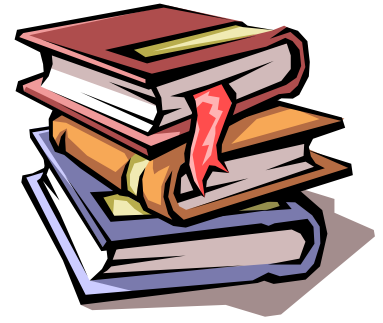




Edna Brewer Middle School
Oakland Unified School District
3478 13th Ave.
Oakland, CA 94610
Principal: Jane Searight
Vice Principal: Thomas Schao
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2 June, 2002

To whom it may concern:

In May of 2002, I took nine of my students to Vida Verde for an overnight trip. We spent a day and a night at Vida Verde, exploring the farm, and then traveled to the beach for a second day of activities. Despite the many obstacles that stood to detract from our visit, we experienced a very full and productive two days. Shawn and Laura, in connection to the larger vision of the farm, share a mission critical to the education of urban youth. Their project forms an invaluable link between “city kids,” particularly in lower income neighborhoods, and the natural world. If we are to strike some balance in this world, among different kinds of people, and between people and the land they inhabit and benefit from, our children must have experiences similar to those afforded by Vida Verde.

Despite their proximity to the ocean, to red wood forests, to marshes and farms, many children in Oakland know only the streets. They are smart about slang and gangs and the latest records and movies. They have a wealth of knowledge that gets them by in their specific neighborhoods. And they are incredibly disenfranchised. We often discuss disenfranchisement in terms of race, class and gender, and these elements are certainly present. From this teacher’s perspective, however, the biggest disenfranchisement is in terms of choice. My students know little of what this world has to offer in terms of jobs, travel, and physical environment. Their aspirations crippled by a lack of experience and decision-making skills, my students only recognize themselves, and their potential, in a limited range of environments. Vida Verde is one viable and accessible answer to this profound problem.

If we are to tap the non-material wealth lying dormant in so many children, students suffocating under the elements of poverty and cultural bias, we must support efforts to expand their world. The world, and their brains and hearts, must stretch to include the “foreign” - land, people, plants, animals and experiences, resources made distant by true distance or issues of access. As we rapidly outgrow national borders, closed economies and homogenous cultures, it becomes imperative to teach a more global fluency. This must begin at home, and it must hinge on a selflessness that requires us to go outside – outside our homes, outside our cities, and outside ourselves. In the bay area, Vida Verde is one such beginning. Vida Verde challenged the obvious and hidden limitations that keep my kids comfortable and stagnant. It was a life affirming and altering experience for me, for them, and for us as a class. We recommend Vida Verde with sincerity, in the hope that it will win wide and generous support.

Sincerely,

Jessica Blundell

Resource Specialist, Edna Brewer Middle School, OUSD