

Helping inner-city students reach their goals

At Loyola High School, tutors encourage eighth graders preparing for Catholic high school entrance exams.

By Ellie Hidalgo
STAFF WRITER

Volunteer tutor Mike Maloney asks three eighth grade students to read several sentences and decide which word is grammatically incorrect or misspelled, if any. The students sleuth for that incorrect word.

"I knew it!" exclaims one teen when Maloney reads out the right answer.

A few sentences momentarily stump him. Perhaps because of computer spell-checks, adult spelling skills are apt to get a little rusty. All teachers and tutors like that answer guide.

While his wife tends to two young children on this bright Saturday January morning, Maloney — Loyola High School Class of '87 and Santa Clara University Class of '91 — is giving a little of his time to make sure the next batch of eighth graders from inner-city neighborhoods get into Catholic high schools, by helping them prepare entrance exams.

"This is a great opportunity to give something back," says Maloney, product manager at a textile company. The Jesuit credo: "A Man for Others" is on his mind.

"They preach that from the day you walk in until the day you leave. It sinks in at some point," quips the alum.

Loyola — which attracts some of the most talented students throughout the archdiocese to its Los Angeles campus and is fiercely competitive — started the program three years ago to reach out to inner city Catholic elementary schools. The high school hosts six Saturday morning tutoring sessions, staggered from October through the end of January when students take the exam.

Nearly 200 eighth graders (boys and girls) from 30 Catholic schools descend on Loyola's front lawn by 9:30 a.m. for the three-hour study session. Some arrive two hours earlier, dropped off by parents on their



MATH TUTORING — Chris Louie (center) explains a math concept to students preparing for the Catholic high school entrance exam.

way to work. Students munch on breakfast bars donated by Kensington Catering of Los Angeles. Catholic school uniforms have been exchanged for sweatshirts and jeans.

More than 40 adults — graduates of Jesuit institutions, including Loyola High, Santa Clara University and Loyola Marymount University — participate as tutors. Loyola freshman also join the tutoring effort as part of their community service requirement. Loyola moms monitor classroom floors.

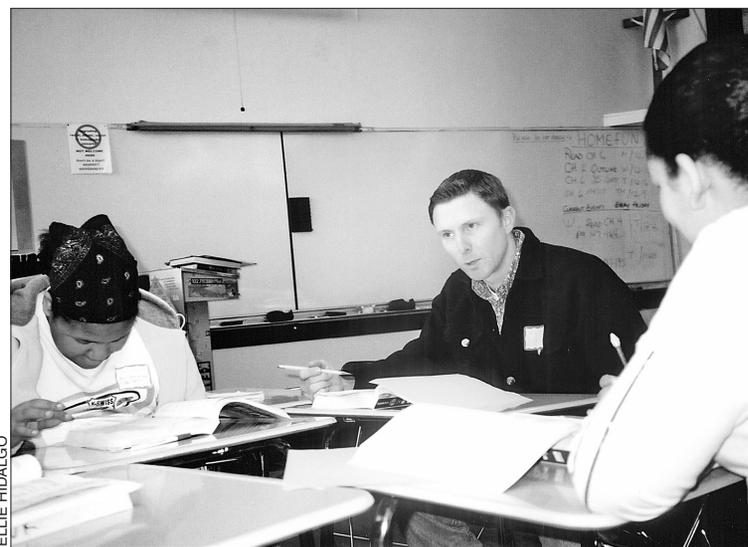
Katie Kornfield, Santa Clara University class of '98, has volunteered all three years.

"Students look to us as role models, as tutors, and to answer questions about every day life," says Kornfield, sporting a kaleidoscope-colored sweater, jean skirt, and Andie McDowell hair.

She recalled one boy who dreamt about becoming a doctor, but had no idea of the steps he needed to take, how to get into college, or how

to pay for it.

"I'm mentoring these kids and at the same time I want to help them reach their goals," she says. That's because people helped her reach



PRACTICE — Mike Maloney helps students from Holy Name of Jesus Elementary School in Los Angeles practice sample spelling and grammar test questions.

her dreams.

A professional figure skater, Kornfield, 27, skated with Scott Hamilton in the Sun Valley Ice Show. She coaches and choreographs routines for younger competitive skaters and for television specials.

