Alert Dogs Signal Diabetics

Fresno Unified school nurse Lisa Monteleone is among a growing number of diabetics who use specially trained dogs to help successfully manage the disease so they can live fully productive lives.

Monteleone’s diabetic alert dog is a 3-year-old Labrador retriever named Myra. Myra is trained to detect and act upon the subtle scent changes that hypoglycemia—low blood glucose—creates in the human body. When Monteleone’s blood sugar begins dropping, Myra "bows" onto her front paws, tugs at her bringsel, a nylon stuffed toy attached to her collar, and barks at Monteleone.

Although Monteleone carefully monitors her glucose levels and wears a sensor and insulin pump, Myra provides another level of assurance as Monteleone goes about her busy days as the diabetes coordinator for Fresno Unified. She never wants problems with her diabetes—such as increased hospitalization. "I was admitted to the hospital three times last year, and Myra has prevented those episodes," Monteleone said. "She has helped me live longer, be more productive and be more independent."

About 200 students from Wawona Middle School, Fresno High School and Dailey Elementary Charter School gathered at Roeding Park for clean-up and other projects as part of the Martin Luther King Day of Service on January 17. All of the schools feature International Baccalaureate programs emphasizing academic rigor with a focus on global awareness and community service. While this was the third year that Wawona IB students have worked at Roeding’s Playland and Storyland, it was the first year for the three IB schools to collaborate on a service project there.

Fresno Unified school nurse Lisa Monteleone is among a growing number of diabetics who use specially trained dogs to help successfully manage the disease so they can live fully productive lives.

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» See DIABETICS, PG. 5
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I must express my deep concerns about funding for education in the coming fiscal year, which begins July 1. Fresno Unified is better off than many due to the prudent actions of our Board of Education in focusing resources and our voters’ approval of Measure Q to improve facilities. But here is our situation as school districts continue to feel the weight of California’s ongoing dramatic financial crisis:

- FUSD’s resources have already been cut $115 million over the past three years; we have addressed more than $85 million of that $115 million, but still have $27.3 million in ongoing reductions to make over the next two years. This is the BEST case scenario.

- However, if voters don’t pass the five-year tax extension that Governor Brown has proposed for a June special election, our budget gap will grow to approximately $71 million. This will be catastrophic for students in Fresno Unified classrooms.

Clearly, serious discussions are underway in Sacramento surrounding this $12 billion ballot initiative. It involves a two-step process: the tax extension must first be placed on the ballot in mid-March and then passed by voters in June. But with many families strapped by the loss of jobs and the increasing costs to health benefits, college tuition and fuel, it is unclear how the public will react to a tax extension. I understand that most of us feel we have contributed more than enough in taxes to support high-performing schools.

And yet too many of our students are not graduating and they are not ready for the workforce. This situation is pronounced in Fresno but is a problem throughout California. Understand that our state produces 12 percent of the nation’s workforce, but there is an increasing gap between what employers need and what schools are turning out. President Obama spoke recently about investing in education—not in terms of money but in regard to what our investment in schools produces. And let me stress that our schools most assuredly will not get to where they need to be if our budget gap grows by $71 million, on top of the massive reductions already made. The work undereway will be short-circuited if the tax extension does not go through.

Please realize I am sounding an alarm you have not heard from me before. To date, we have made it work, despite deep cuts. But for the first time you will see me, along with my colleagues David Cash, superintendent in Clovis Unified, and Marc Johnson, superintendent in Sanger Unified, issue urgent messages about the crisis in California. In fact, the three of us are board members of CORE—California Office to Reform Education—that is leading discussions on how districts can survive this crisis and continue to pursue much-needed reforms in schools.

Our pursuit is improved results for our students. Currently, FUSD is developing two budget scenarios. We must plan for the “worst case” scenario if the tax-extension does not go to voters or does not pass. In both cases we must protect our most important work: classroom teaching and learning. We have already taken significant steps to do more with less. For two years, on a weekly basis, top district leaders have tightly scrutinized all open employee positions as well as purchase requisitions and we are pursuing a retirement incentive to reduce layoffs. We are working smarter and finding savings through economy of scale. We’re also working differently with our labor partners, including unprecedented collaboration with the Fresno Teachers Association to determine what goes on in the classroom. Visit our schools and see the changes leading to better teaching and learning. All of us in the Fresno Unified School District realize what is at stake in the coming months—it is the future of our city, region, state and nation. To be clear, the future I reference is now!

