

### **A brief description of Oasis High School**

Oasis High School is a public charter school and non profit organization founded to serve students who have not found success in the Oakland Public School system. Oasis enrolls young people who are looking for an alternative that will provide them with the motivation, engagement, and success necessary to obtain a high school diploma and move on to higher learning. Oasis is unique in that we provide a learning community where there is:

- Inspiration because of a faculty that is committed to determining every student's needs and the key(s) to his or her success;
- Student involvement in examining their personal cultural/ethnic backgrounds and how these influence their learning and achievement;
- Collaboration with resource people and agencies in the community to insure student success;
- Interaction with families; and
- A low student to staff ratio of 15:1.

Our academic program includes: courses offered by our teachers (English Language Arts, Biology, Physics, Algebra, Geometry, World and US History, Government, Economics and Spanish); electives in dance, art, cycling and music in partnerships with community organizations; and community college classes for students who want classes beyond our core program in preparation for post-secondary education. Our teaching staff works to integrate traditional academic instruction with hands-on learning and opportunities to learn outside the school walls. A few examples:

- Students studying Government researched the November election, participated in the election as poll watchers, and were able to visit with Congresswoman Barbara Lee in January.
- Once a week, our poetry class meets as part of a UC Berkeley poetry class where our students read their own work in front of 200 college students.
- Students in Kathleen Jackson's English class visited the Oakland Museum and chose topics of personal interest based on their tour of an exhibit on the impact of the Vietnam War on California and Society. Topics of their final papers included: the story of the Black Panther Party in Oakland; draft resistance; adoption; and the life of Cesar Chavez.
- Our Science instructor made a connection with undergraduate students from UC Berkeley who are part of Earth Team. Together they are organizing a stream restoration project as part of the field work for Biology.

### **Who we serve**

Oasis High School opened its doors in September 2004 with 80 students in space leased from a long-standing community organization in the Fruitvale District of Oakland. Our students range in age from 14-18 years of age. Most come from Oakland's most under-resourced neighborhoods. More than 85% are students of color; approximately 65% qualify for free/reduced lunch and about 40% have English as their second language. Almost half are young women. Students are recruited through high school counselors, community organizations, churches and through word of mouth. Several students were referred to the school by social

service agencies, and some students come from foster homes or group homes. Following are the stories of just a few of Oasis's students:

***Shanika is one of four seniors who are on track for the first Oasis High School graduation in June.*** Despite an unstable home situation throughout her life, she has a maturity and wisdom beyond her years. She balances her studies at Oasis with an after-school job. While she excels in English, she struggles in math and becomes easily frustrated. At Oasis she has found both support in her challenges as well as encouragement. In an email "check in" to her advisor, Shanika writes: "Keep doin' what you are doin' and I'm more than certain that this school will continue to be a success. The students here and many more to come need your help and even though they might not tell you, they appreciate you a great deal."



***Jose greets everyone at Oasis with a smile.*** Anyone meeting him now would be surprised to hear about where his life was just one year ago. Jose was addicted to methamphetamines, had dropped out of school and had run away from home. At 16 he could see no future and had little hope. A near death experience shook him from his drug addiction and his search for a school brought him to Oasis. Highlights of his first trimester include an unquenchable interest in the ancient history of his native Mexico and the recording of a song about racial unity.



***Natasha stopped going to her 2500-student high school because she felt unsafe.*** Ironically, in the year that she was a "drop out" she frequently volunteered her time at a small alternative school where her sister attended. Both sisters discovered Oasis this summer and stepped up to the challenge of becoming founding students. Before the school year began, they were already active at Oasis, serving the school by painting walls and helping with student recruitment. Like most Oasis students, they weathered the bumps of the first trimester, and are beginning to feel at home at Oasis. They continue to grow from their learning experiences while simultaneously giving through service to the community.

### **Need for Oasis High School**

Oasis High School fills a critical need in the educational landscape of Oakland. According to a recent study conducted by Harvard University and the Urban Institute, fewer than one-half the freshmen who enter Oakland public high school will graduate. The researchers also found that Oakland's graduation rate is substantially lower than the graduation rates in San Francisco, and seven other large Bay Area school districts. While there are efforts underway to break up the large, impersonal high schools into smaller schools within a school, there are very few options for the more than three thousand young people who have already fallen out of the system in the last few years alone.

In our conversations with students we are coming to understand, in very personal terms, why it is important for Oasis to exist. Students tell us how much they value Oasis as a place where they are known by the staff. They appreciate staff who take time to listen and work with them one-on-one and they see themselves making academic progress. They value a school where they have a voice and a sense of belonging.

While the students express their appreciation for the school, we know this first year is but a beginning. With continued hard work and community support, we will truly become an Oasis: *“a place that gives relief from a troubling or chaotic situation”* for many hundreds of Oakland youth who did not think they would find another route toward their goal of achieving a high school diploma with a plan for higher education or their next steps in life.

Oasis High School will be moving to downtown Oakland for the 2005-06 school year with an enrolment of approximately 100 students.