But from age six to 16 Kornfield also battled epilepsy and a short attention span. Along the way tutors and mentors helped her overcome her obstacles, something she says she'll never forget.

Kornfield gathers a few students in one of Loyola's classrooms, each pupil wading through Barron's 693-page study guide of sample pretests and questions on reading comprehension, vocabulary, math and more. For two years the Riordan Foundation has funded the books and study materials.

Unable to pay for a private tutor or an after school course costing hundreds of dollars, Loyola's program helps inner-city school kids compete. The goal is to complement what elementary school teachers are already doing to familiarize students with sample test questions so they are comfortable in an exam situation. Loyola alumni also conduct mock interviews so

students can practice their interview skills.

"Putting them in a different environment with different people can stimulate them to try harder, observes Jesuit Brother Jim Siwicki, director of alumni community service at Santa Clara University. "Adult tutors are signs of hope. They were able to become lawyers, doctors, housewives."

Adults also provide discipline, order and focus, says Thomas Zeko, director of community service at Loyola. Students also see tutors "being shoulder to shoulder in service," he adds.

Jayme Hilton of Holy Name of Jesus Elementary School in Los Angeles says it's helpful attending the tutoring sessions and sharing one tutor's attention among only a few students.

"English can get tricky," observes Hilton. She notes there's a lot to learn with punctuation and spelling. "It's a confidence boost to practice taking the test."

Walk into a sunlit Loyola classroom and several small groups are purposefully studying at the classroom board, the smell of dry erase markers sifting through the air.

Chris Louie, a tutor and an electrical engineer, graduated from LMU in 1991. Today he sets up computer systems on the mammoth ships of Princess Cruises. His work takes him to shipyards in Japan and Italy.

It's also his second year tutoring eighth graders in math. "I like it when suddenly they understand a concept, and you see a light bulb go on in their head," he enthused.

Louie's father was a math teacher, and from him Louie learned to love math. Now he likes helping students review geometry and practice solving equations.

"It's an amazing opportunity to give back to the community and see the next generation," said Louie. "If they are spending their Saturday mornings here, because they want to better themselves, then I want to help." ♦

Religious Education Congress registration available

Registration is still open for the largest annual gathering of catechists in the United States.

"Steeped in Mercy, Balm for the World" is the theme for the 2004 Religious Education Congress, taking place Feb. 19-22 at the Anaheim Convention Center. The four-day event begins with Youth Day for high school students Feb. 19, followed by the adult portion Friday-Sunday.

The Congress theme — drawn,

as is customary, from that Sunday's Scripture readings — "invites us to let the voices of a world in need echo in our hearts, beckoning us to press forward as messengers of new life," said Sister of Charity Edith Prendergast, director of the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education which has presented the Congress each year since 1967.

Approximately 185 speakers — including keynote speakers include Richard Gaillardetz, Scott Appleby,

Victor Escalante and Auxiliary Bishop Dominic Luong of Orange — will present workshops and talks on religious education, family life, social justice issues, spirituality and parish ministry. Sister Prendergast will present her Congress-opening keynote talk on Friday morning as part of the opening rite and welcome.

A wide assortment of liturgies and musical events, plus more than 270 workshops in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, are also offered. The

eucharistic liturgies include Hawaiian, Hispanic, jazz, black culture/Nigerian, Filipino, Vietnamese, young adults and contemplative. Bishop Tod Brown of Orange and Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles will preside at the closing liturgies on Sunday morning and afternoon, respectively.

Lunchtime and evening musical events will feature the Daughters of God; Brother Rufino Zaragosa & the Vietnamese Folk Dance Troupe with La Sallian Youth; Tom Kenzia,

Frank and Vallimar Jansen; Bob Halligan & Ceili Rain; Jon Mattingly & the Newman Singers; Peter Kolar & the Holy Cross Marimba Ensemble; and Gary Daigle, Jim Gibson and John Angotti. On Friday, Daigle and John Flaherty will direct a performance of multicultural music, dance and art featuring numerous well-known Congress performers.

Registration is \$60. For information, call (213) 637-7346, or visit www.recongress.org. ♦