However, there are no “easy” cuts left to make. Simply put, significant layoffs are part of both forthcoming budget scenarios. But the reductions will have to make if the tax extension does not go through will be incredibly painful and disruptive to our schools. And this would be against the backdrop of 16.9 percent unemployment in Fresno County and severe cuts to social and mental health services. Without jobs and without a web of services, our families are suffering. If our district faces a further $71 million reduction—on top of $85 million in cuts we have already carried out—clearly we will no longer be able to protect our students in the classroom.

Many districts are not being clear about the dire situation we are in. But along with the Clovis and Sanger districts, we are taking a different approach because our families, our employees and our community deserve the best information we can provide. These are extremely difficult budget times for public education, but rest assured we remain committed to all of our goals for accelerating student achievement. I also want to remind you that these difficult times wear deeply on our students, our families and our employees, so please be good to one another and support one another as best you can as this time calls for the best in all of us.
In the coming year, a new partnership with the Ford Motor Company Fund is expected to accelerate Fresno Unified School District’s efforts preparing students for the world of work.

The partnership will mean improved collaboration with local businesses on what schools should be doing to ensure an adequate pool of potential employees, and lead to a stronger economy for the Valley.

Fresno Unified joined 15 other communities from throughout the country six months ago in Ford’s network of Next Generation Learning Communities -- regional alliances of K-12 schools, businesspeople, postsecondary educators and community leaders mobilized to reform education and stimulate local economies.

An official with the Ford Fund said that Fresno Unified had already initiated impressive work.

“The district has defined a “career ready graduate” as one who has all possible options available to them upon graduation, has a strong academic foundation, has completed all required courses and has acquired the workplace skills and competencies necessary for success after high school.

Along with Nashville, leading network communities include Pensacola and Philadelphia.

The Ford Motor Company Fund, the philanthropic arm of the automaker, identifies and supports communities through technical assistance and access to resources. In turn, the communities have an opportunity to share best practices identified by Ford.

Ford invited Fresno Unified to join the network because of the district’s push to expand and enhance career awareness, particularly at the secondary level, and the district’s work following the recommendations of the Commission on Workforce Readiness and Career Technical Education.

The commission, established in late 2008, presented an action plan to the Fresno Unified Board of Education in May 2009 that included recommendations for a consistent, system-wide approach to career technical educational. (See the commission’s report at www.tinyurl.com/ctereport)

Fresno Unified’s efforts in the area of preparing career ready graduates include:

- Launching “What’s Your Path to the Real World” campaign in all grade levels to encourage students to think about their future beyond school with specific opportunities for students in third, fourth, sixth and eighth grade, as well as high school.
- For example, students in fourth grade tour local workplaces, including Children’s Hospital Central California, Real Goods Solar and Cooper Chase construction firm.
- Boosting the number of career technical courses that are A-G certified (accepted by University of California and California State University campuses) from 4 percent in March 2009 to 26 percent in September 2010.
- Opening the Career Center at Edison High School last fall, a model for similar centers at other high schools in the district that lack a centralized location for computer access, materials and assistance focused on college and careers.
- New centers patterned after the Edison model will open at all traditional high school campuses by the spring.
- Providing more opportunities for students to connect to the world of work through job shadowing events and career fairs and workplace-based experiences.
- Refining existing career pathways for middle and high school students and developing a process for considering new career-themed options for students across the district.

Hanrahan expects the partnership to benefit the district in many ways, but a key goal is to use the network collaboration to establish the district’s own system for engaging the business community.

“We believe the partnership will enable us to move more quickly and effectively create this system as several partner communities have systems that have been called out as ‘best practices,’” Hanrahan said.

