

# YES We Can!

*The quarterly newsletter from Youth Empowerment School*

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## YES SUCCESS!

68% of 10th-graders passed their ELA CAHSEE test on the first try, doubling our pass rate from two years ago! Next year we're shooting for 100%!

12th-grade English teacher Karen Pezzetti has been named Oakland's "Teacher of the Year"!

*"You'll never see our best because we keep getting better!"*  
- Mikel Calderon, founding student

## YES Students Rock the Vote

Like many around the country, Youth Empowerment School students have been intently following the run-up to next fall's presidential election, especially the contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

Those fortunate enough to be of voting age were particularly excited to be part of history in the making. Senior Raul, who filmed and interviewed student voters on primary day, found the politically passionate atmosphere uniquely inspiring. "The feeling in the school was just something I had never felt before," he explains. "The majority of the seniors were actually excited for this day and what it meant for them because it was going to be their first time voting in an election."

He also overheard spirited debate among fellow students about who would win the election and why. Other community voters at the polling place were curious about the students' project and were "amazed" when Raul and his fellow interviewers explained what they were up to.

Building on this civic-minded spirit, Raul and classmate Ricardo visited Barack Obama's local campaign headquarters in downtown Oakland. "To tell you the truth," says Raul, "we both left the building saying the same thing: We were amazed by how volunteers were so passionate for Obama and how they were fighting on the telephones to convince people to vote for their candidate. It was a very unique experience that certainly changed my perspective on how someone can actually be involved in a presidential election."



12th-graders Tiana and Edgar in class

## Support YES!

While YES received many generous donations this year, we remain \$19,000 shy of our fundraising goal. In this wired (and wireless!) age, our students must keep pace with those in wealthier areas where costly technology is commonplace. As we enter 2008-09, we're focused on furnishing a tech center with up-to-date computers and programs so students can take online courses, write college applications, conduct Internet research for projects, and do graphic design.

Due to cuts in state funding, YES must rely on individual donors now more than ever. You can make a tax-deductible donation online at [www.smallschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org) (click "Donate Now," and choose "Youth Empowerment School" as the Designation), or write and send a check to "OSSF/YES," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

In other fundraising news, YES has won a California Partnership Academy grant which promises \$47,000 for 2008-09, \$72,000 the next, and \$81,000 a year for several years thereafter. This funding will establish YES's Public Service Academy as a full-fledged Academy! "This grant enables us to support students in pursuing multiple careers in public service: education, technology, arts, science, health, government, and more," says Principal Maureen Benson. "We can't wait to see what our empowered youth can do!"

# Empowerment: Returning the Favor

## SENIORS SAY "YES" TO COLLEGE

31 of 45 YES seniors applied to four-year colleges this past fall. "The universities will be lucky to have them," says Principal Benson. "This is an incredible group of young people!"

Nidya recently co-wrote an article featured on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Sunday Insight cover! You can read it here: <http://tinyurl.com/452smv>

**GO TO YES!**  
YES is filling up fast for 2008-09! Contact the Student Assignment Office in Portable 18 across from the district offices (1025 2nd Ave.) to apply. Registration starts August 18.

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When she graduated from Fremont High School in 2003, Nidya Baez wasn't ready to rush off to college and leave her roots behind. As Youth Empowerment School was developing its vision and preparing to open on the Fremont campus that coming fall, Baez (pictured at right) joined the design team for the school. It's hard to envision an experience more in line with "youth empowerment" than designing a school, which is just what Nidya and 10 fellow Fremont high-schoolers did, alongside Principal Maureen Benson and other staff members.

Reinforcing her dedication to the Fremont campus that began as a student and continued as a YES design team member, Nidya came back each year during college to help seniors with college applications, A-G requirements, and other key aspects of college readiness. When she graduated from Berkeley with a degree in Latin American Studies, she knew she wanted to look for a job in education, but wasn't quite sure what form it would take.

During those frequent visits to her old Fremont campus, she spoke with teachers to inquire about possible jobs. She'd already been filling in as an occasional substitute teacher and lending one-on-one in-class support to English-language learners. Given this experience, and her Latin American Studies major, she decided to make teaching Spanish her goal. She interviewed at YES in March. "Going back would be just perfect," she said at the time. "There are opportunities to teach in other schools, but the YES design team was a big part of my high-school experience, of putting together what a lot of people didn't believe we could do."

A couple months later, the news was official: Nidya had the job. This coming fall she'll return to teach at YES, the school she was instrumental in helping found. While thrilled to fulfill her dream, Nidya is also nervous "because I feel like I really want to be the teacher I wanted back in high school and on the design team. We expected certain qualities in them, and that makes me wonder, 'Am I what I wanted teachers to be for us, and how do I get there?'"

She hopes to bring that design team spirit to her teaching. "I want to let students



Nidya Baez, YES design team member and future YES teacher

know that we were a real group of students that built this school," Nidya explains. "I think the students don't always quite believe it. So my thing is, every time I speak with students about extracurriculars, I tell them, 'You can do it, this is what you should do, why not?' The way we designed YES was to empower the students, and I really believe in that vision."



10th-grader Ali and Ms. Diaz during spring mock trial



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