids there," she says.

Former Rockwood student Alicia Rice-Haynes notes that the faculty and staff at Valley Park Elementary have "given over 100 percent" to her daughter Jackie, a second grader. "I have the same positive feelings about her education as I have about my own."

Both moms, who grew up in north St. Louis, have their reasons for why they value their county school education so much. For Rice-Haynes, a 1997 Lafayette High School graduate, it's the way the teachers, administrators and counselors pushed her to succeed. For Broomfield, it is the high expectations that permeated the school: "We were led to believe we would make something of ourselves."

Her exposure in high school to various professions swayed her to pursue cosmetology. She enrolled in South County Technical School, graduating with honors, and now works in that field. Looking back, the mother of three especially appreciates how Hancock kept her "active and focused" after school. "I came from a rough neighborhood but I was too busy to get into trouble."

Rice-Haynes, an award-winning fiction novelist, tells how her former principal at Lafayette encouraged her talent in writing. "He gave me great feedback and I took additional English courses at his suggestion." Also at his urging, she enrolled at Maryville University. "He pushed me to take the ACT and gave me the Maryville application to fill out. He even talked to a counselor there on my behalf."

See Inside: *Second Generation*

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OASIS Volunteer's Work with VICC Students

Leads to Pilot Program at Middle School Level by Peggy Magee

The positive impact an OASIS volunteer has made on students at Parkway West Middle School prompted him to go to bat trying to have the program formally expanded beyond the elementary level where it currently operates. And Don Larsen's idea has "taken hold," he is happy to report.

As part of the OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring program, Larsen, 74, first began tutoring VICC student Keisha Jones when she was in fourth grade at Parkway's Mason Ridge Elementary School. During their weekly sessions, they forged a friendship and Keisha's language arts skills improved. When the time came to look ahead to middle school, the pair knew they wanted to stay together if possible, although OASIS tutoring does not formally exist at the middle school level.

With permission, Larsen, of west St. Louis County, followed Keisha to Parkway West Middle School. Later that first year, at the request of his student's mother, he added Keisha's sister Keiontae, also a student at the middle school. The following year, he picked up another VICC student Charles Griffin.

The retired business owner, who has an interest and training in counseling, worked individually with these students last year while continuing to tutor at Mason Ridge on another day. This year, he continues to work at both schools, although Keiontae has

moved on to high school. Partnering with the students has changed his views about the voluntary transfer program: "Unquestionably, I am more sensitive and supportive of the program than I was when my own children attended Parkway schools."

The OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring program, which operates in many local school districts, pairs volunteers age 50 or older with grade school children who have underdeveloped reading skills. The adults work one-on-one with the students, once a week throughout the school year, using a curriculum designed to build reading and language skills.

By working with his older students, Larsen realized, "Middle school students can benefit from the services of an OASIS tutor just as much, if not more, than elementary students." He is especially concerned about those students entering sixth grade who go from having just one teacher to several. "The middle school years can be a daunting experience for young people," he notes. "It is so important for students who are struggling to have one-on-one instruction; however, schools normally don't have the resources to provide that."

Larsen ran his idea by the guidance counselors at Parkway West Middle School and they organized a meeting with Barb Clark, who coordinates the OASIS program for the Parkway district. "Everyone agreed that what I was doing was necessary and worthwhile," he says. Especially valuable is Larsen's dual role of tutor and confidant/mentor, notes West Middle guidance counselor Chris White. "The students not only receive academic help, but there is one more adult with whom they have a connection and who believes in them."

Larsen's hope is to have more volunteers like him at the middle school level. Recently, the national coordinator of OASIS tutoring was brought in on the discussion and the plan to move the OASIS program into Parkway West Middle School has gotten the official nod. "If it takes off here, OASIS may run it as a pilot nationally," Larsen confirms.



At a volunteer reception last year at Parkway West Middle School, Don Larsen, a long-time volunteer in the OASIS Tutoring program, stands with his three students, Charles Griffin and siblings Keiontae, center, and Keisha Jones. Larsen began working with Keisha once a week at Mason Ridge Elementary School. He followed her to Parkway West Middle School, where he also began helping her sister Keiontae and Charles Griffin. His idea to expand the OASIS program to the middle school level is taking shape.

Parkway School District Photo

volunteer

A newsletter published by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation to spread the word about the positive things happening in the voluntary transfer program and to offer educators a glimpse at innovative programs helping students succeed at area schools.

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Rockwood Mentoring Program a “Win-Win Situation”

One Hundred Students

to be Paired with Mentors by Next Year by Peggy Magee

A group of middle school students in the Rockwood district looks forward to staying after school one day each week. That’s when they get to hang out with an older mentor -- sometimes just talking about their day and receiving homework help; other times playing games, but always getting advice and encouragement.

