

# SAYS

## SACRAMENTO AREA YOUTH SPEAKS



FINAL IMPACT REPORT 2014–2015

SAYS

## ABOUT SAYS

Founded in 2009 at UC Davis, Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS) strives to change the world through education and empowerment. Building on a foundation of critical literacy and spoken word performance poetry, SAYS breaks the chains of underachievement by elevating the voices and power of young people as authors of their own lives and agents of change.

## ABOUT THE COVER

**LEFT** Sacramento SAYS student Shomari “Issa” Jackson took first place in the MC Olympic competition at the 2015 Brave New Voices Festival. Top youth emcees represent their cities and compete alongside local emcees for the honor of being crowned champion. We are extremely proud of Issa’s lyrical ability to captivate and move crowds with his words.

**MIDDLE** SAYS Poet-Mentor Educator Andreas “Dre-T” Tillman performing at the opening ceremony for Brave New Voices International Poetry Festival 2015, Atlanta, Georgia.

**RIGHT** 2015 SAYS Slam Team members Natachi Mez, Kali Ausselet, Danielle Scales and Keis Stroupe performing a group piece in the Brave New Voices Festival semifinals. The seven-member team, which included a middle school student for the first time, is now recognized among the top 20 youth poetry-slam teams in the world.

## LIST OF SCHOOLS SERVED:

American Legion High School	Innovations Continuation High School
C.K. McClatchy High School	Leataata Floyd Elementary
Einstein Middle School	Natomas High School
Grant High School	John F. Kennedy High School
Grant High School ARTS Academy	Sacramento Charter High School
Grant High School Sports Health Academy	Sparks High School
Inderkum High School	Vaughn Middle School
	Wooster High School

## SAYS SERVICES PROVIDED IN 2014-2015

## NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED

Summit 2015	850
In-class residency program	1,000
After-school writing support	500
School-wide assemblies	5,000
March Madness Poetry Slam Competition	350

- ⊕ More than **5,000** students served
- ⊕ More than **1,400** hours of SAYS programming
- ⊕ **15** school districts served

## SNAPSHOT OF WHAT SAYS OFFERS

- Consultation** on SAYS curriculum and culturally relevant instruction
- Designing and producing** schoolwide assemblies and spoken word poetry events on/off campus
- Delivery** of instruction and support through the SAYS classroom residency program
- Providing** after-school writing support to students
- Training** in effective practices to engage at-risk and high-risk students, overall strategies to create student-centered learning environments
- Aligning** curriculum to meet the goals of the Common Core State Standards

We were once the very students  
we are now reaching and teaching.

## **PARTNERSHIPS WITH A PURPOSE**

SAYS creates innovative partnerships with teachers, after-school care providers and trained poet-mentor educators to facilitate student-centered learning.

Research on SAYS shows that the program's approach of encouraging students to write from personal experience improves literacy skills, creates more positive interactions between students and teachers, helps students take ownership of their education and improves the way they see themselves.

**“SAYS is a life-changing program”**

*–District administrator, Sacramento City Unified School District*

## **SAYS TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In 2015, SAYS provided ongoing professional development trainings for the California Teachers Association, the Algebra Success Academy, the University of California Office of the President Gear-Up Program (Central Valley and Bay Area) and various school districts throughout California.

## **SAYS POET-MENTOR EDUCATORS**

SAYS poet-mentor educators (PMEs) are accomplished performance poets, spoken-word artists and educators who have diverse economic, social and educational backgrounds. They are experienced writers, performers, facilitators and public speakers.

Poet-mentor educators are trained and seasoned mentors who have an innate ability to reach and teach urban youth.

As passionate educators, PMEs possess a deep commitment to eliminating the educational achievement gap and empowering youth to understand their capacity to change personal, community and social conditions.

**“SAYS is the glue that holds learning together.”**

*–Teacher, Twin Rivers Unified School District*



▲ Participants at the 2014 SAYS Summit perform their poetry in front of a live audience.

We give our students a journal, microphone, stage and audience, and recognize their voices as authentic and valued. At schools where SAYS has been implemented, students become more confident and comfortable with writing, and their overall academic performance improves significantly.

## HIGHLIGHTED SAYS SCHOOL SITES

### LEATAATA FLOYD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SAYS has facilitated a program at Leataata Floyd Elementary School for the past three years. According to Poet-Mentor Educator Laura “Mama Laura” Cook, the SAYS residency at Leataata Floyd had a slow start. This was, in part, due to the sixth-grade class at Floyd not having a permanent and consistent teacher for the first few months of the school year. After some intense communication, the in-class residency was scheduled for Tuesdays, fourth period. Once the residency was under way, Mama Laura noticed the students had already internalized a distrust of unfamiliar educators because of the inconsistent presence of substitute teachers.

“Being the main source of stability for a class I only visit once a week, for an hour each visit, was a very new experience. These babies were literally begging for stability. Almost every week they were asking me to be their teacher for the rest of the year.

