

# Breakthrough Times

**Mission: 1. To offer a challenging, tuition-free academic enrichment program to highly motivated, under-resourced middle school students from Saint Paul Public Schools, preparing them for rigorous high school programs and college.**  
**2. To attract a diverse group of talented young people to careers in education.**



## Sweet Dreams Bring Restless Nights

by Jeff Ochs

As the director of Breakthrough Saint Paul, I often find myself assigning reflective writing to our students and teachers. However, it has been a while since I have been on the receiving end of such an assignment. So it took me by surprise when at the national Breakthrough conference in November all of the Breakthrough directors were asked to write a journal about what keeps them up at night.

This question immediately resonated with me; restless nights have always been a part of my life. As a kid, it was anxiety before a big test or other childhood fears that usually kept me clutching the blanket at night. However, when reflecting on the past two unbelievable years with BSP, I recognize that now it is anticipation for what the future holds that most often keeps me awake. In other words, nightmares don't keep me up at night; all of my dreams for Breakthrough do.

And these dreams are already coming true. One year into Breakthrough Saint Paul's existence, we have achieved so much. After an adventurous start-up year, we welcomed our first class of 28 rising 7th graders to our program last summer.

These stellar students attended our six-week program 98% of the time, taking challenging enrichment classes in science, math, English, and social studies and doing 1□ hours of homework each night. Through their strong performance in class and All School Meeting, creativity during Explorations, and energy during YO Time, they have set the standard for all BSP students to come.

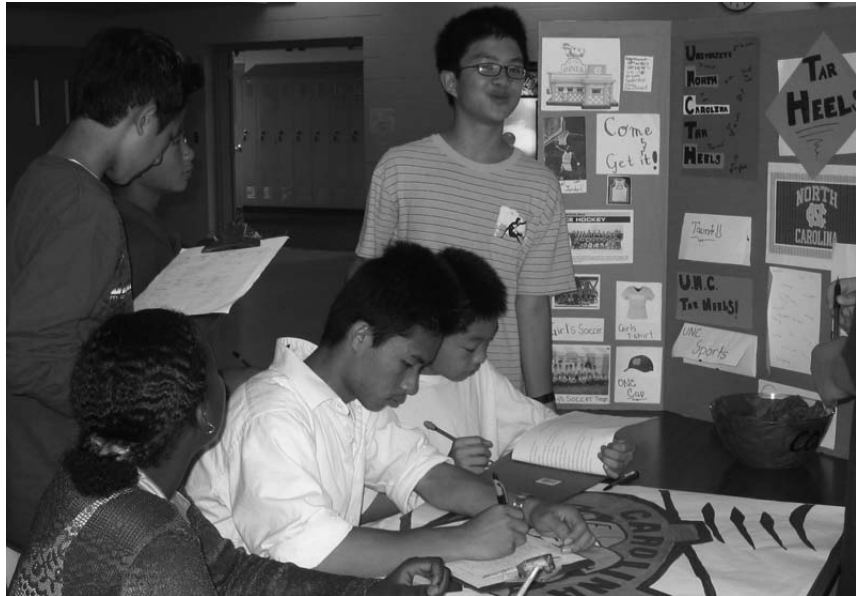
Last summer also saw our first group of aspiring teachers. These eight diverse, talented high school and college students gave everything they could to our students for nine challenging weeks. Together we passed milestone after milestone: our first family conferences, our first Visitors Days, our first end-of-summer Celebration. Each teacher took on many responsibilities in addition to classroom teaching for the first time. Daniel Gibson observed, "On any given day, I am a science teacher, a theatre teacher, a librarian, an advisor, an improv actor, a role model, and countless other things to 28 students." Their hard work captured the attention of many in the education community and set a strong precedent for the future.

*Sweet Dreams* continued on page 2

## **Student Spotlight: Tho Bui**

Tho Bui, a Breakthrough 7th grader at Washington Middle School, is a finalist for the national "Young Scholars" scholarship from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. This scholarship identifies high-achieving youth with financial need and provides them with significant individualized educational opportunities and support throughout high school that will enable them to fully develop their talents and abilities.

Under the guidance of BSP staff member Carl Phillips, Tho worked closely with his family and his current school teachers to assemble a 30 page application with multiple essays. Final decisions will be made in October 2006. Each year, the scholarship is awarded to 45 students nationwide chosen from a pool of over 1,000 candidates. Congratulations, Tho! We are pulling for you!



