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 semi-finals. 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.

SNAPSHOT OF WHAT SAYS OFFERS

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

SAYS SERVES STUDENTS!

IN 2014–2015

- More than 5,000 students served
- More than 1,400 hours of SAYS programming
- 15 schools served throughout California and Reno

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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

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.

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

This year at American Legion, 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 semi-finals 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!
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.”

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.

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
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. Watch the video here: vimeo.com/135921332.

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.

SAYS IS AWARDED THREE-YEAR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANT
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.

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.

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
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.
says.ucdavis.edu

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Takarra Johnson, Poet-Mentor Educator Apprentice and Community Relations Specialist