

A Chance to Learn

Nonprofit ALearn provides a catalyst to college for underserved students.

With a quote from the late Nelson Mandela as its mantra, the team behind Santa Clara-based ALearn understands that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” The nonprofit is dedicated to helping prospective first-generation college students succeed in their quest for a higher education.

Based on the core belief that education is key to social and economic justice, ALearn Founder and CEO Kathryn Hanson set out to help underserved students build the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to succeed in a college-preparatory curriculum—all free of cost to the student. She developed a program around three fundamental pillars: strengthening core math skills, introducing a “college readiness” curriculum, and fostering a “growth mindset” based on the motivation research by Stanford Professor Carol Dweck.

A Powerful Weapon



explains, is its partnership with public school administrators, teachers, and counselors to select and guide students. To date, ALearn has touched the lives of more than 9,200 students in 15 school districts throughout San Mateo and Santa Clara counties since its beginnings back in 2007.

Last year, ALearn received a \$500,000, four-year grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation that will fund its “Catalyst to College” launch. The coaching and peer mentoring program is being piloted at Independence and Yerba Buena high schools in San Jose with 100 sophomores who attended an intensive “College Week” last summer at Santa Clara University as an introduction to college life. The ALearn team tracks the progress of the students in the program, helps them navigate through their high school years, and then guides their college applications and subsequent transition.



ALearn alum and advocate, Glenda Vargas will graduate from Chapman University this spring with plans to continue on for her master’s degree and teaching certificate. Vargas attributes her success to ALearn’s summer math intensive, which boosted both her skills and her confidence. “Everything connected because of that summer at ALearn,” she says. Throughout her four years at Chapman, Vargas has returned home each summer to work as a teaching assistant for the program in hopes of inspiring more students like her—a worthy goal indeed. ♦ —JILL LAYMAN

For more information about ALearn or to make a donation, visit www.alearn.org.

And, the Numbers Are In

Positive statistics are proving just how much ALearn students thrive.

- 80% of students in ALearn’s Algebra 1 class passed and accelerated to Geometry in their freshman year, and 86% of Geometry students accelerated to Algebra II.
- 96% of students from the program’s second Catalyst classes graduated from high school in 2014, whereas only 75% of their peers graduated.
- 76% of these same students were college eligible upon graduation compared to 26% of their peers.
- 92% of these students were from low-income backgrounds, and 83% were students of color.



Glenda Vargas

PHOTO: KEITH DURFLINGER

“Research shows that college is the great equalizer which allows students from any background to move forward in a successful career,” stresses Hanson. “In California, 53 percent of K-12 students are Latino, yet only 13 percent graduate college. There is a huge gap we need to fix.”

Key to the program’s success, Hanson