Ford Partners to Prepare Students for Work

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District Diabetes Coordinator Lisa Monteleone assists preschool student Jaalam Colbert with his insulin shot at King Elementary School. Right, Monteleone’s diabetes alert dog, Myra, looking on.

as a seizure—to interfere with her work or put her or others in danger.

“Having diabetes is stressful, but it’s my life,” she said. “It’s so nice to have a buddy. It’s so rewarding.”

Monteleone and Myra are a familiar sight at the schools with diabetic children that Monteleone visits. And in December, Monteleone was asked to demonstrate Myra’s skills for students at Figarden Elementary School studying service animals.

Monteleone brought Myra home from Concord-based Dogs4Diabetics a year ago. Dogs4Diabetics is a non-profit organization dedicated to training dogs to detect low blood glucose in diabetics and since 2004 has been providing the dogs free of charge to insulin-dependent Type I diabetics. Heaton Elementary School teacher Sheila Zamora also has a Dogs4Diabetics-trained dog that is with her constantly.

Dogs4Diabetics founder Mark Ruefenacht in 1999 began researching the possibility of using dogs to detect and alert diabetics to blood sugar problems. He had been training a guide dog for the blind. One night, the dog woke Ruefenacht up while he was in the midst of a dangerous low-blood sugar crash: “Very literally that dog may have saved my life that night.”

Type I diabetes is an autoimmune disease that occurs when the pancreas does not produce insulin, essential to preventing the body’s blood sugar from reaching toxic levels. Type I diabetics must inject themselves with insulin several times a day—depending on what they have eaten and how active they are. But too much insulin can send blood sugar levels plummeting too low, eventually causing brain damage, coma and even death. The disease requires vigilant monitoring to prevent serious health problems associated with wild fluctuations in blood sugar.

Just a handful of similar organizations training diabetes alert dogs exist in the United States, although many diabetics report that their pet dogs will alert them when their blood sugar levels have dropped. Scientists are still unsure how the dogs can detect glucose levels.

Most of Dogs4Diabetics’ dogs were trained as service dogs for the blind. To train the dogs to detect low blood glucose, diabetic volunteers provide cloths wiped with their perspiration when their blood sugar was low. When the dogs successfully identify the cloths, they are rewarded with a food treat. The training generally takes four months to a year. Dogs4Diabetics has placed about 80 dogs with diabetics.

Monteleone said that Myra is accurate 90 percent of the time in detecting when her blood sugar is dropping. She helps Monteleone live a normal life, something she stresses with the children she assists in the district. Fresno Unified has about 100 students in kindergarten through 12th grade with diabetes.

“When I was a kid, I never let it stop me,” Monteleone said. “I want Fresno Unified kids to feel that way too.”

**DIABETICS (continued from pg. 1)**

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Plans are moving forward to construct a new middle school in southwest Fresno for 1,000 students, including the naming of veteran principal Steve Gonzalez to lead the campus.

Gonzalez is currently the principal at Carver Academy, which will be replaced by the brand-new middle school on an expanded site in August 2013. The campus will provide a traditional neighborhood middle school program for students in southwest Fresno for the first time in more than 30 years and eliminate the need to bus students from the area to other parts of the district.

"It is much anticipated, and I think the community will be very supportive of the school," Gonzalez said. "We will do everything we can to make it an integral and positive focal point for the community."

As plans proceed for the 22-acre school site, district leaders this spring will develop a high-quality academic program similar to others in the district, designed to prepare students for success in high school and after graduation.

"We want to help students and families become more aware of opportunities for them as they move into high school and beyond, and we plan to work closely with Edison High School," Gonzalez said. "We want to use this school as a catalyst. We're hoping the school has a ripple effect in a variety of areas outside the classroom."

Efforts are underway to gather input from parents, students and community members to ensure that the design of the middle school and educational program not only meets the needs of students, but strengthens the community. The district is considering a variety of options, including the potential for flexible work space for employment development and community services.

The Board of Education is expected to give final approval in December. Construction would begin in January 2012 with an opening set for the 2013-14 school year.

