



SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY

## New principal shows 'what a school could be'

The Lowell Sun

Updated: 01/05/2011 09:55:42 AM EST

Having written on education since the 1950s, I finally see a growing movement among some teachers, principals and even a few school districts away from standardized tests of whole classrooms and whole schools to a recognition that there also has to be a School of One for each student.

For years in schools, only rarely did I hear a kid say, "Gee, in this place, they know my name. They know who I am." But in Napa, Calif., at the American Canyon High School, which opened in August, 2010, a new principal, Mark Brewer, is demonstrating his credo: "Motivating kids to learn means building relationships with them."

As education reporter, Alisha Wyman, reported in the Napa Valley Register (Dec. 8): "Brewer welcomes students into his office without appointments ... regularly visits classrooms and sits down at desks to ask what students are working on."

And often in what never happened to me in all my years of middle school and high school, "he calls students in to hear how they are doing and what they would like to see in the high school."

This principal also gets to know the individuals who are the teachers, asking them what's working and what isn't. Brewer's mornings, the Napa Valley Register adds, are also "full of meetings with students and parents."

At American Canyon High School, learning in and through relationships is embedded in the very structure of the school. Brewer, notes reporter Wyman, "oversees 650 ninth- and 10th-graders in a state-of-the-art

campus that could hold up to 2,200 within the next 10 years, he says."

And here is where the relationships deepen. The new high school opened with four learning centers, in each of which the students will have the same classmates, along with an assistant principal, for four years. As the Napa Valley Register's Michael Waterston explains beforehand (Dec. 10, 2009):

"We're in the people business," says principal Brewer.

At the actual beginning, the students at the American Canyon High School were surprised by the ubiquitous principal. Reporter Alisha Wyman was told by 10th-grader Taji Cashaw that "It was a little weird at first." But now she likes that he's not just behind a desk in his office. 'Mr. Brewer's social with us,' she says. 'He likes to talk to us and knows our names.'"

What about discipline in this school of relationships? Are all the students angelic? The Napa Valley Register reporter, who herself sure knows how to build a relationship with a subject, has the answer:

"First, he tries to get to the bottom of why the teen is misbehaving because it usually has nothing to do with school, he says. Then he caters the punishment to the individual. 'You can expect things to go wrong with the kids in high school because they're trying to be adults,' he says. 'Everything that goes wrong to me is a teachable moment.'"

Advertisement

Send flowers for any occasion  
**Bouquets from \$19.99** +s/h  
 ProFlowers  
 Order ONLY at  
[proflowers.com/happy](http://proflowers.com/happy)  
 or call 1-877-888-0688

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



"It's quite an opportunity to see what a school could be."

It is my intense hope that around the country, principals, teachers, school boards, parents -- and certainly students -- will know about how Mark Brewer is creating individual lifelong learners at American Canyon High School. As I noted, he's not alone as the realization is growing slowly that the progress or failure of students, teachers and principals cannot be judged by collective standardized tests -- and by spending too much class time teaching for those tests.

But there are far from enough Mark Brewers in our schools. In the Dec. 12 "Education Week" Online, I was chilled to read: "More Testing Seen for High School Students." The president of the Center of Education Policy, Jack Jennings, is quoted:

"The bottom line is that high schools tomorrow will face more testing not less." He then warned of "the real risk, especially in lean budget times, that assessment systems could be poorly designed, aligned or implemented, leaving high schools with a massive testing burden that doesn't provide a deep or accurate understanding of what is needed for improvement."

More important, what's needed is an understanding of who EACH student is. "As you get to know students," says 45-year-old Mark Brewer, "and develop relationships with (each of) them, they can give you a lot of insight. The only reason I come to work is the students. I want to help them have a better life... One of the biggest challenges in this work is engaging kids."

You can't engage them to be critical, independent thinkers and active citizens through collective standardized tests. Says Brewer: "I just like kids. They're fun to be around. They're our future." In too

many other schools, what will their future be?

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. He is a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and the Cato Institute, where he is a senior fellow.

Advertisement

<p><b>Get a FREE ADT-Monitored Home Security System.*</b></p> <p>(With \$99 customer installation and purchase of ADT alarm monitoring services. See important terms and conditions below.)</p> <p><small>*\$99.00 Customer Installation Charge. 36-Month Monitoring Agreement required at \$35.95 per month (\$1,295.40). Form of payment must be by credit card or electronic charge to your checking or savings account. Offer applies to homeowners only. Local permit fees may be required. Satisfactory credit history required. Certain restrictions apply. Offer valid for new SecurityChoice - An ADT Authorized Dealer customers only and not on purchases from ADT Security Services, Inc. Other rate plans available. Cannot be combined with any other offer. **\$100 VISA® Gift Card Offer: \$100 VISA Gift Card is provided by Security Choice and is not sponsored by ADT Security Services. Requires mail-in redemption. Call 1-877-835-8373 for complete restrictions and redemption requirements.</small></p>	<p><b>Call Now!</b></p> <p><b>1-877-835-8373</b></p> <p><b>SECURITY CHOICE</b> </p> <p><small>ADT Authorized Company</small></p>
--	---

Print Powered By 