

SIM Impact Award Riverbank High School, Riverbank, Calif.



Riverbank High School and KU-CRL staff members at the awards ceremony during the 2007 International SIM Conference. From left, Don Deshler, Mike Hock, Ken Geisick, Kathy Briggs, Cris Romero, Carla Spyksma, Mary Black, Ron Costa (assistant superintendent for business and secondary educational services), Yolanda Vera, Peggy Graving-Reyes (SIM Professional Developer), Barbara Ehren, Jean Schumaker, Patty Graner, and Jim Knight.

Without the teachers, schools, and administrators who are willing to step out of their comfort zones and give SIM a try, our efforts would be consigned largely to dusty journals or seldom-visited bookshelves. These individuals and groups breathe life into our work. To express our gratitude, we bestow the SIM Impact Award on schools or school systems that have incorporated many components of the Strategic Instruction Model™ throughout substantial segments of their entire school or school system.

*Julie Tollefson
KU-CRL*

Along the shores of the Stanislaus River in California's Central Valley, a remarkable success story unfolds in Riverbank. In this semi-rural town of 22,000, a team comprising high school teachers, school and district administrators, and SIM Pro-



fessional Developers has put in place an extensive literacy improvement program based on the Strategic Instruction Model™ and following the Content Literacy Continuum™ framework. Teachers across subject areas—physical education,

Recipients of the award contribute significantly to the work of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, strengthening SIM, enabling us to develop needed tools for educators, and ultimately leading to more effective instruction and better learning experiences for students. This year's recipient, Riverbank High School in Riverbank, Calif., has embraced the work of the Center and, in turn, become an outstanding example for all who desire improved outcomes for schools and students.

computer, math, and science, to name a few—incorporate multiple Content Enhancement Routines into their daily instruction. Students learn strategies in both general education and resource classrooms. And scores on state competency tests have risen dramatically—more than 50 points in the first two years of the now

The SIM Professional Developers at Riverbank

CLC Team Lead: Peggy Graving-Reyes

Leslie Herod, 3 years

Jeffrey Reyes, 3 years

Bev Colombo, 2.5 years

Jeannene Ward-Lonergan, 2 years

Susan D'Aniello, 1 year

Winona Gardner, 1 year

Andrew Walter (math facilitator for 2 years; not a SIM Professional Developer)

four-year-old program alone. "It's just beautiful to watch from afar to see how administrators and teachers across departments come together with a common purpose in mind and work against some pretty significant odds to prevail and be successful," says Don Deshler, director of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

Among the challenges Riverbank faced when it began its literacy improvement process were large numbers of struggling students, including English language learners and students

performing below grade level. Many among the predominantly Hispanic student population speak Spanish outside of academic settings yet must perform well in course work and on tests in English. "That makes the gains they are making even more incredible to me, because the students are doing what they're doing in their second language," says Jean Schumaker, retired associate director of the Center. The school's test scores continue to rise each year, and students are engaged and interested in learning, as Schumaker observed during a full-day visit in the fall. "I never saw one student do one disruptive thing," she says. "It was an incredible experience."

In launching the CLC initiative, the district looked at long-term goals as well as short-term needs. "We didn't want this to be another one of the one year or two year flash-in-the-pan changes that comes in and goes away," says Ron Costa, assistant superintendent for business and secondary educational services. Far from being a temporary fix, the Riverbank CLC initiative continues to gain strength and credibility through a collaborative approach that respects the



**Ken Geisick, Principal,
Riverbank High School**

experience of school faculty while acknowledging the need to improve instructional methods. At the center of the collaboration is the school's site literacy team, which principal Ken Geisick views as vital to the school's long-term success. The team evaluates professional development sessions, looks at student work, and makes determinations in conjunction with the CLC professional development team about what the school should do next. "It's starting to change the culture of the campus, so that when I leave and my VPs leave and the CLC team leaves, everything will

Peggy Graving-Reyes has done incredible work. We have had so many professional developers come out of that school in the last two years. I just reviewed a set of materials from future professional developers from Riverbank. It's astonishing to see the kind of care and the attention to detail that they put into their work. They self-reflect to be sure that what they're doing is meeting the needs of kids and teachers in the community. The folks who have come here to learn how to go through that professional development process have been so thorough and come so prepared with depth of knowledge and understanding about SIM and the processes and all of the underpinnings. Peggy does a good job of nurturing them along, and they are outstanding students of that knowledge and then take that on and use it in their own work.