"Our greatest hope and dream is to have a school that engages all students in a program that will propel them forward to their future through academics, arts, culture, career education and athletics," said Nancy Akhavan, assistant superintendent, school leadership. "We want all students to be engaged in school and be successful. Having a middle school in southwest Fresno will help students attain their goals."
Edison Launches Green Energy Technology Academy

Edison High School this year launched a special academy of classes focused on career opportunities in the growing field of green energy, enrolling 70 students in what is designed as a four-year program.

Edison’s Green Energy and Technology (GET) is one of five high school programs in the state selected by the California Department of Education as New Energy Academies. The state provides the designated schools with access to grants and industry experts, as well as special training for the teachers. The other schools are Berkeley High School, Foothill High School in Sacramento, Independence High School in Bakersfield and Venture Academy in Stockton.

The goal is to prepare students for work in the green-energy field and stimulate the discovery of new green-energy technologies.

Sophomore Nailah Harris-Murillo said she has learned about energy technology and “different things going on in the world” that she would not have been exposed to had she not enrolled in GET. The program appeals to her love for science and is also introducing her to career ideas, she said.

Nailah, who is 15, also enjoys being part of a career-pathway program that keeps the GET students together for English, social science, biology and a career technology class: “We bond more. We’ll be together throughout the years and we’ll grow into a family.”

GET is designed with a cross-curricular approach that integrates green-energy studies and strives to connect the students’ classroom work with career possibilities and emphasizes college readiness, said John Berg, a teacher in the program and the History-Social Science Department chairman at Edison High. The hope is that the academy will give students an advantage in landing internships and jobs in the green-energy field, Berg said.

Earlier this school year, GET students organized their first big project that demonstrated the cross-curricular aspect of the academy, holding a Roman chariot race featuring homemade chariots. Along the way, students learned about energy conversion, shop-tool use and Roman history, culture and vocabulary.

A safety fair that will teach CPR and how to put out a fire, conduct swimming assessments and help families prepare their homes for a crisis will be held on April 9 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Sunnyside High School in southeast Fresno.

The safety fair is the first of its kind for the Fresno Unified School District, which will join with several agencies to provide crucial safety information for students and their families in the southeast area of the district.

Instead of elementary schools and various agencies offering individual, small safety events throughout the year, organizers are collaborating on a larger fair that they expect will attract at least 1,000 people.

“We felt we could touch more families and that it would be a better use of resources to do it this way,” said Don Weaver, the district’s emergency planning/crisis response coordinator and one of the event organizers.

Other agencies involved include Children’s Hospital Central California, Hands on Central California and the Fresno police and fire departments. Various booths and demonstrations will emphasize:

- Water safety
- Traffic safety
- Fire prevention and response
- Home crisis preparedness
- Railroad safety

CPR training will be provided for children and adults, swim assessments conducted in the pool, the Fresno Fire Department will demonstrate how to evacuate in case of fire and extinguish a fire, and the district’s mobile health unit will participate by offering shots for pertussis (whooping cough).

Medical magnet students from Sunnyside and McLane high schools will volunteer and students at the 18 southeast Fresno elementary schools can compete in a safety poster contest. Weaver said special demonstrations are planned at least every hour at the amphitheater. Student groups and others will sell food at reasonable prices.

To provide access to as many families as possible, the district will offer free bus service to Sunnyside High from elementary schools in the area. While the fair is targeting 18 elementary schools; Kings Canyon, Sequoia, Terrence and Tehpinte middle schools; and, Sunnyside and Roosevelt high schools, anyone is welcome.

TEACHING TOLERANCE

Sheriff’s deputy Greg Chapman (standing) and Deputy Chief Neil Tyler act out a scenario with Fresno High School student Felix Ybarra-Rodriguez during a presentation by SHARE, which combats hate crimes and intolerance.
Xiong Granted 2011 Milken Educator Award

Balderas Elementary School fourth-grade teacher Lou Xiong was headed toward a degree in accounting when she discovered a passion for teaching and switched careers. Eleven years later, she has won one of the top educator awards in the nation.

