

# Sonoma Mountain High School

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To Whom It May Concern:

The staff and students of Sonoma Mountain High School are looking forward to implementing *The Essence of Acceptance* curriculum again this year. It was a very successful program for us last year, and blended in perfectly with our curricular objectives.

The list of benefits of this curriculum is a long one, for both staff and students. One teacher said that just working with the detailed and well thought out activities in *The Essence of Acceptance* gave her the confidence to expand her use of guest speakers and use of other community resources in the rest of her curriculum.

More specifically, though, she cited the program's interview process and student preparation components as being very valuable. We brought in two guest speakers, an Israeli and a Palestinian, to deliver their stories to the students. Students discussed and prepared questions in advance of the visits, and spent considerable time discussing and reflecting afterwards. The added student buy-in that was a result of *The Essence of Acceptance* curriculum increased their awareness of, and appreciation for, basic qualities of life that we usually take for granted. They listened intently; they asked thoughtful, appropriate, respectful questions; in short, they were engaged in their own learning! To be able to have that kind of influence on today's teens, especially those identified as being "alternative" or "at high risk" is no small feat.

Some of the students' comments are among the most telling: "It made history and current events *real!*" "It made the news real." "It gave me an appreciation for other cultures that I had thought I already figured out." Other students reported having their stereotypes and myths shattered, causing them to confront their own belief systems.

In addition, the first hand accounts, delivered directly to students, sent a very powerful message, and in most cases, overrode students' prejudices and prior assumptions. They reported that this was because of the respect they acquired for the presenters, due to their ability to survive, and for the personal story they each had to tell (and, I believe, it was also due in large part to the structured activities designed to open the students' minds beforehand). This is clearly a quality program that touches students in ways that few others do.

This year, the teachers hope to present a similar program, focusing on the survivors of the Holocaust and the Japanese Internment Camps, and expand classroom activities to include more of *The Essence of Acceptance* curriculum.

It is very difficult for teachers to add anything new to their already bulging curricular responsibilities, for nothing is ever taken out of the curriculum to make room for these new additions. Teachers, therefore, are generally quite reluctant to voluntarily take on additional programs. But when one comes along that fits into the existing scheme of things, has the ability to take student understanding to a new level, *and* is readily embraced by teachers who *want* to fit it in, then it makes me also sit up and take notice. *The Essence of Acceptance* is such a program.

If you would like more information, or more specifics about how *The Essence of Acceptance* worked at Sonoma Mountain High School, and why we want to see it continue, and even expand, please feel free to contact me or my staff.

Sincerely,



Robert Hermann

Principal, Sonoma Mountain High School and Carpe Diem High School  
Petaluma City Schools