



ASPIRE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



In This Issue

[Interview with Elise Darwish](#)
[Aspire Seniors Recognized as Shining Stars](#)

[Pathways to College for Certain](#)

[Aspire College for Certain Dinner](#)

Aspire in the News

[Unwavering Commitment to Students in Tennessee's Priority Schools](#)
The Commercial Appeal

[Project-based learning on the rise under the Common Core](#)
EdSource

About Us

Aspire Public Schools operates

College for Certain Newsletter April 2015

Dear Friends,

It feels like there is a constant hum in the air around our schools. We are gearing up for state assessments and for the first time in California these assessments are geared towards the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The team across Aspire schools have been preparing for the CCSS transition for quite some time. Given this will be the first year implementing Common Core-aligned assessments, we know results will vary greatly in our baseline years. But, we remain optimistic the new standards will provide a college-readiness foundation for students.

Because of our focused work around Common Core, we have been selected by the online education reporting group EdSource to participate in a study around our CCSS implementation. They recently interviewed our Chief Academic Officer, Elise Darwish, and an excerpt from the interview is found in this month's newsletter.

Lastly, we'd like to announce our inaugural Aspire Shining Star winners. These

38 high-performing public charter schools serving over 14,600 students in under-served communities across California and Memphis, TN.



510-434-5516

www.aspirepublicschools.org

Help our students achieve college readiness



nine students, representing our Aspire secondary schools, exemplify our vision that every student is prepared to earn a college degree. These seniors have been recommended by their school staff because of their academic achievement and tenacity in the pursuit of *College for Certain*. We also want you to meet Xavier Taylor, an Aspire alumna now studying at St. Mary's College. He shares a bit about his *Pathway to College for Certain*. We applaud them all and hope you will join us at our College for Certain Dinner on May 20 in San Francisco, to meet them and learn more about their experience.

We look forward to seeing you. Thank you for your continued support.

Together we can!

James Willcox
Chief Executive Officer

Common Core emphasizes 'thinking deeply and problem solving'

Excerpts from an interview with Chief Academic Officer Elise Darwish

EdSource Apr 2, 2015 | By EdSource staff

Aspire Public Schools is one of six districts that EdSource is following during implementation of the new standards. EdSource recently talked with Aspire's Chief Academic Officer, Elise Darwish about preparing Aspire teachers and students for the Common Core standards. Here are excerpts from the interview:



You've seen reforms come and go. How enthusiastic or skeptical are you about the Common Core?

I would land on the very enthusiastic side. In part because of the value it places on kids thinking deeply and problem solving. On rolling out Common Core, we're more like a school district. We have instructional practices that we've always had, that we've refined, that align better with Common Core. And those are common across all of our schools. For example, guided reading is consistent across all of our schools a certain number of times a week, and in that sense it's a mandated practice.

Our math materials are also mandated in the sense we want to be able to have consistent and effective coaching, and that means similar materials. We have common assessments three times a year that are aligned with Common Core. For this year, since the Common Core is such a big thing to roll out, what we asked schools to do was to pick majors and minors.

[Continue Reading>](#)

Aspire Seniors Recognized as Shining Stars

Aspire recently launched its Shining Star program to recognize outstanding seniors at each of our nine high schools across California. While we believe in the power of all of our students to excel and fulfill our *College for Certain* vision, Aspire's Shining Stars have gone above and beyond to exemplify *College for Certain*. Nominated by their school staff, Shining Stars epitomize why *College for Certain* is making a difference for our students and their families.

Meet Aspire Shining Stars at the College for Certain Dinner on May 20. For more information visit our [webpage](#).

Aspire Shining Stars Class of 2015



Alexander Lopez
*Aspire California College
Preparatory Academy, Berkeley*



Bree Saldevar
*Aspire Benjamin Holt College
Preparatory Academy, Stockton*



Cristian Jimenez
*Aspire East Palo Alto Phoenix
Academy, East Palo Alto*



Laura Garcia
*Aspire Pacific Academy,
Los Angeles*



Marisol Perez-Alcala
*Aspire Golden State College
Preparatory Academy, Oakland*



Omar Sanchez
*Aspire Langston Hughes
Academy, Stockton*



Samuel Renfrow
*Aspire Vanguard College
Preparatory Academy, Empire*



Shawn Ignacio
*Aspire Alexander Twilight
Secondary Academy, Sacramento*



Vanessa Veronica
*Aspire Lionel Wilson College
Preparatory Academy, Oakland*

Pathways to College for Certain

Xavier Taylor graduated from Aspire California College Preparatory Academy in 2012. From there, he has gone on to have much success at Saint Mary's College of California. As a junior, he is double majoring in Sociology and English. Ten years ago, when Xavier joined the Aspire family, he had no idea he would be in this position.

As a Sociology major, Xavier is very interested in interlocking systems of oppression. Xavier feels Aspire has found a way to deconstruct these systems and give students like him an opportunity to maximize their potential.

"Aspire is more than an organization that is focused on improving lives through education; it is a family. Next to my faith in God, family is the most important institution in my life. When all else fails, you should always be able to rely on your family. Both my biological and my extended Aspire families were relentless in their efforts to instill a College For Certain mentality in me."



"These constant messages of College For Certain made me believe just that; college was for certain. When asked what college means to me, I would have to say it is a gateway to innumerable possibilities. That is what Aspire has to offer - an equal playing field in education. I stand firm with pride when I say I am an Alumni of an Aspire Public School. Look out Aspire; I will be back."

After graduating from Saint Mary's, Xavier plans to return as an Aspire Teacher Resident.

Hear more about Xavier's *Pathway to College for Certain* at the College for Certain Dinner on Wednesday, May 20. For more information visit our [webpage](#).

**There's still time to buy tickets to the
Aspire College for Certain Dinner**



Aspire College for Certain Dinner

May 20, 2015, 6:30pm

Bently Reserve, 301 Battery Street, San Francisco

6:30pm Reception

7:00pm Dinner and Program

Event Program

Pathways to "College for Certain"

Student Alumni Speakers

Xavier Taylor

Alumni, Aspire California College Preparatory Academy
Student, St. Mary's College



Blanka Mariscal

Alumni, Aspire East Palo Alto Charter School
Graduate, Aspire Teacher Residency Program
Teacher, Aspire 1st Grade



Keynote Video Address

Bill and Melinda Gates

Co-Chairs, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation



Recognition for Service

James Wilcox

Chief Executive Officer, Aspire Public Schools



College for Certain "Fund a Need"

Event Host Committee

Warren Felson and Lucy Sun

Jonathan and Kimberly Garfinkel

Leslie and George Hume

Beth and Michael Hunkapiller

Steven Merrill

Louise and Arthur Patterson

Richard Spalding

Business or Cocktail Attire - Valet Parking

For Sponsorship Opportunities [click here](#)

or

[Buy Tickets](#)

Questions? Please

contact catherine.foster@aspirepublicschools.org or 510-434-5516



College for Certain

Founded in 1998, Aspire Public Schools is a national K-12 school system focused on improving public education by preparing underserved students for college, training highly effective teachers and sharing innovative best practices. Aspire serves more than 14,600 students in 38 open-enrollment public schools in underserved communities across California and Memphis, Tenn.

Contact Us:

- communications@aspirepublicschools.org
- 510-434-5516

Help our students
achieve college
readiness

www.aspirepublicschools.org