This month, the California Department of Education will honor Xiong and the two other California winners of Milken Educator Awards. In April, Xiong will travel to Santa Monica for a conference with 55 Milken winners from across the country.

These accolades follow a surprise announcement at a school-wide assembly in November where Xiong first learned she had won a Milken Educator Award and a no-strings-attached $25,000 cash prize. The awards are considered among the most prestigious in the country for educators, honoring teachers, principals and specialists at the beginning or middle of their career to propel them to even greater contributions to education.

“We created the Milken Educator Awards to proclaim in a very public way that greatness in education must be recognized and rewarded,” said Lowell Milken, chairman of the Lowell Family Foundation. “Lou Xiong embodies this message intended for entire communities, policymakers, students who may be inspired to enter the profession, and for our nation’s K–12 educators themselves.”

Xiong is a popular teacher with families at Balderas Elementary in southeast Fresno, where she has taught her entire career, and is respected and well-liked among her colleagues as well. She excels at teaching math, with more than 90 percent of her students scoring proficient or better in math this year and more than 75 percent of her students scoring proficient or better last year.

The district has tapped into Xiong’s expertise by asking her to demonstrate math lessons to other teachers and she worked as a math coach for two years before returning to the classroom in 2008. She said she enjoyed coaching but missed the daily contact with her own classroom of students.

“I became energized when they understand something,” Xiong said.

In searching for ways to lift her students’ performance in math, Xiong developed new fourth-grade math pacing guidelines – the order and pace for teaching a year’s worth of curriculum. She revamped the pacing guidelines out of frustration with her students’ test scores:

“Just wasn’t getting the results I wanted.”

Xiong added lessons and changed the pacing order – and her students’ California Standards Tests math results soared. She shared the revamped plan with her grade-level colleagues and their students’ scores went up as well. Since then, colleagues in the district have helped further improve the pacing guidelines, Xiong said, and they are used district wide.

Xiong has developed several other strategies to help students learn math, but her favorite “trick,” she said, is teaching students how to round up numbers using a story about a 5-year-old boy named Michael and his grandmother. The story helps students remember that “5” is the pivotal number in rounding. She said the cultures of her students give them the experiences to relate well with a story about a boy and his grandmother.

“It’s not surprising that Xiong is skilled at teaching math,” Xiong said. “I always liked numbers.”

“Was supposed to be an accountant.”

Xiong was majoring in business at California State University, Fresno when she took a part-time job with Fresno Unified as a bilingual aide. She was assigned to help students learning English at Roosevelt High School, and discovered she loved teaching and was good at it.

She realized she could use her knack for numbers as a teacher, switched majors and graduated in 1999 from Fresno State with a Bachelor of Arts degree in liberal studies. She joined the Balderas staff that same year.

“This is much more rewarding than accounting,” Xiong said.

Balderas Elementary has many challenges, with more than 95 percent of students impoverished and nearly half of students still learning English. Nearly 32 percent of those children are Hmong and 61 percent are Spanish-speakers. Xiong is a Hmong immigrant from Laos, arriving in the United States when she was 6 years old along with thousands of other Hmong refugees fleeing war with the communists after the Vietnam War spread to Laos.

Xiong’s father had been a teacher in their homeland before the war, and then fought with Hmong soldiers in the U.S. military’s efforts against communist forces in Laos.

Xiong said her experiences as an immigrant learning English as a second language gives her empathy and understanding of her students’ struggles and she uses her life story to motivate them.

“I do see myself in some of these kids,” Xiong said. “Maybe they are scared to answer in class. I try to get them out of their shell. When I was growing up, I didn’t know English. I understand how to help them make language connections, to encourage them instead of making them feel like everything they are doing is wrong.”

Xiong’s principal, Tiffany Hill, said Xiong is an exemplary teacher with high expectations for all of her students: “She creates an environment where students want to learn. When you visit her class, students are actively engaged in learning at all times. Lou lets each student know that she believes in them and is willing to do whatever is necessary to help them succeed.”

Her colleagues were not surprised she won the Milken Educators Award but she was.

