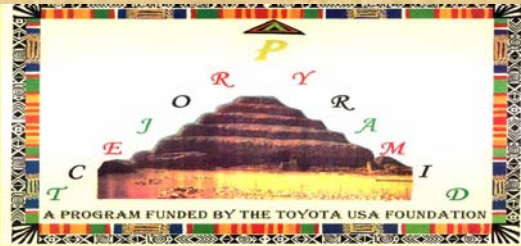


# PROJECT DRUMBEAT

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VOLUME I—ISSUE 1



# PYRAMID PATHWAYS

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JUNE, 2003

Project PYRAMID was launched on February 14, 2002, at Warren Lane School in the Inglewood Unified School District as a one-year extended learning pilot program. Designed to be a multi-dimensional and multi-phased college preparatory program, this first phase focused on enhancing math/science skills. Its purpose was to test and refine an Afrocentric instructional model gleaned from “best practices” that have evolved in Black Studies. The project goals sought to increase math skills proficiency and orient the middle school students toward long range preparation for college admissions and math/science careers. *Research results from Project PYRAMID indicated that this Afrocentric model did indeed enhance the students’ math grade level skills.*

Students were immersed in an Afrocentric after-school program utilizing the psycho-educational approach. With a format called the “circle of learning,” students covered achievement training, cultural heritage, math, astronomy, and arts/crafts lessons.



**Above:** Mr. Sirs, principal, welcomes Project PYRAMID to Warren Lane.

**Below:** Fantasia dance group from Inglewood lines up to perform.

## PROJECT PYRAMID LAUNCHED WITH \$130K GRANT

Students were guided through a journey of self-knowledge, in which they found out that their ancestors invented math, pioneered science, and discovered the laws underpinning the universe. They learned about the Ancient Egyptians, and their innovations in algebra and geometry. African-American contributions in astronomy, math, and scientific inventions were also studied.

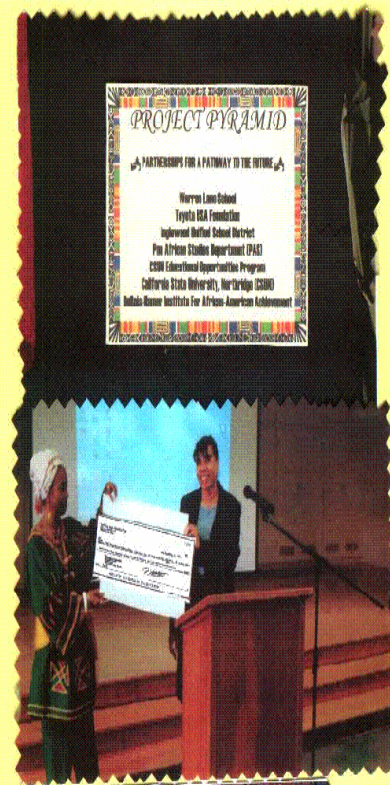
Students were divided into cooperative learning groups, called *Nubians* and *Yoruba*, prominent African empires. The Nubian (ancient Ethiopia) empire emerged along the Nile Valley long before ancient Egypt, and gave rise to African and world civilization. The Yoruba were a dominant empire in West Africa (Nigeria), and their religion is still prominent in Brazil and Cuba. We challenged them: “What can you do to honor your ancestors and improve the Black community?”

In this pilot study, 115 students were provided an intensive and interactive learning experience, with the goals of: (1) enhancing learning readiness; (2) increasing math skills proficiency; (3) and increasing science proficiency. Approximately thirty-five students were recruited for three discrete sessions. Primary program sessions were held during the spring and fall semesters, comprising about four months whereby students received in-depth instruction. Then a one-month summer session took place, where students received condensed instruction; and field trips complemented the classroom learning.

An integral part of the project was providing monthly progress reports to parents. Once math skills were assessed, the staff worked with the students to build self-esteem and increase confidence in their academic capabilities. Parents received a college learning plan to monitor academic progress during high school matriculation.

