



AT-RISK STUDENTS

find a new beginning

BY N. SUSAN EMEAGWALI

ALL STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO ENROLL IN CHANA'S WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM AND CAN EARN CREDITS FOR EMPLOYMENT HOURS OR PARTICIPATE IN CAREER-BASED INTERNSHIPS.

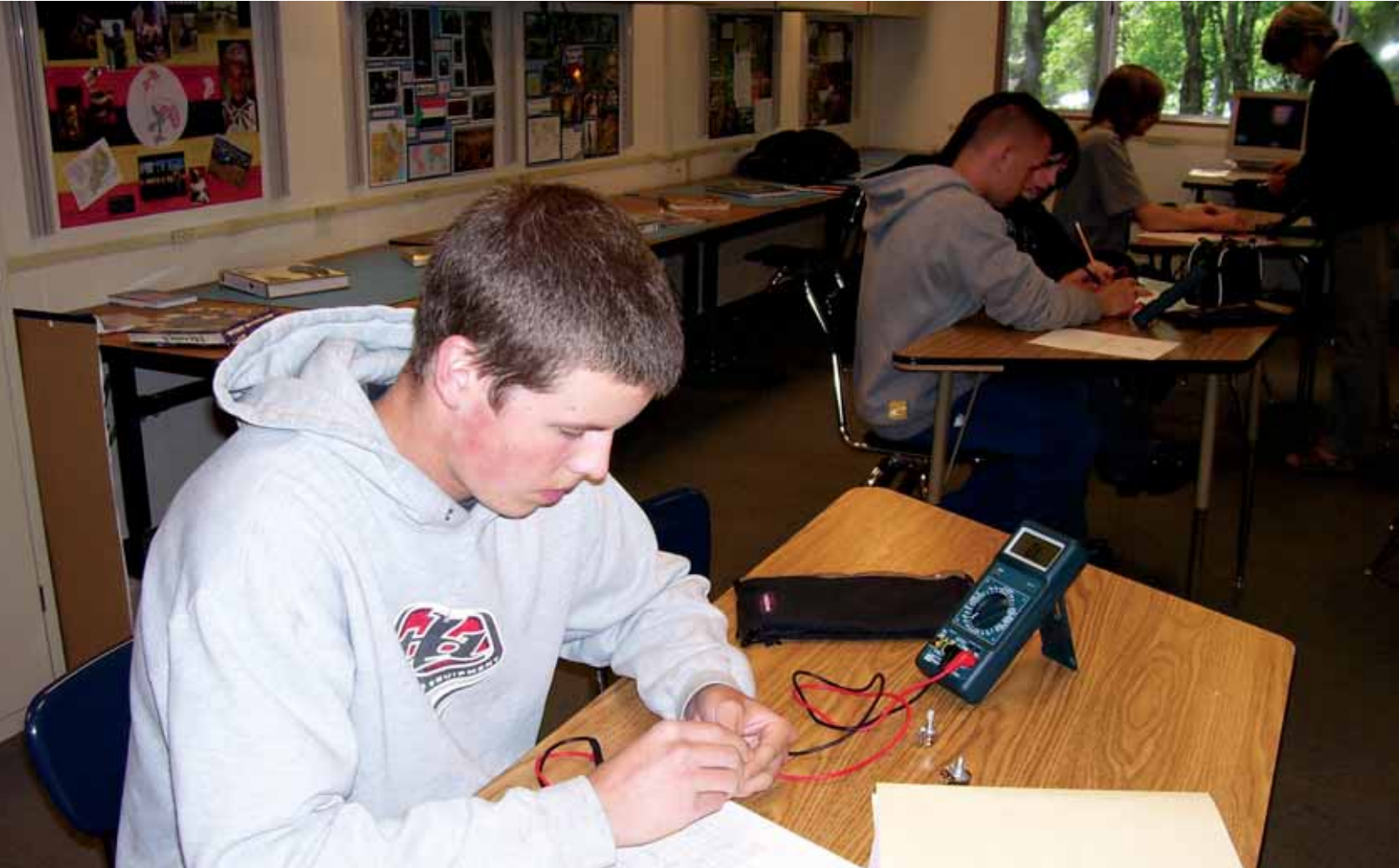
When 17-year-old Buck Brogdon came to Chana High, he was at a high risk of dropping out of his traditional high school. Regular school "wasn't working out for me," he said, because it was inflexible, he didn't get along with some of his teachers or fellow students, and his grades were less than stellar: Ds and Cs. Like the more than 200 students who attend Chana High, Brogdon got an opportunity to finish his secondary education in a smaller learning environment that embraces hands-on learning, one in which each student's strengths and weaknesses are known, and teachers work with their wards to give them an academic and technical education that will help them succeed post high school.

Brogdon said that teachers at Chana High are a lot more friendly, kind and straightforward, and the environment is more personable.

"It's more one-on-one instead of seeing three thousand students each day, which really does help," he said.

