

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: http://www.venturacountystar.com/vcs/ca/article/0,1375,VCS_165_5026741,00.html

USC says charter school in Camarillo model for others

By Cheri Carlson, [ccarlson@VenturaCountyStar.com](mailto:c Carlson@VenturaCountyStar.com)
September 28, 2006

Charmon Evans walked University Preparation School's campus this week poking her head in the classroom doors.

A graduate student sat on a carpet in one room surrounded by kindergartners and first-graders. Outside at a picnic table, an undergraduate student read as four children pointed to pictures inside a colorful book. In a classroom several yards away, another university student watched as a teacher talked to her students.

At any given time, University Prep, a charter school on Temple Avenue in Camarillo, has 50 students from **California State University, Channel Islands**, signed up as student teachers and as service learning students, said Evans, the school's special projects coordinator.

"We have trained more than 300 student teachers here" over the past four years, Evans said.

The partnership was part of the plan when both University Prep and CSUCI opened four years ago, and it's also what placed University Prep in a list of 20 promising charter school practices in California.

Charter schools, which operate as independent, public schools, receive state funding and have to administer state achievement tests, but they have more curriculum and budgetary freedom. Professor Priscilla Wohlstetter from the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, set out to find the charter schools that have the "most promising," innovative practices in the state and create a database.

She looked at how schools improved their performance and each program's potential to be replicated at another school and whittled a list of 120 nominated charter schools to 20 for the database, according to a USC report.

University Prep was one of two schools lauded for its school-university partnership, and that came as no surprise to Marilyn Buchanan, who serves as CSUCI's liaison to the charter school.

"I think it's a good choice," she said. "The school is quite unique in several aspects."

The more than 500 students at the charter school, which expanded to include the pre-K-5 University Prep and sixth- and seventh-graders at the new University Charter Middle School this year, live throughout Ventura County and come from diverse backgrounds. They learn in multi-age classrooms from "master teachers" picked from Ventura County districts to work at the school for several years at a time. Dozens of students also participate in a dual-language program, where half the students come from Spanish-speaking families and half from English-speaking ones.

Along with student teachers at the school, about 35 CSUCI students participate in service learning projects each semester on the charter school campus, reading to children and helping them learn about literature and create poetry and art.

While Evans said the elementary students benefit from the added, personalized instruction and exposure to college students, university students also gain from the program's reflective process. After working with students on campus, the undergraduates write about their service learning projects for their university class.

"I love it," said undergrad Jenee Vaccaro, 22. She said she loves searching for new, unique books to take to the school and looks for how children react to the cover, words and pictures. After graduating from CSUCI, she plans to get a master's degree in special education and ultimately start teaching.

The program might be a different approach than other charter schools in the state. But, Evans said, "Any public school could do what we're doing."

The program has little overhead but does come with some challenges. Both CSUCI and University Prep opened in 2002, and that has been both an advantage and a challenge.

"Neither of us came to the table with preconceived notions about how this should be and ? that provided an

openness," Buchanan said. But at the same time, both schools have had some growing pains and faced budget crunches. Now entering the fifth year, the schools need to push ahead and collaborate on research, she said. From the beginning, University Prep was seen as a ready-made laboratory for the university. But the research focus of the partnership hasn't taken off as fast as other aspects.

Evans said she also would like the service learning component to grow and would like to see university students working with parents in the school's family resource center. She also hopes to start spreading the word about how other schools can make a similar partnership work.

At USC, plans call for a national search for promising practices and an expanded database. USC's Compendium of Promising Practices can be found at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/cegov/>.

Copyright 2006, Ventura County Star. All Rights Reserved.

At left, service learning student Jenee Vaccaro, 22, reads with Elizabeth Grimaldo, 5, at University Preparation School. Below, service learning student Renee Wachter 21, reads with Aubrielle Kirsch 5½ and Raul Rebolledo 5. Both the older students are from California State University, Channel Islands, which has a partnership with the charter school. USC has picked the Camarillo charter school as one to watch.



TLC shortage

The national shortage of nurses — owing in part to exponential population growth, an aging nurse labor force and sometimes questionable working conditions — will be addressed locally by the Ventura County Community Foundation, thanks to a two-year grant of \$231,000 provided by Partners Investing in Nursing's Future, a program that seeks to encourage organizations to set actionable plans for improving and stabilizing the nursing workforce. VCCF is one of ten foundations selected nationwide, and will work in conjunction with **California State University Channel Islands** in order to determine how best to recruit and retain nurses and enable them to act in leadership positions, as well as how to engage other “stake holders” — philanthropists, health care professionals and academics.