### “PARTNERSHIPS FOR A PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE”

At the opening ceremony, parents, students, teachers, and partners from the Toyota USA Foundation, CSUN School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Pan African Studies Dept., CSUN Office of Development, DuBois-Hamer Institute, college students, and newly assembled Project PYRAMID staff gathered to launch this innovative Afrocentric program. Designed to connect students to African cultural heritage—this framework also promoted empowerment. We were treated to an energetic performance by Fantasia, an Inglewood African dance troop. The community audience cheered during a special moment when Tracy Underwood, from the Toyota USA Foundation (and a CSUN alum), re-issued the \$130K check Dr. Rehema Gray, Director of Project PYRAMID. Mr. Sirs, principal of Warren Lane welcomed “this first ever” program on behalf of the Inglewood Unified School District. The program ended with a tour of the “circle of learning” stations.



Tracy Underwood, program officer from Toyota USA Foundation “re-presents” \$130K check to Dr. Gray, director, Project PYRAMID at the opening ceremony.

## Moving From Station to Station... "THE CIRCLE OF LEARNING"

Upon entry into the "circle of learning," the Nubians and Yoruba groups moved from station to station on a journey into the discovery of self-knowledge. African legacy in math and science was the foundation for the curriculum at each station.

### ACHIEVEMENT VALUES TRAINING STATION- [Know Thyself]

**Activities- African heritage training & life planning**

### TEACHING (MATH) STATION- [Pyramid-Building]

**Activities- Math problems & internet exercises**

### ACADEMIC REINFORCEMENT (SCIENCE) STATION- [Reach For the Stars]

**Activities- Solar system observation & experiments**

### DEMONSTRATION PRODUCT STATION- [African Marketplace]

**Activities- Math reasoning through arts & crafts**

Immersed in a learning space with vibrant red, black, and green liberation colors, students began their sessions in this culturally aesthetic environment. Each day began with students taking turns as class leaders reciting the mantra "If I believe, I can achieve." These rituals were designed to counteract problems from eurocentric bias in the history of mathematics, math anxiety and underachievement, scarcity of math/science college majors, and omission about the African origins of math and science. At the end of the program sessions the program staff witnessed student transformation of self-esteem and math skill levels.

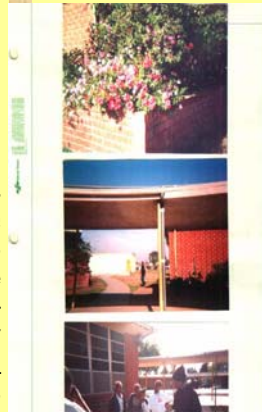
### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Students shared a variety of feelings.

Too much work ....

Liked playing Mankala

I want to lead the mantra today...



Learned a lot about our African ancestors and how they built the pyramids...

Liked going outside to do our science lessons...

Building pyramids with legos in the Marketplace was fun...

Too many problems to finish all of them...

Trip to the Planetarium and beach was exciting...

Enjoyed talking with the African-American CSUN college students at the Black House...

Liked riding the high wire bicycle at the California Science Center...

Glad it's time to go home...

"I miss Project PYRAMID."

## On the Move Across the City... Experiential Learning

Field trips were an important part of the curriculum and enhanced the academic experience. They brought another aspect to the "circle of learning" for the students. During the summer and fall sessions the students visited:

**California State University Northridge, (Office of Admissions and the Black House)** Summer session students were provided with an in- depth orientation regarding college admissions and toured the campus. African-American CSUN graduate students shared their pre-college and college experiences at the Black House (a facility provided through the Pan African Studies Department).

**Santa Monica Community College Planetarium,** gave the Summer session students an imaginary tour of the night sky and solar system. They viewed different images of the constellations and planets, such as the "drinking gourd," that enslaved African-Americans used in order to guide them to freedom. The summer session students also enjoyed the **Santa Monica Pier's** beach amusement park and spectacular ocean view.

**California Science Center** provided the Summer session students with a glimpse into the math timeline, which was a featured exhibit, noticeably omitted were African mathematicians. This exhibit created a real-life lesson in illustrating the neglect of African contributions. Summer and Fall session students viewed "Taking Flight," an exhibit of African-American pilots and aeronautics inventions which explored the wonder of flight, and reinforced scientific contributions of African people. Students also enjoyed the array of interactive games and toys, such as the high wire bicycle.