“They finally got a steady teacher, Mr. Sam, and he did a pretty good job of bringing care and structure. Once on board, he was a very accommodating partner to work alongside. It was great when he, too, would chime in on topics dialogued in workshops. There were even a few folks who would regularly come to sit in when it was SAYS time, and they added to the richness of exchange and engagement transpiring in class.”

### AMERICAN LEGION CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOL

In its fifth SAYS programmatic year, American Legion is a base for some of the most engaged, thought-provoking and truthful students.

This year a separate SAYS class was created during the school day that extended into after-school hours. This specialized class created an opportunity for American Legion students who wanted to dive deep into social justice education, critical thinking, writing and, importantly, spoken-word poetry and hip-hop.

Led by Patrice Hill, the class comprised 25 students of various grade levels and ethnicities who collectively engaged in innovative learning.

“Ultimately what ensued was a group of students who were not afraid to speak up and critically question their education as well as engage in analytical discussions and do intense writing about societal events that have had a direct effect on

them. They were also able to define themselves in a world that doesn’t necessarily recognize youth voices as valuable contributors to societal change.”

*I am from struggle, I am from less opportunity,  
I am from overcoming.  
I am from a home that never felt like home; a home of chaos,  
and constant battles,  
I am from a frequent search for a way out.  
In my 19 years I have learned that blood does not make family, and  
Loyalty does not come in the shape of an inner circle.  
I am from poverty, oppression and depression.  
My circumstances have only made me strong, willing  
and determined.  
My trials have made me brave, overachieving and unbreakable.  
I come from nothing but having nothing made me.  
Humble, caring and thoughtful of the less fortunate.  
I come from the hood, which made me careful, wise  
and understanding.  
I come from nothing but nothing gave me hope,  
Nothing made me something.  
-Student, American Legion High School*

### EINSTEIN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Einstein was one of the few school sites that held an on-site preliminary poetry slam for the SAYS March Madness Slam season. This unique partnership forged a way for SAYS to reach and teach programming for close to 100 students. Students from Einstein participated, with over 10 students moving on to the semifinals and five students making it to the SAYS Slam Finals. We are proud to say, for the first time in SAYS Slam history, a middle school student joined the 2015 Brave New Voices SAYS Slam Team!

Because of the campus administration’s generous support and commitment to fostering safe spaces for SAYS during the school day and after school, SAYS facilitated two eighth-grade English Language Arts in-class residencies for the duration of the school year, as well as after-school programming. Program Coordinator Patrice Hill served as the poet-mentor for the in-class residencies, while Poet-Mentor Andre “Dre-T” Tillman facilitated after school.

## NATOMAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

SAYS partnered for the first time with Natomas Unified School District (NUSD) to provide in-school programming during the 2014-2015 school year. The array of services SAYS provided included lunchtime open mics, school assemblies, workshops at the Family Empowerment Summits and the HOPE Academy in-class residencies at Inderkum and Natomas High Schools.

Students in the HOPE Academy are placed in gender-specific classes to receive increased mentorship and one-on-one attention from educators who are deeply familiar with their home and life experiences and who relate to them on a cultural and community level.

Poet-Mentor Educator Andreas “Dre-T” Tillman Jr. facilitated the all-male HOPE Academy class at Inderkum and Natomas High Schools. The academy focused on increasing literacy and writing as well as building character, defining and establishing what brotherhood and unity among young boys and men of color looks like. “I focused my intention on being the mentor I never had in high school,” said Dre-T. “Respect for one another continued to grow the more they saw how honest, transparent and true I’ve been to them.”

The outcome was increased attendance and engagement in the classroom, improved writing skills, development of critical thinking skills, more defined leadership skills and a classroom milieu transformed from boundaries to a unified brotherhood.

Poet-Mentor Educator Jennifer Vargas led 30 or so young girls in the all-female HOPE academy at Natomas High. “The young women in the class kept me on my toes,” said Vargas, “and engaged in critical discussions around beauty standards, identity, reality and being a young women in a society dominated by men.” The academy resulted in more established and confident writers and students more comfortable with public speaking.



▲ Participants show their skills during the MC Battle at the 2014 SAYS Summit.



▲ At the 2014 SAYS Summit, students were able to represent and share their culture and community.

