

San Jose Unified School District would like to nominate Trace Elementary School, the K-5 campus of the District's Academic, Visual and Performing Arts strand, for the 2009-2010 "Caring School Climate" Award. Located in the Rose Garden area of San Jose, this diverse school community is 64% Hispanic, 21% white and 5% other ethnicities. 57% of Trace students are economically disadvantaged, and 38% are English learners. Although there are many noteworthy asset-building activities taking place in SJUSD schools through our partnership with Project Cornerstone, the Trace community stands out this year. In one of those magic synergies where the right people with the right minds and hearts come together with the right leadership at the right time, this school has involved the entire community in creating a caring climate where more students are able to succeed academically, socially and emotionally.

Watching an elementary school recess is always a good litmus test for school climate. On the Trace Elementary School playground these days, an atmosphere of respect among children and a genuine spirit of play prevail. In the past 3 years – in the midst of a 3-year enrollment increase from 766 to 966 students, this school has made enormous strides in creating and sustaining a caring school climate – no small feat to continually "re-culture" the school each year with such a large influx of new students and families, many of whom do not speak English. But with the strong, new leadership of principal Mary Martinez weaving through these external changes, a compelling vision uniting a diverse community around a shared interest in the common wealth of its children has gathered strength and numbers. The changes began with the careful tending of small sparks of interest that have gathered growing numbers of supporters each year. This year the vision has caught fire among all 3 stakeholder groups – students, staff and parent/community partners - who must be in sync for a system-wide impact of any school initiative. Through their combined asset-building efforts, Trace has become a school that grows leaders – teacher leaders, student leaders and parent leaders.

Parents: Trace parents have clearly embraced the philosophy that is at the heart of asset building—that "all kids are our kids". The messages from staff to parents are inclusive and always bilingual: "We need you here... we need your voice and your participation in the education of your children." What is extraordinary about the Trace community is that Spanish-speaking parents are now equally as engaged in school leadership and parent led programs as English-speaking parents. Spanish and English-speaking parents fill the room for the monthly Principal's "Second Cup of Coffee" chats or Saturday School programs to learn the latest school news, how to support their children's academic and social skills, and to add their voices to shaping the school's direction. The Parent Involvement in Education (PIE) Program in which parents sign a contract agreeing to volunteer at least 4 hours/month - began with a single classroom. Today, PIE encompasses 15 classrooms with 3 of them bilingual. In 2007-08, *Los Dichos* began with 3 Spanish-speaking parents. This year, the *Los Dichos* team numbers 20 parents. *ABC Readers* began in 2008-09 with 4, this year they are 12. Each week, these 32 parents are in classrooms reading books in English and Spanish. Using Cornerstone-developed lessons as a basis for lively classroom discussions, the stories that parents read offer a way for children to preview situations that call for honesty, restraint, caring or any number of other positive values. Parents and students become explorers on a quest for greater understanding and for exploring alternate solutions to everyday challenges. Through these interactions with students, parents support the development of strong social skills and model how to relate respectfully to everyone. One of the *Los Dichos* parents is now the school's Parent Liaison and is Vice President of the school's English Language Advisory Committee. Parent engagement and asset-building support took another leap forward this year with two exciting events – one was the offering of a "Taking Asset Building Personally" parent group – a core of 20 parents who spent 6 weeks discussing, acting on and reflecting on the asset development of all children at Trace. This class has become yet another stepping-stone in the development of parent leaders. The shared asset-building vision among these parents has resulted in first-ever joint parent meetings between English- and Spanish-speaking families. Another example of something quite wonderful that came out of this is that one of the moms decided to begin a Daisy Troop – Girl Scouts for her daughter and friends. The second event that rolled out the third year of the Cornerstone-

Trace partnership was the quick response to Cornerstone's new training for yard duty personnel and volunteers. Trace was the first school to step up and involve their yard duty staff in this training – then they recruited two groups of parents for training and for creating a volunteer “force” of caring adults on the playground every day – adults with whom children can play, read, blow bubbles, jump rope, toss footballs - and substantially reduce the peer conflicts that so often come about during recess. Their volunteer force of lunchtime parents is 24 people strong – half are English-speaking, half are Spanish-speaking and *all* are committed to being on the playground creating wonderful moments with children.

Staff: The second year of Trace's Cornerstone partnership was kicked off with an in-depth staff development around what teachers and all school staff can do every single day to build developmental assets – not changing their curriculum or putting all types of new ideas into their daily work – simply by being intentional about building positive relationships with their students. Now, as a district leader in the Positive Behavior Intervention Support program, Trace's 10-person staff team, comprised of administrators and representative teachers from every grade level, meets twice a month to discuss ways to deepen the school's caring school climate. In addition to constant reinforcing of the “3 Bs” of the school's core values (Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible), the staff continually draws from the strength-based perspective of the developmental asset framework and positive behavior approaches as a basis for developing new strategies for student engagement, both inside the classroom and through out-of-class activities. As an Academic, Visual and Performing Arts school, Trace teachers make full use of the arts to emphasize and elaborate on classroom curriculum and reinforce positive behavior themes. The messages are consistent, clear and ever-present in the positive relationships that teachers build with their students. On their annual Climate Survey, 100% of Trace teachers say they care about their students and 99% of Trace students agree! Every morning, the daily announcements over the PA system start with messages about how students at a caring school behave: *Everybody needs a friend. Invite someone who isn't playing with anyone else into your game.... We respect one another when we compliment each another on good sportsmanship during games...*

Students: Not content to have the development of a more caring school climate reside solely with adults, the school has also fully engaged their students' energies. *Everyone* is engaged in asset-building activities through the arts. Annual “Expect Respect” workshops provide the structure and follow-up support as students implement their action plans for creating a more caring school. Over time, student participants become school leaders and oversee 3 schoolwide, student-directed efforts. One team of students creates and presents skits in classrooms and at school assemblies that exemplify the 3 Bs. A second team - the *Junior Coaches* – is trained in game rules, strategies for good sportsmanship, how to encourage the use of positive language and encouragement for teammates and conflict resolution. *Lunchtime Leaders* students set up activities such as arts, yoga and Lego groups to provide engaging options for their peers during lunch recess. Both the Jr. Coaches and the Lunchtime leaders are paired with adult volunteer leaders, although the students manage and run the activities. Trace's student leaders reach beyond their school to add their voices to District leadership. Last year Trace's Expect Respect student leaders provided important feedback on whether the District's new climate survey questions were phrased in kid-friendly language. Their input was a significant student contribution to the final survey.

The proof is in the pudding: A 2008-09 *Simon's Hook* assembly involved everyone on the campus – ABC readers shared the story, students explored how teasing affects them both academically and in their future and appropriate ways to respond to teasing. They created skits on strategies for dealing with bullies and handling teasing. The results are tangible in the school's everyday climate and culture and responses on the school's climate survey are impressive back up. Trace's Caring School Climate Index increased a record-breaking 10% this past year. Academic achievement is on the rise as well, demonstrating that when all members of the school community are positively engaged, student learning increases occur. The school's Academic Performance Index rose an impressive 25 points from 2007-08 with all subgroups making targets for the first time in several years.