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Del Oro Named Model Continuation High School

By Andrea A. Firth



Del Oro students (L to R) Katherine Hernandez, John Barron, Chelsey Dorsett, and Che Da Silva
Photo A. Firth

"One size just doesn't fit all," explains Rae Eckholm, the principal of Del Oro High School. Del Oro was one of 14 schools in California to be recognized as a Model Continuation High School in 2009 for their program designed to help struggling students stay in school on a path to graduation and opportunities in college and the work world.

"Our goal is for each student to be successful in whatever path they choose," she says.

Students come to Del Oro because of a lack of success in one of the traditional high schools. A firm believer in second chances, Eckholm, who has served as the principal at Del Oro for the past six years, has fostered a safe, caring environment that takes every opportunity to acknowledge the student achievements.

Part of the Acalanes Union High School District, Del Oro is set upon a hill off Tice Valley Boulevard and shares a campus with the Adult Education Center. Students navigate their way from one of the school's four main classrooms to a central hallway, and spill out into a sunny courtyard with picnic tables and landscaped planter boxes to have lunch. The setting feels relaxed and comfortable.

"It's really friendly here," states John Barron, a senior, who identifies the one-on-one academic help available at Del Oro as a very positive aspect of the school. "The help is here if you need it."

Del Oro has a cross section of students, most of which switch to the continuation high school because they have fallen behind in academic credits and are at risk of not graduating. (Del Oro requires 205 credits to graduate versus the 240 required at AUHSD's traditional high schools.) Approximately 40 percent of Del Oro's 70 students transfer from Miramonte, Campolindo, and Acalanes High Schools.

Although behavior problems may be the reason some students land at Del Oro, Eckholm says students with more serious offenses are often required to meet a set of predetermined expectations, or live by a contract, in order to attend. However, Eckholm adds that the students' credit deficiencies are due to variety of factors such as family issues, social challenges, and stress that lead to increased absences and falling behind.

The school's small size allows students to get a lot of attention and early intervention. "Kids don't get lost here," states Eckholm. And she keeps careful track of her students. "We pay close attention to attendance."

Eckholm will personally call a student's cell phone if needed. "With a school this size, we know when a student is gone, and we are sure to acknowledge their return."

In addition to recognition from State educators, Del Oro's pragmatic approach and individualized attention yields positive feedback from the students as well. "I like it a lot better here. The smaller school allows teachers to give you more time," explains junior Chelsey Dorsett. "And you know everyone," she adds with a confident smile.

Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

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