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“Hospital” Treatment Helps Middle Students Succeed

By Trina Audley



“Binder” physician” Sue Tenerowicz reviews binder with Joaquin Moraga 8th grade student Gaby Photo Trina Audley

The adjustment to middle school poses organizational challenges. Running between classes and keeping track of multiple assignments from different teachers can overwhelm 11 to 13 year olds.

“Adolescent brains are usually not developmentally able to meet the stringent organizational demands placed on them,” confirms Beth Samuelson, founder of SOS Student Services in Walnut Creek. Samuelson regularly speaks about student organization and agrees that “whatever a child’s academic ability, his or her organizational skills dictate achievement.” While most middle schools teach organizational skills in the classroom, one local school is doing more.

Bruce Burns, Principal of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School (JM), says with first hand proof, “An organized student is a more successful student.” Last spring, Burns came upon a novel idea in another district that was working to improve student organization. Intrigued by the concept, he quickly found a parent volunteer to institute “The Binder Hospital” at JM.

Parent Julie Ewert launched the program with the help of school counselor Heidi Felt. The impact was quickly made obvious. “We started seeing students in April and in less than two months, we had measured success,” reports Felt. By June, teachers reported improved homework and test scores for the students who had been “treated” with the Binder Management System (BMS) at the hospital.

Although excited by the results, Ewert points out that resources are limited. Hospital staff consists of only three trained volunteers. Appointments take place during lunch and funding comes through donations. Whereas all students are eligible, appointments are prioritized for students with the most need first. “Students are identified and referred to the hospital by a teacher,” says Ewert.

The teacher referral slip provides the hospital with classroom observations. Parent volunteer “physicians” then perform an “intake evaluation” with the student at the first appointment to pinpoint needs. At maybe another visit, backpacks and binders are culled

carefully for unnecessary clutter. Sometimes a new binder or planner is provided to the student. Finally, new system instruction and practice ensue. “We schedule follow-up appointments and offer rewards to guide and ensure progress,” says Ewert. “New habits are hard to get under your belt.”

Teachers follow progress and provide feedback as well. “That makes it hard for a child to fall between the cracks,” comments Felt. She likes the program for more than just its associated academic success. “Lack of organization can be a red flag for other struggles,” says Felt. “It is a proven fact that students respond when they know that they are cared for by two adults and followed-up with two or more times.”

It is likely many students could benefit from guided reorganization. Teachers at Joaquin Moraga must agree. “The program is booked out with referrals until January already,” added Felt. Given the program’s success, Principal Burns hopes that the Binder Management System materials can become standard school supply requirements for incoming 6th graders next fall.

Miramonte Gets MADD

By Jean Follmer



Orinda Detective Nate McCormack leads Joey Epperson (middle) and another student in a mock field sobriety test at Miramonte

As part of Red Ribbon Week, the Healthy Choices, Safety First Club at Miramonte hosted the Mothers Against Drunk Driving Crash Trailer. The plexi-glass trailer encased a completely destroyed automobile that had been involved in a drunk-driving accident in Santa Barbara. In that case, a drunk 44-year-old man was fleeing police and hit a concrete barrier at about 80-90 mph.

“It’s probably a good example of what can happen. It’s a good message that this can happen at any age,” said Senior Heather Aars after viewing the wrecked automobile. “I’m a parent volunteer and it’s my 3rd year to be working with Healthy Choices Safety First. Students want to do something every couple of months around the topic of drinking and driving because they feel it’s become an issue for their peers,” said Healthy Choices Safety First Club Chair Marsha Harris.

In addition to the trailer, Orinda Detective Nate McCormack was on hand to let students try on Fatal Vision Goggles and attempt to

successfully pass a field sobriety test. There were many different pairs of day and night Fatal Vision Goggles and the impairment levels differed. The impaired vision ranged from a Blood Alcohol Level of .06 (which is below the legally impaired level of .08) to 2.5 times the legally impaired level.

