

10/10/89

Dear Frank,

I recently read this article about the Summerbridge Program in Independent School and thought it could be worth further investigation.

I think a program like this could hold great potential and promise for Ransom Everglades. It could, among other things

- 1) Increase community awareness of Ransom Everglades.
- 2) Help us recruit gifted minority students.
- 3) Give us a vehicle to do something tangible for our community.
- 4) Provide our high school students with a tremendous educational and service experience.
- 5) Give our school exposure on a local and possibly national level.

Please let me know your thoughts regarding this.

Sincerely,

Joe Mauro

Independent School (Spring, 1989)

The Reporter

Summerbridge. During the academic year, University High School in San Francisco is a normal private urban day school. During the summer, however, a remarkable transformation takes place: the school is the site for a unique "laboratory" in education that has an academic intensity and excitement quite uncharacteristic of summer school. The program, called Summerbridge, brings 140 rising seventh, eighth, and ninth graders from the city's public and parochial schools on campus for six weeks of intense academic study for three consecutive summers. The participants, of whom 75 percent are ethnic minorities, are all top

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students in their own schools. Teachers are high school and college students who come from outstanding schools all over the country to work in the program.

Summerbridge began in 1978 as an academic enrichment/outreach program, but it has evolved to become a rigorous preparatory program for students and an innovative school of education for the young staff.

Students are recruited directly from public and parochial schools. Admission to the program is selective (last year fifty students were chosen from three hundred applicants) and is based on academic strength and potential, desire, and need. Students apply in the sixth grade. Those accepted for the program must commit themselves to six weeks of study during each of the next two summers (the third summer is optional), to after-school tutoring during the school year, and to extensive counseling on choosing a high school.

In the summer program, each student takes five academic classes in the morning, choosing from a catalogue of over forty courses. Classes are small (four to seven students), and the emphasis is on skills and discussion. Students expect, and are expected, to do three hours of homework every night. Perhaps because the teachers are young, they are extremely demanding and very familiar with the expectations and pressures of top-notch high schools. Work is rigorous and study skills are emphasized across the curriculum, but an objective of the program is for students to see their young teachers as mentors and partners, so a great deal of support and coaching takes place and continues during the regular academic year.

The forty-five Summerbridge staff members, split evenly between high school and college students, are treated as and perform as full

faculty members. They develop curriculum, write their own lesson plans, teach, advise, meet with parents, evaluate students, and take on much of the administration for the program. They are also club leaders, performers at birthday skits, dance partners, and more—strong role models and great friends for their young charges. Many are graduates of the program themselves, and many return for more than one summer.

How did fourteen-to twenty-one-year-olds come to be entrusted with such responsibility?

Originally, the staff was adult teachers aided by high school assistants. Each year, however, the assistants were given more and more teaching responsibility. They brought such energy, academic skill, love, natural teaching ability, dedication, and understanding to the work that eventually adults were phased out altogether and college-age teachers were phased in. Adult master teachers still play an important role—they launch the summer staff with a week of intensive training, then stay on to observe, evaluate, and provide resources and support for the young teachers.

Hiring teachers for the summer sessions is rigorous: last year there were about three qualified applicants for every opening. For high school students, teaching at Summerbridge is excellent leadership training that offers fascinating perspectives on their own "other lives" as students. For college students, the program is both a magnet and a testing ground for potential teachers. We have found that age

seems to have little to do with innate teaching and leadership ability. Every summer has a fifteen-year-old who inspires awe in college-age coworkers and adult master teachers. One of the Summerbridge program's explicit goals is to attract talented young people to the teaching profession. A measure of success is that nearly two thirds of the college-age summer staff have gone into teaching after graduation. The program is also extremely successful in meeting its primary objective, to encourage and prepare talented middle school students to attend academically strong high schools: nine out of ten Summerbridge graduates have entered strong college preparatory high schools, over a third of which were independent schools.

During the school year, two paid staff members administer the program—recruit students and staff, set up the summer program, counsel students and families on high school admission, and operate the after-school tutorial program.

Summerbridge is interested in working with other schools that want to start similar programs. Clearly, both the independent school community and the field of education stand to benefit from programs of this nature. The directors are available for consultation and hope to prepare a collection of materials that might serve other schools as something of a blueprint. We also extend an official invitation to teachers and administrators to visit Summerbridge 1989 (in session June 26-August 4). We think you'll like what you see there.—Lois Loofbourrow and Tom Malarkey

Lois Loofbourrow and Tom Malarkey are codirectors of Summerbridge. For more information, get in touch with them at San Francisco University High School, 3065 Jackson St., San Francisco CA 94115; telephone (415) 346-8400.