**"UNC Say What, What What!" Tho Bui presents about the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to BSP's prospective college students at a mock college fair at Breakthrough last summer.**

For more information on the Young Scholars program, visit [www.jackkentcooke.org](http://www.jackkentcooke.org).

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## **Sweet Dreams, continued from page 1**

The success of the summer continued into our first school year program. On 12 Saturday mornings this year, when most of their peers were fast asleep, BSP students and teachers were back at it for more enrichment courses. While we experimented to find the best new routine, BSP students and teachers stretched their minds and strengthened their relationships. One highlight from the school year program was "Winter Breakthrough!" which had students learning algebra through a traditional Jewish dreidel game as well as geometry and budgeting through gingerbread house making.

The countless achievements of the past year haven't abated my dreams for BSP, and I still often arise in the middle of the night just to write down an idea. This year, we are welcoming our second class of students (bringing our total to 64), and we will double our summer faculty to 16. We also have hired two new year-round staff members. Our major priorities for the next year include strategic planning, developing a high school component to BSP, and connecting BSP students to financial resources for college. The success of Breakthrough Saint Paul and our sister program, LearningWorks at Blake, also has people talking about the future potential of the Breakthrough model elsewhere in the Twin Cities.

After teaching with BSP last summer, Dana Munoz reflected saying, "I have learned that if the bar is set high enough, kids will work hard to meet expectations...And I have learned that you must always work to your highest potential if you expect others to follow your lead." Here Dana has articulated what I believe is the critical key to education, modeling high expectations. If we expect our students and teachers to internalize a standard of excellence, we as an organization must model that same standard at every level.

This year, as we begin to explore together all of the future possibilities for Breakthrough Saint Paul, I encourage you to keep a notebook and pen on your nightstand. If your dreams for our community are as numerous and as sweet as mine, you may need them.

Sweet dreams, BSP.

## **Making My Map: Reflections of a First-Year Breakthrough Teacher** by Anna Dibley

On our last day of College Bound, the academic class that I taught during the Breakthrough School Year Program, the assignment I gave students was to draw a map to college. Students used the knowledge they had gained over the year to chart a course through the treacherous maze of high school, the SAT's, and college applications. Paths navigated around obstacles and split in different directions, skirting pitfalls that could have stood in the way of success. As I looked at maps that ended at colleges and universities, at "my perfect job," and at simply "happiness," I thought about the twists and turns my own path had taken in the past year.

I graduated this spring from the University of Minnesota, but a year ago I was eagerly anticipating my first summer as a teacher at Breakthrough Saint Paul. I had always thought that I wanted to be a teacher, but nothing prepared me for what it was like the first time I stepped into my own classroom. I never expected that being a teacher would be the biggest learning experience of my life.

What I learned that summer caused me to take a path on my own map that I never expected. Somewhere in between skits about César Chávez and songs by Bob Dylan, between rewriting Shakespeare and making crêpes, sometime after the first "Word of the Day" but before Celebration, I found a power that I never knew I had.

Teaching at Breakthrough empowered me by making me a very real and tangible part of a solution to a problem that initially seemed too big to take on. Like college to a middle school student, solving the issues of educational inequity seemed far away from where I stood. Reaching the goal of providing great educational opportunities to every student was, like college, a great goal. It was one that I cared deeply about, but I felt as if the idea was too big to tackle. Besides, I didn't even know where to start. What could I do today to make that dream a reality?

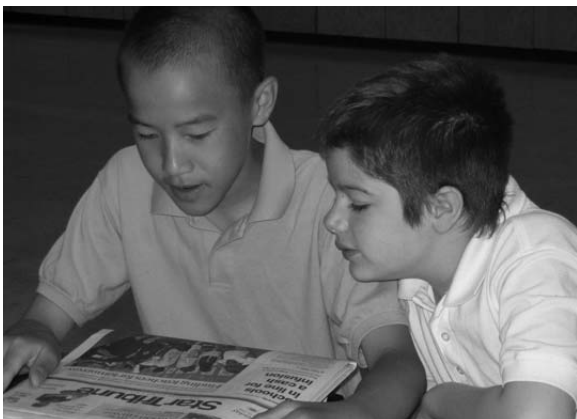


**First-year teacher Anna Dibley with her mentor, John Wells, a social studies teacher at Battle Creek Middle School in Saint Paul.**

Just like the maps to college allowed my students to see that every little step—like taking challenge classes and not being embarrassed to be the smart kid in class—was one step closer to college, Breakthrough showed me that I could make progress towards a big goal by taking small steps every day.