The Rockwood SAGES mentoring program currently enlists 70 VICC students, who have been recommended and agree to participate, from all six Rockwood middle schools, and pairs them one-on-one

with a caring and responsible mentor, either high school age or adult. The three-year program is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. It started last year with 20 students and, next year, plans are to serve 100 students who struggle to connect, succeed or reach their full potential. The goals are to improve grades, to develop leadership skills and to reduce unexcused absences.

“The middle school students in SAGES are always eager for their ‘SAGES Day’ when they get to spend time with their mentor,” confirms Mary Corsair, guidance counselor at Rockwood South Middle School. The sessions might include discussing problems or points of pride, studying for a test together, shooting baskets, or working on goal setting or other success strategies.

“The students clearly value the special one-on-one relationship they have with someone who is there just for them,” adds Corsair.

She believes the program is a “win-win situation” because the high school mentors also derive benefits by being involved. “It is also a good experience for the high school students to be placed in the position of role model for someone younger. As a mentor, they are responsible for demonstrating grown-up attitudes and behaviors that set an example for their mentees and they are encouraged to aspire to high standards for themselves.”

Depending on what middle school they attend, students meet up with their mentor at the feeder high school. Wildwood Middle School is the other mentoring site and the only one where career peo-

Virtual school

An Educational Option for VICC Students

The Virtual Schools program operated by the St. Louis Public Schools may be an educational option for VICC students who are short of credits for graduation, want an advanced course not available at their school, are homebound or have a scheduling conflict.

Courses are free of charge to eligible students -- which includes any student living in St. Louis City or in any of the magnet participating suburban school districts. Students need to have internet access, as well as access to a computer, printer/fax, phone and email.

For more information about how this option may help a student in your school, contact

JoAnne Reese, 314.345.2551 or jreese@slps.org.

Second Generation VICC Student

After receiving an associate’s degree from Maryville, she continued her education, eventually earning a master’s in human resources. About Rockwood, she says, “I really enjoyed the education. The teachers, administrators and counselors pushed me to be successful. I felt supported and cared for.”

That same attentiveness by faculty and staff has 1995 Pattonville graduate Lauren Buckner convinced that she made the right decision in sending her first grader, Larry, to the Valley Park district. “The administrative staff and teachers demonstrate a genuine interest in each



During discussion time at a Rockwood's SAGES mentoring session last year, Jarrod Gillespie of Rockwood Valley Middle School learned from his Lafayette High mentor Amber Clay, what his high school schedule might be like. Jarrod was surprised to hear that he wouldn't get recess. As a testament to her viewpoint that students should put forth 100 percent effort, Amber told Jarrod, "I'm on the Honor Roll." *Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman*

ple and college students serve as mentors. All necessary transportation for the high school and middle school students is provided.

Once a month, students and mentors from various sites assemble for a meeting or activity led by the local chapter of the National Council of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (NCADA), who has partnered

with Rockwood. NCADA's involvement is to help students develop skills, behaviors and attitudes that reduce their risk of involvement with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. In addition, the organization helps with mentor training. Also as part of the mentoring program, field trips are planned to give stu-

dents and mentors the opportunity to bond.

Jordan Jackson, of Selvidge Middle School, related well with his college-age mentor last year who, he says, advised him that grades are just as important as talent when it comes to getting athletic scholarships.

Jordan's father, Anthony Jackson, believes that by getting to know

Students (from page 1)

child and work diligently to develop a personal relationship with the students."

Buckner, a lawyer from the Central West End, remembers the close relationships she had with students and teachers at Pattonville. "I made life long friends and still keep in touch with some of my teachers," she says.

Another plus to her son's education at Valley Park Elementary is that it equips him with "a background and foundation in diversity," which Buckner believes is essential for life. She says that in his previous school, there was no diversity in his class and so when she brought him

around her co-workers and their families, "he seemed confused that not everyone looked like him."

Avis Hill, whose children attend Parkway schools -- the same district she graduated from in 1992 -- also sees benefits to a racially-diverse school setting: "Students interact with each other and find common ground which is good preparation for the real world." At Parkway West High School, Hill says she "thrived academically" and went on to attend Mizzou. "The quality of education at Parkway was such that it even made college easier. I was

used to challenging academics and knew how to study."

She also was involved in many different extra-curricular activities there and, as a result, "I got to know a lot more of the staff. Because of those partnerships, my needs were better met. My sense of belonging improved."

