



ALISON McDONALD
Principal, Life Academy High School, Oakland, California
Bay Area Writing Project, '94

YUMI MATSUI
Humanities teacher, Life Academy High School, Oakland, California
Bay Area Writing Project, '05

CLIFF LEE
Humanities teacher, Life Academy High School, Oakland, California
Bay Area Writing Project, '04

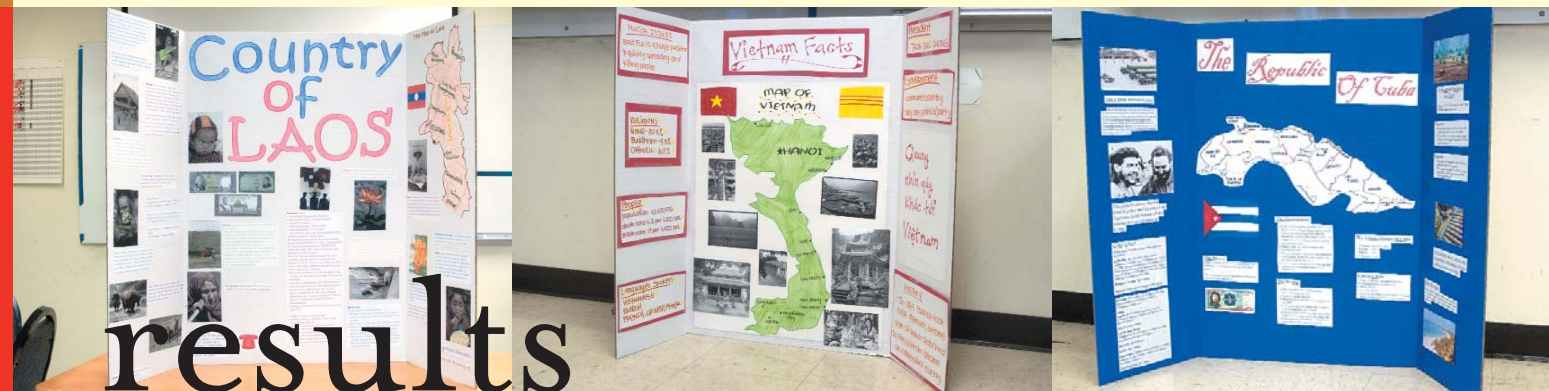
Alison McDonald taught history for twenty-seven years before she became a principal. "The Writing Project kept me in teaching," she says, "and it made me a very different administrator. When our school opened, I immediately devoted our professional development time to literacy strategies for every subject."

One result is that Life Academy High School of Health and Bioscience — where over 70 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch — had the highest scores for writing in the Oakland Unified School District on the California high school exit exam in 2004–2005. Seventy-three percent of the students passed — a remarkable jump from 53 percent in the previous year. In November 2004, a state audit judged the school's English language learner program to have "the most rigorous overall curriculum of any high school in Oakland."

Alison attributes these accomplishments to the school's small size, the dedication of the staff, and the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP).

Cliff Lee, a fifth-year teacher, is one of the Writing Project teachers who work with Alison. "Prior to BAWP, I focused solely on standardized tests and rote activities to prepare for them," Cliff says. "But once I had experienced ways to improve thinking and writing and to *enjoy* academic material, I wanted these experiences for our students, especially for ELL students. They are still doing well on standardized tests, but they are also working on challenging, engaging projects."

Yumi Matsui, a third-year teacher, adds her Writing Project experience to Life Academy. "I was lucky to work with a BAWP coach for an entire year," she says, "and then to revisit the whole process of writing and revising in the summer institute." Yumi and Cliff's eleventh-graders are currently creating a documentary film, the culmination of extensive reading and research about the civil rights movement. Student engagement and high-level learning are everyday events when Writing Project teachers and a gifted Writing Project principal join forces.



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