McCormack asked the teens to stand on one leg, keep their arms at their side and raise the other leg up about 6 inches while counting. He also asked them to walk heel to toe, turn and walk back. The teens had a lot of fun trying to pass the pseudo field sobriety tests, but it was clear that none of them would have passed. After trying on the goggles and subjecting himself to McCormack’s mock field sobriety test, Senior Joey Epperson was impressed. “I actually couldn’t do anything he (McCormack) asked me to do. It’s (drunk driving) something that I would never consider doing,” said Epperson. (This reporter can attest to what Epperson said after completely losing my balance when I tried on the daytime vision .06 goggles.)

McCormack said the department has had some trouble with teen DUI’s but “the Slow Down Lamorinda campaign really helped.” He explained the legal level of intoxication for a minor is a .01 BAC and the minor can be charged with a DUI with a .05 BAC. “It’s one of the most dangerous misdemeanors that people can commit because people can really be affected and hurt by it,” said McCormack.

In addition to not drinking and driving, McCormack said it’s important for teens to adhere to all driving laws. When a teen first gets his license, it is illegal for him to carry underage passengers in the vehicle. It’s also illegal for the newly licensed teen to be driving after 11:00 pm. Both of these laws are “widely ignored” and McCormack cautioned that offenders can be cited with a loss of license for 30 days if they are caught. When asked if the teens simply don’t know the law, Detective McCormack said “I think most of them know it and choose to ignore it and their parents just don’t enforce it.”

“I’m never too busy for your referrals!”



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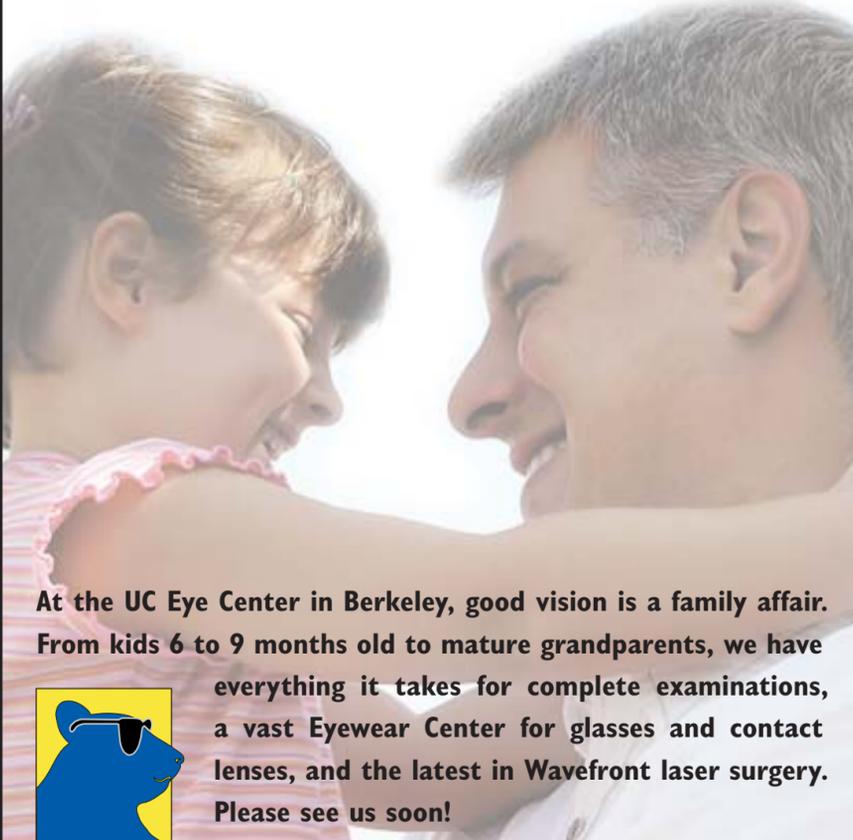
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