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## > ACOE – A natural place for creative ideas to develop and mature

by Superintendent Sheila Jordan

Over the last several years, public education has experienced a dramatic shift in not only the content of what's taught in classrooms, but also in how it's taught. A narrowing of the curriculum was but one of the unintended consequences of No Child Left Behind.



In recent years, educators have worked to reform teaching and learning to better educate students, particularly those who have been underserved, and to prepare them for college, career, and community. Efforts to enrich the curriculum and make it relevant to today's economy have included an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) skills. The Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) extends this call to include the application of STEM skills through the arts and service learning (STE(A)M).

**▲ We need to educate our students for the jobs of tomorrow, not of the past, says Superintendent Jordan.**

ACOE's STE(A)M Center will bring together a mix of K-12 science and math subject matter experts, higher education faculty and researchers, as well as scientists and industry professionals to promote the effective integration of science, technology engineering and math in public schools throughout the region.

The Center aims to influence academic standard reform across the state and to promote integrated alternative assessments that include student demonstration of learning.

ACOE is a natural place for these creative ideas to develop and mature. We're positioned squarely within a region with growing opportunities in the areas of bio-science and green technology development. As a county office of education, we serve as an intermediary between the state and local districts – an umbrella organization that can bridge educational and community resources to pilot new ideas and ensure that they are rigorous and standards-based. It's simply not enough to bring educators from the various disciplines into one place. An effective strategy



must include a new approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes creative collaboration and reflection. The results of this can be seen in our emerging work with the Teacher Action Research Institute and our new STE(A)M Center.

Integrated, hands-on learning provides a great opportunity for partnership between schools and business. At ACOE, we are working to develop innovative and effective curriculum, to train teachers, and to build collaborative professional teaching networks. Business professionals can have a profound effect both in the classroom and also by providing resources and support to teachers outside of the classroom. I'm excited by our prospects working with community and education minded local businesses like Pandora and Pixar. We look to grow these partnerships and build others in the future.

We need to educate our students for the jobs of tomorrow, not of the past. The best way to instill these qualities is through rich, integrated curriculum that includes hands-on experimentation. This strategy engages student creativity and allows students to advance their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills by testing ideas through experimentation or demonstrating understanding through visual or performance art. Together in partnership with business, we can do much to change the way students learn and are prepared for the world of work and community leadership. ■

*Sheila Jordan is the Alameda County Superintendent of Schools.*