During wrap-up week at the end of last summer, a recruiter from Teach For America came to talk to the Breakthrough faculty. Teach For America is an organization that recruits and trains college senior and recent undergraduates to teach for two years in the nation's most underserved school districts. Listening to the goals and the successes of the organization, I knew that it could be the next turn on my map. After an intense application process, I was one of approximately 1,700 new Corps Members accepted from across the country into the program, and I am now looking forward to teaching secondary social studies in South Dakota for two years in what is sure to be a challenging setting.

As I continue to move along my path, I am confident that my experiences at BSP have prepared me to face whatever new challenges greet me along the way with perseverance and enthusiasm. I look forward to staying connected with Breakthrough Saint Paul and to watching as the organization and all of its participants continue to grow in the years ahead.



### **Breakthrough Makes News**

Over the course of the last year, the special efforts of our students and aspiring teachers definitely caught the attention of many in our community. Here is some of the major media coverage we received!

- ◆ Two front page articles with the "Star Tribune"
- ◆ Two articles with the "Pioneer Press"
- ◆ Article in "Minnesota Parent"
- ◆ Story on KARE 11's 5:00 news
- ◆ WCCO Radio's Pat Miles interviewed Jeff Ochs and Anna Dibley

## **MPA Class of 2005 Starts BSP Library**

As part of their graduation gift to the school, the Mounds Park Academy class of 2005 donated \$500 to Breakthrough Saint Paul to start a collection of books to be used by BSP teachers and students in class and at home.

In presenting the gift, MPA senior Juliet Dana noted, "These kids are extremely bright and thirst for knowledge. As we thought about what our teachers [at MPA] have taught us about giving back to our communities, making a difference in the world, and living as leaders, as well as the love of books and learning we have cultivated, we thought the best place to contribute was to the Breakthrough library."

Due to the contributions of the class of 2005, as well as the generosity of the Red Balloon Bookshop, BSP now has over 325 books in its library. Teachers draw on these resources for use in class, and students can borrow them to read at home.

## **Breakthrough Saint Paul: By the Numbers**

### **Students**

28 - Number of 7th grade students who started with BSP last summer and completed the entire first year program.

96 - Percentage of Breakthrough seventh grade students who have enrolled in and passed at least one challenge course this school year.

100 - Percentage of Breakthrough seventh grade students who are returning for their second year at Breakthrough.

67 - Number of current SPPS sixth graders who completed the rigorous application to join Breakthrough Saint Paul's second class this year.

40 - Number of SPPS sixth graders selected to join BSP this summer.

68 - Total number of SPPS students participating in BSP this upcoming year.

83 - Percentage of BSP students who identify as students of color.

### **Teachers**

13 - Number of high school and college students who participated as aspiring teachers with BSP during the first year of the program.

41 - Number of years cumulative teaching experience from first-year Breakthrough mentor teachers.

16 - Number of aspiring teachers joining Breakthrough this summer.

13; 40 - Percentage of teachers nationwide who are of color; percentage of students nationwide who are of color.

56 - Percentage of this summer's aspiring teachers who are of color.

110 - Number of applicants for this summer's 16 aspiring teacher internship positions.

8 - Breakthrough's rank in "The Princeton Review's" Top 10 College Internships national listing in 2003.



**On the last day of BSP, the Wild Rumpus Book Store brought its horse-drawn book wagon to campus. Students learned about the importance of literacy through the story of the Gypsies in Europe.**



**Sai Lee, Chue Thao, and Tho Bui each picked out a book for the BSP library, purchased with money donated by MPA class of 2005. The students each wrote a small message inside their book.**

## **Breakthrough Saint Paul Students**

### **Class of 2007**

Cotez Adams  
Tho Bui  
Elizabeth Campbell  
Jasmine Clark  
Dedrain Davis  
Benson Her  
Ann Kuria  
Nicole LaFontaine  
Pa Lee  
Pai Lee  
Sai Lee  
Myint Maung  
Darian Mero  
Annie Moua  
DuVoe Moua  
Gregory Nelson  
Kalina Nelson-Pfeiffer  
Aung Oo  
Richard Reid  
Shawneese Ross  
Chue Thao  
Edwin Togar  
Mai Yang Xiong  
Anny Vang  
Kalea Vang  
Kong Vang  
Nikolas Ybarra