THIRSTY  
FOR  
KNOWLEDGE

## STUDENT WRITING FROM NATOMAS

At the end of my day I wonder, what really matters to me?  
The values of my day should be based on laughter and happiness.  
It always matters whether I'm truly happy or wearing a facade.  
I want to enjoy everyday of my life, and remember what made  
them such great days.  
I always base how amazing my day is by comparing it to  
a bad day.  
I know that my good days will always outweigh my bad day and  
therefore my days are valuable.  
I remember I was told, what will matter is not what you bought,  
but what you built, not what you got, but what you gave.  
What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage,  
and encouragement of others. What will matter is not  
competence, but character.  
These words show that a day is not complete unless you've done  
something for someone else. By helping others to be happy,  
in a way I help myself.  
It's nice to be able to do something others can appreciate.  
-Sharle Samuel, Natomas High School

Life is hard but it will be okay  
All I'm trying to do is see a brighter day  
Making sure I'm staying away from the yag  
I'm going through a struggle  
Contemplating my life  
I recently went through heartbreak  
And I'm trying to control my life but it's harder than you think  
She was dope I gave her my all  
But in the end I got hurt and it made me fall  
Like a ball from a cliff  
I try not to turn to drugs and alcohol because that  
will make me slip  
I never really liked keeping it lit  
That's not me no more  
That was nothing but a faze to a graze in my life  
All I see in front of me is a cloudy haze in my sight  
There's nothing bright about any of this  
Everyone says it will be okay  
But how can I truly believe that when I haven't seen  
that brightness of the day  
Man it's crazy and I'm not trying to f up and become lazy  
I'm on my grind striving to shine in this darkened world  
But it's hard like playing a game of 52 pick up with cards  
I'm keeping myself together  
But the way I'm feeling is making the weather, very dark  
Has anyone really made a mark in this world?  
I'm trying to search for the truth but I haven't looked in the mirror  
I hope one day this experience will make my life a little clearer  
Hopefully the end is not nearer  
I'm just getting started with my life nothing much bigger  
This is just the spark on the mic  
If anything man this will make me hike for the spike  
It's like I'm drawing a blank  
The government is spending all the money on nothing but tanks  
I hope one day I feel happy  
Could be alone and it could be with someone else  
All I know is that this whole situation is making my heart melt  
And that's not in a good way  
I rarely even say hey to anyone  
Dre-T told me to keep to myself and block out the  
sounds of everyone  
Because in the end don't nobody else got me but myself.  
-Elvin Narayan, Inderkum High School

## SEVENTH ANNUAL SAYS SUMMIT COLLEGE DAY

As a culminating event of the academic year, SAYS invites hundreds of young people to convene on the UC Davis campus to experience college and empowerment in a new way. SAYS hosted its first summit in 2009 and to date has attracted over 4,650 students. In 2015, the SAYS Summit brought together 850 youth from different regions, schools and economic and ethnic backgrounds.

## SAYS IN THE NEWS

This year SAYS launched an official partnership with Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada. This newly formed partnership sparked a lot of media attention in Reno; as an example, SAYS assemblies were featured on Channel 2 News: [ktvn.com/story/28154407/washoe-area-youth-speaks-program](http://ktvn.com/story/28154407/washoe-area-youth-speaks-program).

SAYS was selected from a highly competitive group of nationally recognized arts organizations to join the Brave New Voices Network Initiative Leadership Cohort. As a member of this select group of 15 arts organizations from around the nation, SAYS has been recognized as a lead innovator.

## BRAVE NEW VOICES 2015

In summer 2015, SAYS celebrated its fifth year of participating in the exciting and life-changing Brave New Voices International Poetry Festival (BNV). Our team of seven students, representing school districts throughout the Sacramento Region, competed as the official 2015 SAYS Youth Slam Team.

Held at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, BNV (as seen on HBO) is a platform for the international recognition of youth voices through poetry and spoken word. Part conference, part festival, part service-learning project, part poetry-slam competition.

The SAYS Youth Slam Team was a heavy contender in the poetry-slam competition at the 2015 festival and is now recognized among the top 20 youth poetry-slam teams in the world.

We are beyond proud of our young people for having the courage, the cadence and the confidence to let their voices be heard on an international stage.



▲ Poet-Mentor Educator Jennifer Vargas Esquivel teaches young students the power of poetry and the spoken word.



▲ At SAYS Slam, students are empowered through poetry to share their truth and make their voices heard.

## YOUTH POET LAUREATE PROGRAM

SAYS recently received a prestigious grant that allows us to launch a Youth Poet Laureate program in Sacramento. In close partnership with Urban Word in New York City and local city agencies and schools we can move youth voices into the center of civic engagement. The SAYS Youth Poet Laureate Program will promote youth voices and elevate their values, which are significantly underrepresented and marginalized in politics.

## LOOKING FORWARD

In the 2015-16 school year, SAYS is looking forward to continuing to serve schools throughout California.

We ask that you remain a critical partner by supporting the SAYS program in providing services for your district and inside your schools that directly serve Y(OUR) young people.

Through partnerships, we are creating innovative ways for young people to seek agency within themselves, for young people to invest in their communities, for young people to be on a trajectory for success and, most importantly, for youth voices to be heard and valued.

## SEE SAYS IN ACTION

Visit our website to watch videos and learn more about how SAYS is making a difference throughout our community.

***[studentaffairs.ucdavis.edu/equity/says](http://studentaffairs.ucdavis.edu/equity/says)***

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**SAYS**

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UNDERGRADUATE  
ADMISSIONS