Hill, a social worker, points out that fitting in can be a challenge for students who come from the city, adding that often students struggle with the issue of "the haves versus the have nots." In addition, they are subjected to "stereotypes and assumptions some people have of

their high achieving mentors, the middle school students “think about their own performance and begin to place expectations on themselves.” Mr. Jackson also appreciates that his son has an opportunity to talk about issues with an objective party, as opposed to a friend “who might have slanted views.”

Most valuable to Adrian Sanders, of Rockwood South Middle School, was becoming familiar with the high school and talking with the high school mentors about school. “I’m getting a pretty good idea of what high school is like,” he said.

The relationship between the students and mentors is “the heart and spirit” of the program, notes Nicole Arb, a Rockwood area supervisor who, along with her colleague Jon Pierre Mitchom, coordinated the start-up of the program and ran

it for the first year. “The goal is to match kids who are struggling with a one-on-one supporter, friend, coach and guide who can help them gain confidence, set goals and model appropriate behavior.”

Samantha Clark, a high school mentor from Summit, says that special bond between the middle school students and their mentors “makes the students feel that people really care about them and so they try harder.”

Mentor Stephanie Campise, a graduate of Lafayette High School who is studying to become a teacher, says the mentors serve as cheerleaders of sorts for the middle school students. “‘You can succeed,’ we tell them.”

African Americans.” But, she says, “Sometimes it takes the negatives to bring about the positives,” citing that students do learn to make distinctions and come to realize that all people don’t share the same beliefs. “They can then pass that message on to others which is a positive thing.”

Hill’s own children, Sydney and Elijah, are “comfortable in the environment” at their school, Ross Elementary, she says. “And when children are comfortable in their environment, they do better academically and they do better socially.”

Lauren Buckner totally agrees, pointing out that her son made a smooth transition to Valley Park this year, thanks to a home visit by the teacher, principal and assistant principal over the summer. “Larry feels a direct connection between home and school. He is excited and happy in his school. I hope to send my youngest child there next.”

Kenya Broomfield shares those same sentiments about wanting her preschooler Kyla to follow her older sisters to Hancock. “I’ve got a four-year-old still to come.”

Message from the CEO



Hooked & Hungry . . .

Lately, it seems I've taken a keen interest in science. Instead of the latest John Grisham, Dan Brown or Dean Koontz novel, you're more likely to find my nose stuck in a book on physics, electromagnetism, chemistry, gravity or some other natural force. Fascinating stuff. The kind that grabs your interest, makes you think, changes your view of the world around you. And makes you yearn to learn even more.

For example, did you know it takes about eight minutes traveling at the speed of light to go from the sun to the Earth? So what, you say? Okay, maybe it's not that interesting by itself. Maybe it won't change what you have for dinner tonight or what you wear to work tomorrow. But other implications of it sure are intriguing. Like meaning the image of the sun as we see it hanging in the fair blue afternoon sky is actually eight minutes old. The sun as it was eight minutes prior. Think of it as simple time delay -- like how you hear thunder several seconds after observing lightning in the distance. And it gets even more interesting when you consider that there are stars that are far more distant from Earth than the sun. Applying the same speed of light/distance delay factor means we are seeing them as they were hundreds of thousands of years ago. Talk about ancient history! In fact, they could have de-materialized eons ago, but won't disappear from our sky view until thousands of years into the future. That's pretty wild, don't you think?

There's more, lots more. Things like

- *There is no sound in a vacuum because sound waves are based on the vibration of solid matter (even if such solid matter just consists of air molecules that are invisible to the naked eye) and vacuums contain no solid matter.*
- *Any given item weighs less on the top of Mount Everest than in New Orleans because the pull of gravity declines as elevation increases. Now there's an idea for the next diet plan craze!*
- *Water boils at a lower temperature at higher elevations for the same reason.*
- *Even the most apparently solid items on earth are mostly empty space at the atomic level and therefore, with enough force, could be compressed to a tiny fraction of their original size -- even a solid steel bar.*

I could go on and on, but you get the idea. As you can tell, it has me hooked and hungry. (Yeah, and I wonder why it's so hard for me to get a date!)

Which brings us (finally!) to my point. Do your students feel "hooked" on any subject or activity at school? The best schools are adept at awakening the curiosity, at whetting the appetite for learning. Think about it. Aren't the most successful students (and adults for that matter) curious and excited about something? It doesn't matter whether it's art, math, science, music, history -- teaching -- just so long as it's something.

Skeptical? Well, don't take my word for it. Just look at the sampling of success stories in this issue of the Volunteer. Whether it's a second generation transfer family or high school role model for a younger child or a retired business owner pushing for a middle school mentor program, these folks are "stoked" as my skateboarding son would say.

So . . . other than potassium chlorate or butane . . . what lights your students' fire?

Bruce Ellerman
CEO