Project PYRAMID means

**P**-ropelling  
**Y**-oung and  
**R**-esponsible  
**A**-frican-American  
**M**-ath/Science Mastery  
**I**-ntellectual  
**D**-evelopment Program

**About the Curriculum...**Curricular lessons, program activities, teaching strategies, and assessment techniques were based on a fusion of affective and cognitive intervention strategies. Affective issues, which included such psycho-social elements as feelings of intimidation by the prospect of learning math were dealt with on an individual and contextual basis. We sought to mystify the experience of acquiring math skills, build a positive self-concept, and instill achievement motivation by studying biographic lessons of Africans and African-Americans in math and science. In addressing this affective dimension we worked to significantly influence learning readiness, and dismantle the mental blocks that interfere with grasping math concepts. Through the dialogic method and Afrocentric lessons, students became knowledgeable about the creativity and contributions of Africans and African-Americans in math and science. African roots of mathematics are fundamental, yet neglected in the math curriculum at the pre-college and college levels. This omission has influenced educational performance and aspirations of African-American students. A 1990 study by the Children's Defense Fund revealed that a Black male had 1 in 4,000 chances of receiving a Ph.D. in math/science. Even more glaring was that a Black female had merely 1 in 21,000 chances of attaining this degree!

Administering this program from the university level exposed middle school students to college professors through personal interaction. By empowering students and parents, we strove to cultivate long-range college preparatory achievement strategies— in order to increase the percentage of African-Americans competitively eligible for higher education and students pursuing math/science careers.

## A MESSAGE TO PARENTS & FAMILIES

FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE...

Project PYRAMID at Warren Lane

Project PYRAMID was an excellent program at Warren Lane. The program focused on enhancing math and science proficiency. The program used an Afro-centric academic curriculum to enrich students' academic skills while enriching their knowledge of African history. The students of Warren Lane flourished in this program. Parents, teachers, and students were excited about the activities in Project PYRAMID. The students experienced exciting field trips. Visiting California State University, Northridge was an excellent fieldtrip. Students were exposed to role models, and encouraged to plan ahead for a successful future.

Parents were encouraged to participate in all activities as co-teachers and nurturers at home. Student success is greater if support is offered at home and school. Parents, teachers, and students were upset to see the program end at Warren Lane. It was truly an asset to have experienced Project PYRAMID. The students were given a gift of caring, encouraging, teachers/role models in the program. Thank you for providing this program for our students.

*Mrs. Ugema Hosea-James - Assistant Principal*

*Mr. Reginald Birls - Principal*

PROJECT PYRAMID:

A COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAM

**Note to parents:** Project PYRAMID was an early outreach college preparatory program. *All students who received certificates or public recognition for participating in Project PYRAMID may cite this experience as relevant extracurricular credit towards prospective college admissions.* Congratulations to all students who participated, and a special commendation to all those that received awards!

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

### COMMENDATION TROPHY

Angela Holcomb Aysia Rowe

### SPRING SESSION AWARDS

### OVERALL OUTSTANDING STUDENTS

Angela Holcomb Aysia Rowe

### DEDICATION TO EXCELLENCE

Ashley Armstrong Aysia Rowe  
Angela Holcomb Ashley Shigg

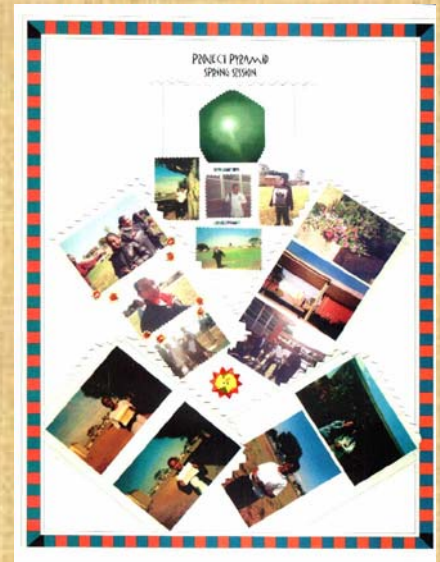
### MATH ACHIEVEMENT

Ashley Armstrong Desmoines Green  
Perry Davis Angela Holcomb  
Aysia Rowe

### HONORABLE MENTION

Alice Bridgewater Lauren Brown  
Shakari Clemons Shellony Hilton  
Zaakiyah Clemons

