

# URBAN VOICE

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## SUA STUDENTS EXPERIENCE A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

as noted by Michael Friedland, Ph. D., SUA US History Teacher

We've been studying the election process since the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter last year and this quarter from the convention speeches onward. Students examined the platforms of each candidate during the primaries. They were pretty much divided between Senators Barack Obama and John McCain; while they were excited about the prospect of an African American candidate, I'm not sure any of them really believed that Obama would be the Democratic nominee. Much of what we studied was the nuts and bolts of the political process—primaries, caucuses, and delegates/superdelegates.

Student enthusiasm grew in earnest in the fall: we were down to only two candidates, and a handful of students were eligible to vote for the first time!

The political process became much more real. Our emphasis was now on the Electoral College and the electoral map. We spent a lot of time going over what voters believed and valued in "safe" blue and red states, and why battleground states were so crucial. Students designed "red", "blue" and "yellow" (battleground) maps, with a breakdown of which states each candidate needed to win the election.

By Election Day, the majority of students were for Senator Obama, even the ones who couldn't vote. The chance that we could have the first African American president was very exciting for the students, especially the first-time voters. On Wednesday morning, Steven Harper (who is African American), Sarah Carroll (who is White), and DeSean Slater (who is Asian) greeted me outside the door of the school, chanting "O-ba-ma!" and were very, very pleased with the outcome. That morning, Sugar Ray Foote told me he hoped that with an African American president in the White House, perhaps African American youth would find a positive role model, not one based on money, drugs or other forms of materialism.

The pride the youth at SUA have in the election results, the sense of optimism, hope, and novelty is tangible. There has been a lot of discussion in my classes about what the election might mean in the transformation of racial attitudes in our nation. The catchphrase "anything is possible" seems very real to my students. ▀

*Left: Kellen with Sharon and Rev. Proctor*

*Above: Kellen with family and SUA friends*

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## URBAN SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

by Daniel Carver,  
CRISTA Communication

Graduation rates are a topic of vigorous analysis and debate across the landscape of high school reform. A recent study, *Cities in Crisis: a Special Analytic Report on High School Graduation* (April, 2008), adds a new dimension to the debate by comparing urban schools with suburban ones.

The study shows that students in our country's most populous cities are struggling, Seattle included. High school graduation rates are lower in our nation's urban schools than in schools located in the suburbs.

In 2003-4, the graduation rate in the urban districts of Seattle was 57.6%, whereas suburban districts graduated students at a rate of 67.4%—a difference of 9.8%.

SUA is in a strategic location to help, situated in Seattle's Rainier Valley where student dropout rates are high. School-age students in this area often have multiple risk factors hindering their goal to graduate. Many students have a household income well below the poverty level, often in a single-parent family or one where parents didn't graduate themselves. Students' past academic failures add to pain-based behaviors in school. All these factors create obstacles to graduation.

We are not alone in our efforts. As a member of the Street School Network, SUA is part of a network of highly effective schools working to address these unique challenges in urban areas across the United States. Our success comes from a strategy that aims to invest in the "whole student". Our programs emphasize academic rigor, to be sure, but our dedication to the spiritual development of our students, from a staff personally involved in mentoring and equipping them with the life skills they may have missed, has been a successful formula for our graduates. ▀

## SAUSAGE, BISCUITS AND AN EXTRA HELPING OF LOVE

by Whitney Huntley, CRISTA Communication

As the sun dawned on a new day, Barbara, Debra and Ruby (from Seattle's Berean Church) were putting the finishing touches on a masterpiece. Steaming trays of hash browns, sausage and buttery biscuits with jam lined the serving table at SUA. But as students began filling their plates, a deeper level of nourishing was taking place.

Food is a great motivator. "Students are excited to come to school," SUA Executive Director Sharon Okamoto explains, "Breakfasts start our day off with positive

interaction between students and staff." Sharon estimates that 90% of SUA students do not eat before coming to school. However, after breakfast at SUA, they have higher levels of energy and are ready to learn.

Students respond with gratitude. Ruby Reid, one of the volunteer cooks, says, "The thing that really stuck out to me was the appreciation they had. One student last year just loved those biscuits—I called her 'the biscuit girl' until I finally learned her name at the end of the school year!" Ruby adds, "Doing something that was needed, wanted and appreciated was wonderful."

At SUA, volunteers are mentors, extended family—in Sharon's words, "a strong force that moves us closer to our mission and vision for each student." This vision sees each student, in time, modeling the volunteers' example.

Ruby states her own life's mission succinctly: "To simply serve others. To help other people in any form that I can." Service motivated by love is extended to students in day-to-day school life and at special events, like the 2008 SUA graduation. Ruby, who last year attended for the first time, says, "It was a worship service focused on God and how important it is to have Him in your life."

Volunteers like Barbara, Debra and Ruby do far more than meet students' surface needs. Biscuits and sausage may set the stage for positive interaction and learning, but the gift of serving plants seeds that change lives.

**Is monthly/weekly breakfast something your group could do for SUA students? Contact us at 206.723.0333 or blebsock@seattleurbanacademy.org. ▀**



## DID YOU KNOW...?

- In September, CRISTA Ministries' **SPiRiT 105.3FM** aired SUA interviews with Sam Kelly, morning co-host! Sam chatted with students, staff and supporters of Seattle Urban Academy to find out what they liked most about the school. If you missed them, go to [www.seattleurbanacademy.org](http://www.seattleurbanacademy.org) and follow the links. Some of their observations might surprise you! ▀

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**URBAN VOICE** is a free monthly publication of Seattle Urban Academy, located at 3800 S. Othello Street, Seattle, WA 98118. 206.723.0333 ● Submissions are encouraged. Send articles and photos to [ejohnson@crista.net](mailto:ejohnson@crista.net) 206.546.7274. Editor retains right to edit for clarity and space limitations. ● The mission of Seattle Urban Academy is to be a safe, alternative, Christian educational community where at-risk high school students develop academic, social and spiritual maturity to graduate to higher education and sustained employment. To support our mission, send your tax-deductible donations to Seattle Urban Academy, 19303 Fremont Avenue North MS 15, Seattle, WA 98133. SUA is a part of the CRISTA Ministries family. ▀