### **Class of 2008**

Faith Amaro  
Kyle Brabant  
Mariah Dubose  
Maryanne Ejiofor  
Angel Garcia  
Pa Tao Her  
Toua Her  
Amoses Holton  
Alyssa Hoppe  
Malcolm Jackson  
Darius Johnson  
Lana Lee  
Tou Lor  
James Lynch  
David McClain  
Genevieve McDaniel  
Carissa Mero  
Bonnie Miller  
Mariana Morgan-Sawyer  
Raven Pillmann  
Denise Quintanilla  
Tyler Redden  
Ashley Roelofs  
D'Angelo Stephens  
Ghenet Tekle  
Andy Thao  
Khou Thao

Zoua Thao  
Francis Thompson  
Melissa Vang  
Tao Vang  
Toucheng Vang  
Jennifer Waweru  
Laura Williamson  
Damionna Willis  
Keng Xiong  
Mai Vue Xiong  
Plia Xiong  
Mai Tong Yang  
Panya Yang



Breakthrough seventh grader Benson Her shows his breakdancing moves at a daily All School Meeting.



At right, Breakthrough student Kong Vang leads "Say What?!" public speaking students in a toast to the many accomplishments of Breakthrough students and teachers at the end-of-summer Celebration.

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## **Have You Heard?**

- ◆ Breakthrough parent Faith Pfeiffer, helped BSP to receive a \$1,000 grant from the TCF Foundation. As an employee at TCF, Faith recognized the impact that BSP had on her daughter, Kalina, after her experience last summer and found a great way to give back. "Kalina has been able to express herself more," said Faith, "She is happy to return, and she looks forward to becoming a teacher in the program." Thank you, Faith!
- ◆ Three parents of returning Breakthrough students—Adrian Pendelton, Faith Pfeiffer, and Maria Hernandez—listed themselves as parent references on this year's student application. By doing so, they made themselves available to interested families who had questions about the program. Thank you!
- ◆ Mounds Park Academy Head of School Michael Downs was recognized this spring for his leadership role in developing Breakthrough Saint Paul in partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools. He was one of twenty-three administrators from independent schools across the country to receive the prestigious Klingenstein Leadership Award for actively promoting diversity, committing to service learning, and providing community leadership through hosting Breakthrough programs. Previous award recipients include influential educators Ted and Nancy Sizer, Howard Gardner, and Maxine Greene.

## **Breakthrough Saint Paul Donors**

In addition to our institutional partners, Mounds Park Academy and Saint Paul Public Schools, Breakthrough Saint Paul relies on the financial support of generous corporations, foundations, and individuals. Many thanks as well to all who volunteer their time and talent for the program!

### **Foundations and Corporations**

3M  
Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation  
Kavaney and Associates, Ltd.  
McNeely Foundation  
The Medtronic Foundation  
St. Paul Travelers Foundation  
Target East Saint Paul  
TCF Foundation

### **Individuals**

Elaine Anderson  
Jeffrey Bores & Michael Hawkins  
Joan Cady-Brownstein  
Randy Comfort  
Amie DeHarpporte & Jason Zimmerman  
Michael Dole & Carol Parry  
Bette Erickson  
Audrey Stockin Eyler  
John Eyler  
Susie & Leslie Fishman  
Erica & Greg Fortescue  
Pam Kadrlik & Carla Moos

Pat & Skip Kiland  
Solveig & Joe Lawrence  
Paula LeCocq  
Ellen McVeigh & John Giudicessi  
N. Nancy Misra  
James & Leslee Nestingen  
Phil & Sheila Ochs  
Anne & Curt Petersen  
Nancy Jacobs & Mark Sandercott  
Coleen Schwartz  
Jody Rohweller  
Aaron Rupert  
Mike Vergin  
Mounds Park Academy - Class of 2005

### **In-Kind**

ProGroup, Inc.  
Brave New Institute  
Comedy Sportz Twin Cities  
Red Balloon Bookshop  
Davanni's East Saint Paul



Check it out – on a field trip to Lake Phalen with his Bird Watching elective, Breakthrough student Benson Her, a 7th grader at Hazel Park Junior High, points out a species to Breakthrough teacher Kieran Palmer-Klein, a Macalester College biology major who is joining Teach For America in Chicago this upcoming year.

### **Name the Newsletter!**

As a start-up organization, Breakthrough Saint Paul offers its participants many opportunities to impact the program for the long-term. As part of this inaugural issue, we would like to enlist your help in naming the Breakthrough newsletter. Please email your ideas and any other feedback to Jeff Ochs at [jochs@moundsparkacademy.org](mailto:jochs@moundsparkacademy.org).