(Continued on page 4)



## What Parents Should Know About the "High School Exit Exam"

(\*The CA State Board of Education will vote to postpone this exam until 2006.)

**Q: What is the HSEE?**

**A:** Beginning in 2006 graduating seniors may have to pass it to graduate from high school.

**Q: Who will have to take it?**

**A:** All students in the 10th grade were to take it in 2002.

**Q: Must students with exceptional needs take it?**

**A:** Yes

**Q: How can parents and guardians help their children prepare for it?**

**A:** Here are a few pointers.

- The exam is controversial due to the high failure rate & inadequate preparation.
- Review all school work
- Monitor this debate
- Review HSEE sample test materials

**Q: What will the language arts section cover?**

**A:** The test consists of multiple choice and two essay questions.

**Q: What about the math?**

**A:** The math section addresses CA standards through Algebra I. It includes statistics, data analysis and probability, number sense, measurement and geometry, mathematical reasoning, and algebra.

## Parents as Partners With The "Partnership Act"

The "Partnership Act" is a California law that allows parents, grandparents, and guardians to take time off from work to participate in your child's school activities. This law allows you vacation time, personal leave, or compensatory time for your child's educational needs. You may take off up to 40 hours each year to participate in your child's school affairs. The employee chooses the options. Then the law instructs families to let their employers know in adequate time. If your employer has 25 or more employees, he/she does not have the right to refuse your request.

*How families can help children succeed in school...*

- Be informed about school policies
- Be involved with school programs
- Get to know your child's teachers
- Monitor homework assignments
- Support your child in extra-curricular activities
- Show high expectations for your child's performance

## Planning Ahead: It's Never Too Early To Think About College!

### Minimally Eligible Requirements

- 2 Years of History/Social Science
- 4 Years of English
- 3 Years of Math (starting with Algebra)
- 2 Years of Laboratory Science
- 2 Years of a Foreign Language
- 1 Year of Visual/Performing Arts
- 1 Year of College Prep Elective

### Competitively Eligible Requirements

- 3 Years of History / Social Science
- 4 Years of English (AP / Honors)
- 4 Years of Math (starting with Algebra)
- 3 Years of Laboratory Science
- 3-4 Years of a Foreign Language
- 1 Year of Visual/ Performing Arts
- 1 Year of College Prep Elective

**Project PYRAMID**

DuBois-Hamer Institute  
CA State University, Northridge  
18111 Nordhoff Street  
Northridge, CA 91330



**Meet the Project PYRAMID Staff**

- ❖ Dr. Rehema Gray - *Project Director*, Pan African Studies Department, California State University Northridge
  - ❖ Paula G. Leftwich- *Assistant Director*, is a former public school educator and administrator of various non-profit youth programs.
  - ❖ Robert Bivens III – Master Teacher is a math educator and computer scientist.
  - ❖ Mary Brown –*Science Tutor*, is presently attending Pasadena Community College, majoring in Geography/Science.
  - ❖ Muhammed Ali- *Math Tutor*, will complete his 2nd Master’s Degree in Business Administration in June from California State University Dominguez Hills
  - ❖ Prince Kobi - *Math Tutor*, is an experienced math teacher.
  - ❖ Duke Mbroh - *Math Tutor*, attends Glendale Community College, majoring in Computer Science Engineering.
- \*\*\*\*\*
- ❖ Samuel Augustine – *Research Assistant*, student in the Pan African Studies Department at California State University, Northridge
  - ❖ Dr. Adewole Umoja, *Program Evaluator*, doctorate in Public Administration
  - ❖ Astenu Brown, M.S. in Education, *Mathematics Curriculum Consultant*, UCLA Math Project
- Student Peer Tutor Contributors**
- ❖ Angela Holcomb, a superb Project PYRAMID participant, and an 8<sup>th</sup> grade honors student at Warren Lane School.
  - ❖ Aysia Rowe, an outstanding Project PYRAMID participant, and is also an 8<sup>th</sup> grade honors student at Warren Lane School.