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Chana's Curriculum

Chana High School is a continuation school located approximately four miles north of downtown Auburn near Sacramento, California. In February 2007, it was designated a California Model Continuation High School campus by the California Department of Education. The school accommodates more than 200 students who were at risk of dropping out of their traditional high school. It offers a regular academic education program in all of the core areas required by the California Department of Education. It also offers career and technical education (CTE) programming funded by Perkins in computer technology, restaurant careers, electronics, child care and sign painting. The school maintains standards-based coursework and diversity in instructional methods, materials and activities so that students have the best chance of succeeding. Chana's 2005-2006 School Accountability Report Card (required by the state) notes, "Academic support and intervention is embedded in the Chana Master Schedule and is also scheduled on a one-on-one and small group basis for students who are struggling to meet all diploma requirements." All teachers meet the No Child Left Behind Act's highly qualified requirement, and the school district ensures that instructional staff members are given opportunities to receive up-to-date information and training on classroom methods and strategies to meet student performance targets. Since some of Chana's students are parents, the school offers a child development center so that the young children of teens can receive child care and enrichment services. It also serves as a learning center where students interested in pursuing a career in child care

get supervised hands-on learning experience.

CTE Programming

For students who elect to take classes in electronics, they get the intermediate skills necessary to gear them up for job opportunities in component manufacturing. Soldering, reading and drawing schematics are some of the skills they learn in addition to bread-boarding. After a semester students earn a certificate, and some take advanced classes to learn about surface mount soldering (components mounted on a circuit board). They use equipment from the community college—where they can attend classes to earn a certificate. Brogdon got interested in electronics at Chana High and asked his teacher about some of the pros and cons of pursuing a career in it. He worked with components, equipment and learned to solder. He said it gave him inspiration to learn and made him look forward to classes every day. "It's more hands-on. It's how I learn," he said. Brogdon was able to put all he had into his studies, and if he didn't understand something he didn't hesitate to ask what he was doing wrong and how he could fix it. (He freely admits that this was not his way of thinking at his other schools.)

Computer technology students work on equipment by tearing them down, troubleshooting and replacing peripherals. There is also a computer software component taught in addition to the basics of computer repair.

Chana's fully licensed child care development center provides a place for teen mothers' children, and students in that program work to get certification as child care assistants. After completing

it they are then ready to go on to community college to get further credentials.

The sign-painting program has a graphic arts focus and gives students an opportunity to work on signs for the community. Kathleen Sutphen, Chana High's principal, said, "Our intent is to have them move on to graphic arts at the community college."

In all five programs, students progress from entry-level CTE coursework to more advanced courses while they take academics. For students intending to pursue postsecondary education (CTE or otherwise), the school has a scholarship program funded by local endowments and organizations such as The Lions Club, and the school helps them apply for financial aid. All students are able to enroll in the school's work experience program and can earn credits for employment hours or participate in career-based internships. FFA and the 'S' (Soroptimist) Club are branched on campus for students to be actively and positively engaged in the community. In addition, students have access to a counseling program for issues ranging from crisis counseling to anger management, from parenting to substance abuse.

A Strong and Understanding School Community

Principal Sutphen understands the challenges her students face. She put herself through college working in a factory stuffing components into boards; she even got certified in soldering. She said she made more money doing that than she ever would have working in the mall. So when in the late '80s she decided to pursue a graduate degree and needed to supplement her income to take care of her family, she went back to her roots in the factory. (She was making triple minimum wage and she went back to stuffing boards after years of professional work). When Sutphen arrived at Chana High, the electronics program was already in place. But because of her experiences in the field she was drawn to making that program as strong as it can be—which would not have been possible without Perkins.

"I'm so happy that my district is equitable in sharing that funding and they recognize that our at-risk students need that career and technical training."

Sutphen notes that Chana High has a good graduation rate for a school of its nature. In the 2005-2006 school year, 100 percent of students were on track to graduate. This is due in no small part to the fact that teachers know each student by name, have identified their strengths and weaknesses, and work with them to make a postsecondary plan—even if that plan is to go straight to work. This helps them to understand their choices today and how it affects their future, even if they put off going to college right away in favor of employment. When students tell her, "you wouldn't know about my life," she has a response that takes them all by surprise: She worked in a factory, went to community college, flunked out because she had no guidance or family support, and knows what many of them are going through. To that end she works to provide students with the structure and support they need, and opportunities to go on to college. The school works with Sierra Community College in Rockland; a liaison from the college is based on campus giving presentations to



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10th-, 11th- and 12th- graders a few times a year.

For Brogdon it was easier being in an environment where he and his contemporaries share the same history, past and problems.

"You can have a better relationship with them because they've gone through the same stuff," he said. He added that in Chana High's environment he was able to focus and mature a lot compared to his other schools. When he graduated last June, Brogdon planned to enroll in a postsecondary school to pursue an associate or bachelor's degree in electronics. Kathy Brenner, his electronics teacher, concurs that Chana High gives many students a new environment in which they can thrive.

"A lot of them make really good progress here," she said. "because we are small and we accept their differences, and I think we give them a clean slate." **T**