

Teacher focuses on freshmen employment goals in effort to reduce dropout rate

ANDRÉ GENSBURGER
Clayton Pioneer

Clayton's Roger Haserot was outraged by the 50 percent dropout rate at his school, Mt. Diablo High in Concord. Last year, he decided to do something about it by firing up then principal Bev Hansen to support a new school-wide program targeting freshmen.

It was designed to allow heavy support of freshman students by keeping their focus on a future of employment and goals that they want to reach. Haserot was teacher leader.

Since the district earns its revenue by average daily attendance, the more students who attend the more education revenue comes in.

"If we save 10 students," Haserot explained, "we save the district \$50,000 a year."

CONSIDERING CAREER OPTIONS

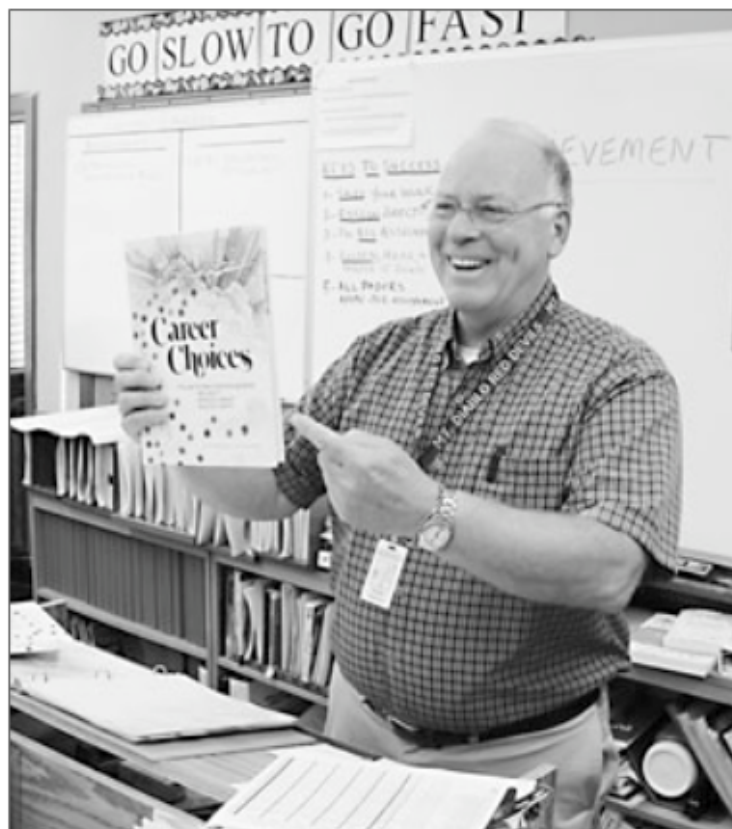
Because of the attention his program was generating, Haserot was named Teacher of the Year at the end of the last school year. Yet, he's not comfortable with the recognition.

"I like to stay in the background and do my job," he said. "This was a complete surprise and I feel there are people more qualified than I."

Another layer to the program is Career Integrated Academics, with the aim of always including career focus in the academic instruction as well as coordinating with teachers to ensure that students receive the instruction they need at the pace that works for the overall plan.

"I knew it would take about two years to see it through as lead teacher," Haserot said.

Now into his second year, he's uncertain what the future holds. "That depends on my wife," he said, adding that he hopes to



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ROGER HASEROT HOPES AN EMPHASIS ON TEACHING BASIC SKILLS TO freshmen will reduce the 50 percent dropout rate.

leave teaching and transform to a consultant.

And this is where the plan grows. Based on discussions with Clayton Valley's principal Gary Swanson, Haserot would like to see all the high schools in the district incorporate the plan.

"Many schools have problems maintaining freshman interest," he noted.

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD

One of the elements of the program is to develop a 10-year plan. "Where will you be in 10 years?" he asks his students, having them develop a sense of their future.

"And how's your 10-year plan?" he will ask students. "If you understand where you are going as a freshman, you can have a 10-year plan."

Teachers involved can ask to see the students' plans. "Getting the kids to relate how their high school classes beyond their freshman year affects them becomes frosting on the cake in their senior year," he explained.

Attributing a lot of the MDHS dropout rate to cultural expectations, or lack of, Haserot notes that while many students believe in the need for a job, most expect obtaining that job to be easy enough to negate the importance of their education.

"One of the students from my first year said, 'I haven't the foggiest idea what I want to be and I really don't care.'" It surprises him that this attitude can be so pervasive.

ACHIEVING BUY-IN

While data is limited on

whether the dropout rate has decreased, Haserot sees a change in the number of freshman remaining at school.

"Every piece of what I teach has a real-world application," he said.

Each set of freshman only have him for 90 days before rotating through other teachers, but he communicates there as well. "I teach basic skills," he said. That includes everything from letter writing to things that businesses expect from applicants.

"About 70 percent of the students last year started listening," Haserot reported.

When Haserot asked one freshman how the 10-year plan was going, he shook his head and said: "It's not going well."

"Some freshman are not yet mature enough to handle it," Haserot said.

Now starting the program for sophomores gives students another chance to buy into the program.

Haserot gleaned most of the program from what has been done elsewhere. "Schools in Victorville have a year-long course and it is required for graduation," he said with a hopeful tone.

Academic Innovations, sponsors of the program, plan to buy Haserot a video camera so that he can tape classes as a learning tool to see what works and what does not.

The next challenge is recording all the data from last year's grades and determining how many students are lost. "Even if we see the GPA increase at the end of the sophomore year," Haserot explained, "we cannot necessarily attribute it to the program since a number of factors are at play."

For more information, visit www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/mountdiablohigh or www.focusonfreshmen.com.