**EDITORIAL STAFF**

Dr. Rehema Gray  
Paula G. Leftwich

**Honoring our African Legacy**

“There are a people, now forgotten, who discovered while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the arts and sciences.

A race of men, now ejected from society for their sable skin and frizzled hair, founded on the study of the laws of nature, civil and religious systems which still govern the universe.”

(Count Volney, *The Ruins of Empires*)

**SUMMER SESSION STUDENT AWARDS**

**HIGH ACHIEVEMENT**

Milo Brule Ashley Shigg

**MOST IMPROVED**

Theresa Champaine  
Curtisha Jackson LaVonce Wilson

**DEDICATION TO EXCELLENCE**

Milo Brule Alice Bridgewater  
Agustin Chapina Bashicka Champaine-Lee  
Ashley Shigg Alicia Sudduth

**MATH ACHIEVEMENT**

Jonnerica Rivers Ashley Shigg  
Chenelle Duntin (Honorable Mention)

**CREATIVITY IN THE MARKETPLACE**

Chenelle Duntin Kimberly Cornelius  
Kalila Timmons Travis Toca

**FALL SESSION STUDENT AWARDS**

**OVERALL OUTSTANDING STUDENT**

Lenette Bradley

**ACHIEVEMENT STATION**

**OUTSTANDING:** Lenette Bradley & Ariana Navarro

**Honorable Mention:** Brittnye Anderson

**TEACHING (MATH) STATION**

**OUTSTANDING:** Lenette Bradley & Ariana Navarro

**Honorable Mention:** Kiana Culpepper, Brittnye Anderson, Unique Porter, Curtis Tiggs

**ACADEMIC REINFORCEMENT (SCIENCE) STATION [Academic Excellence]**

Lenette Bradley, Ariana Navarro,  
Ralph Rudd, Ishmael Naylor

**DEMONSTRATION PRODUCT (MARKETPLACE) STATION [Creativity]**

Ariana Navarro, Ralph Rudd, Lenette Bradley, Ishmael Naylor, Myesha Cheatham, Brittnye Anderson, Unique Porter Alice Bridgewater

**LEADERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS**

Brittnye Anderson, Alice Bridgewater, Ashley Shigg, Ralph Rudd, Ashleigh Smalley, Larry Smith, Curtis Tiggs, Bryce Young



**PROJECT PYRAMID CULMINATION EVENT AND HIATUS...**

On December 18, 2002, the culminating event was held at Warren Lane School; its theme was *Celebrating and Honoring African/African-American Legacy in Math/Science*. Project Director, Dr. Gray, and Mr. Sirls, principal, welcomed parents with an review of program accomplishments. “Celebration in Song,” performed by the Warren Lane Choir rocked the audience! Afterwards we were treated to impressive powerpoint presentations by the Yoruba and Nubians, who shared lessons learned from the past that are valuable for improving today’s Black community! Following these presentations was a video with scenes of students studying in the “circle of learning,” and discussing their career plans. Guest Speaker/Actor Nick Latour, honored our Ancestors and Elders through storytelling and by describing the meaning of Kwanza. Special recognition was given to selected Project PYRAMID students for exceptional performance. All students received certificates and learning plans for college preparation. Family and friends viewed the displays of the students’ projects and work. We ended the culmination program with a Kwanza feast. Afterwards, to our sadness, Project PYRAMID took a hiatus. (We anticipate that this project will be funded again in the near future and will keep you informed.)

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

- Warren Lane School
- Mr Reginald Sirls – Principal
- Mrs Ugema Hosea-James – Assistant Principal
- Warren Lane Teachers & Staff
- Inglewood Unified School District