—Patty Graner, Director of Professional Development
University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning

Ken has provided not only outstanding leadership, but creative and focused leadership. He truly understands the CLC vision and the many roles and responsibilities that he must assume, coordinate, and distribute to be an instructional leader of a sustainable schoolwide literacy program.

—Peggy Graving-Reyes, CLC Team Leader

still run,” Geisick says. “It will change, it will morph, but it will certainly still be there.” The collaborative process ensures that teachers are involved in decision making and opens leadership opportunities for them within the school. “We don’t have everybody completely on board, but we do have critical mass,” he says. “We have teachers in every department who are taking the lead. I really believe we’re in a good position.”

Complementing the collaboration at Riverbank is a commitment to grounding decisions in data, both qualitative and quantitative. Administrators periodically seek students’ perspectives about classroom instruction, then report their findings to faculty and the site literacy team. They also drop in to classes and record the instructional methods and SIM components they observe teachers using. Teachers are expected to collect data on all students and to use that data in making instructional decisions. The system that Riverbank has put in place and the extent to which teachers adhere to the intended instructional steps associated with SIM components is truly extraordinary. “They have taken SIM to a place that most of us can only dream about, by examining year after

year how did this go, what do we need to do differently, who else do we need to bring in,” says Patty Graner, the Center’s director of professional development. “They nurture not only the kids, but they nurture each other through that process.”

Riverbank stands out, too, in its commitment to open communication about what education looks like in the school. “I don’t think they have a lot of closed doors,” says Graner. “I think that practice is very open to the whole school community, to the parents, to the kids. People are invited to come and learn there.” Riverbank has graciously allowed the Center’s cameras in to capture examples of really good practice. In doing so, the school has helped the Center meet one of its greatest current challenges: Finding research sites at which a significant group of leaders and teachers are willing to take risks and help us understand how to bring about change in schools as a whole. “All of us at the Center have admired the work that they have done, how they’ve gone about doing it, and of course, we admire the tremendous results that they have gotten with student outcomes,” Deshler says.

KU-CRL CALENDAR

October 10-12, 2007

Instructional Coaching Institute
Contact: Kathy Schmidt or Mona Katz
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

October 14-17, 2007

Instructional Coaching Conference
Contact: Kathy Schmidt or Mona Katz
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

November 2-3, 2007

SIM NE Conference
Mystic Hilton, Mystic Seaport, Conn.
800 HILTONS by October 12, 2007
Contact: Alice Henley
(Henley@ctserc.org)

January 17-18, 2008

Florida PD Update
Alamonte Springs, Fla.
Contact: Mary Little
(projcentral@mail.ucf.edu)

February 21-23, 2008

SIM SE Conference
Francis Marion Hotel, Historic District,
Charleston, SC
Reservations: 843.722.0600 or
877.756.2121 by January 20, 2008
Contact: Jerri Neduchal
(jerrinsisinc@aol.com)

www.kucrl.org/institutes

STRATEGRAM

Vol. 19: Issue number 5. Published six times per year by The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, Joseph R. Pearson Hall, 1122 West Campus Road Room 521, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-3101. Subscription rate: \$15 per year. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher, unless otherwise stated.

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Editor

Julie Tollefson

Consulting Editor

Don Deshler

Contributors

Patty Graner

Mona Katz

Graphic Designers

David Gnojek

Ali Abrams

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