

## **“Elementary Students Encouraged to Set College Goals: Schools Try to Establish a College-Going Culture”**

By Caralee J. Adams

To get children thinking about college early, Los Penasquitos Elementary School in San Diego changed its name to No Excuses University at Los Pen. Instead of numbers, classrooms are identified by college names with flags from Ohio State or the University of Michigan hanging on the door. Students learn all about their assigned school, make up a cheer for it, and sometimes even have alumni visit.

“From the minute students walk in the door, we want them to feel like they are on a college campus. It’s all about the spirit,” Damen Lopez, a former principal at the school and the founder of the No Excuses University Network of Schools. “We want to expose them to the possibility of a four-year university. That it’s not something far, far away.”

By creating a college-going culture in elementary school, the hope is that students will aspire to a lifelong path toward higher education and deeper learning that ends with a degree. To reach that goal, the school plays up the concept that there are no excuses for poor effort and staff members have a belief that all students can excel.

Starting Early: “Waiting until they are in high school for college readiness is as crazy as starting parenting when a kid is 13. You miss the opportunity,” said Mr. Lopez. “For kids who live in poverty, it will take a childhood to break down myths about college and get the child to the place where they can see college in their future.”

To reinforce the message at home, parents, many of whom live in nearby public-housing projects, attend evening sessions (aptly named Parent University) to learn about how they can support their children’s studies.

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