“I was stunned. I just held onto my chair,” Xiong said. “I don’t know how my feet got to the front of the cafeteria.”

The Milken Educator Awards were established in 1987 to recognize outstanding educators and foster an interest among talented young people to become teachers. Instead of a formal nomination or application process, the Milken Foundation relies on blue ribbon panels appointed by each state’s education department to recommend worthy candidates.

The awards program has honored more than 2,400 educators with more than $60 million in prize money.

As for Xiong’s $25,000 cash award, she will send it to a gift to those who nominated her. She also wants to recognize her colleagues in some fashion for their support in treating her students and share with family members. Xiong is married with three children and has a large extended family.

The award, Xiong said, is “confirmation for me personally that I’m doing something good. It encourages me. It pushes me more to take risks.”

“Whatever I believe, I should go with it; don’t hesitate. It gives me self-confidence.”

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8 : BUILDING FUTURES
Measure Q: Facilities Projects to Begin

The district will begin construction on new classroom buildings to replace a portion of the portable classrooms at four elementary schools this spring and summer. These new buildings are a part of the first wave of projects funded by the $280 million Measure Q school bond, passed by voters in November.

With 76 percent of voters approving the measure, Measure Q had one of the highest passage rates for bond measures in the state. District officials said Fresno Unified’s significant accomplishments in recent years, sound finances despite the state economic crisis and stable leadership attracted widespread support for the bond.

“We are extremely grateful to the community for approving Measure Q, which will allow Fresno Unified to continue providing high-quality facilities to students and staff and support the academic programs of our schools,” said Karin Temple, assistant superintendent, operational services.

Work on the new classrooms at Mayfair and Wilson elementary schools is expected to begin in March, with construction at Rowell and Winchell elementary schools likely to begin this summer. The new buildings will make progress toward reducing the need for portable classrooms at the four schools – helping to fulfill Measure Q’s goal of replacing 50 to 80 percent of the district’s portable classrooms with permanent buildings.

The district is tackling the classroom projects at the four elementary schools first to take advantage of state matching funds currently available to reduce the number of portable classrooms and open up green space. Classroom construction at the four schools is expected to cost $5.9 million, with half coming from state matching funds.

At Wilson Elementary School the new classroom building will provide a separate wing for the upper-grade students and facilitate more collaboration and team-teaching among the staff, and allow for more movement between rooms.

“This will support students in being prepared for six to eight teachers in middle school,” said Wilson Principal Kelley Forse.

The district has also started designing work on a Measure Q modernization project at Hamilton School that will leverage state funds. Modernization projects focus on accessibility, safety improvements and enhancements to the classroom environment, as well as upgrades to major systems such as heating/air conditioning and electrical.

In identifying and prioritizing projects at each school for Measure Q funding, the facilities staff examines assessments that were already conducted at schools during the Facilities Master Plan process. The school-site assessments focused on conditions at the campuses, as well as suitability—how well sites support and enhance overall educational programs.

The Board of Education approved the Facilities Master Plan in spring 2009, creating a landmark document that will guide the district’s facilities projects for the next 15 years.

The facilities plan was the result of two years of work by the Facilities Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, made up of community members selected by the Board of Education. The new bond measure will fund just a portion of projects called for in the Facilities Master Plan, which outlined $940 million in needs.

Along with replacing portable classrooms, high-priority projects will likely include improving core facilities such as libraries and career counseling centers. Project implementation will be staggered over the next several years based on need, availability of matching state funds and whether a project contributes to consistent feeder patterns between elementary, middle and high schools. Measure Q also provides funds for general repair and upgrade of school facilities, particularly for safety, security and accessibility.

In addition, the district is also working on site master plans for six of the district’s high schools – Bullard, Edison, Fresno, Hoover, McLane and Roosevelt – and will identify priority projects for Measure Q funding on these campuses.

The district will involve school communities in reviewing projects at each campus and will create a schedule for those engagement opportunities.

“We’re incredibly excited about the work ahead on Measure Q projects,” said Superintendent Michael Hanson. “This was our local community investing in our school district, creating opportunities for high-quality facilities across Fresno Unified.”

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A new study indicates that students who attend the Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART) routinely go on to college at higher rates than students who did not attend CART, with particularly dramatic results for minority students.

The study, funded by the James Irvine Foundation, was released last month. Created in 1999, CART is a joint venture between the Fresno Unified and Clovis Unified school districts. It features a half day program for high school juniors and seniors, integrating rigorous academics within career clusters that include professional sciences, engineering, advanced communications and global dynamics.

In establishing CART, the two districts took a bold step toward reshaping high school education around relevance for students, project-based learning and connections with the real world of work. The new study supports CART’s work with strong data about the college-going rates of CART students. The study found:

• 71 percent of CART students attended community colleges compared to 60 percent of demographically similar students from the Fresno and Clovis districts.
• 23 percent of CART students attended four-year colleges compared to 21 percent of demographically similar students from the two districts.
• CART students attended college at more than twice the rate of their California peers.
• Minority students also had increased college-going rates, including 68 percent of African-American CART students attending community college compared to 32 percent of their African-American peers statewide.

Devin Blizzard, chief executive officer of CART, calls the program’s success the “CART effect.” “For years we have heard employers and colleges praise CART students for their ingenuity and ability to tackle real-world problems,” Blizzard said. “Now we have the data that shows a robust, systematic benefit to students who attend CART.”

Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson said: “In an increasingly competitive global job market CART is giving students a head start on skills that will actually give them an edge in the workplace.”

The Institute for Evidence Based Change conducted the study using transcript data from the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success. Data was examined for seven school years, beginning in 2002-03. Detailed study results can be found at http://irvine.org/cart.

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Edison Girls Dig Out Title

Edison High School’s girls’ volleyball team celebrates winning the Division II Central Section title. Members of the team are Alyasia Brown, Akeya Maddox, Britanney Brown, Brittnie Sims, Brittanie Robinson, Jenia Sears, Mariah Sims, Briana Thompson, Amanda Alvarez, Jobe Jones, Leah Hall, Jazmine Young and DonJane Smith. Kelly Phillips is the head coach and Sonny Perez is the assistant coach.
Baird Middle School has a new amphitheater that will for the first time provide seating for the entire school and a high-quality venue for ceremonies and student performances.

“One of the things that sets Baird apart is the strong community support it has. Now they have a gathering place for their school community,” said Doug Finks, a former teacher at the school who has a son in the seventh grade at Baird. “What they’ve done at the school since it opened is amazing, and this is just going to enhance the educational experience even more.”

The Baird Pavilion seats 600 and includes landscaping and a sound system. Baird families, staff, generous community donors and the Fresno Unified School District joined together to complete the amphitheater, which was dedicated in December. Diane Parrish, the school’s first principal, was honored at the dedication ceremony for her service to the school from 1996 to 2001.

The Downtown Rotary Club donated $10,000 to the project, while Principal Janetta McGensy’s husband, Chester McGensy, donated his services as the conceptual designer, Steelescapes Landscaping contributed a majority of the plants and landscaping labor and Eugene Sue provided the architectural drafting. In addition, Baird families and staff held two fundraisers beginning in the fall of 2009.

“The Baird students, staff and families are overwhelmed with the quick response and generosity of the Fresno community,” said Principal McGensy.

Baird, which includes fifth through eighth grades and an agri-business magnet program, has had much to celebrate in recent years. The school received a Bonner Character Award and California Distinguished School designation in 2009 and this year, Baird outscored all other Fresno Unified schools in eighth-grade algebra, with 89 percent proficient or advanced, up from 33 percent proficient or advanced in 2007.

Parent Wendy Forestiere said she is looking forward to watching her son’s eighth grade promotion ceremony this spring in the Baird Pavilion.

Forestiere said: “We’ve all made due with sitting on the grass, but everyone’s thrilled to see the pavilion happen.”

The Baird Pavilion is dedicated in December, celebrating the official opening of the school’s first venue large enough to accommodate all students and staff. The amphitheater, built with substantial donations from the community, also offers comfortable seating for families during promotion ceremonies and performing arts productions.
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