

# I M P A C T R E P O R T

## WILL POWER TO YOUTH



## Youth Transforming, Play by Play

a program of



formerly Shakespeare Festival/LA

## O V E R V I E W

These pages demonstrate the consistent effectiveness of The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles' nationally replicated Will Power to Youth project (WPY), an award-winning arts-enrichment and job training program for local teens. What follows are the results of two reports prepared by Dr. Simeon Slovacek. The first report surveyed youth who participated during the 2001 school year, and reveals their positive attitude towards the program and its outcomes. The second report (2007) specifically tracked young people who both participated in WPY and attended the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)'s Belmont High School. It compares them with average students from Belmont, who did not participate in WPY. The subjects for this study all demonstrated that they were living at poverty level or below. Results show that youth enrolled in Will Power to Youth:

- Scored 20% higher on average on standardized state-wide English language acquisition tests than their peers.
- Showed significant improvement in their high school GPAs.
- Graduated at a rate that more than doubles the completion rate of average students at Belmont H.S.

Together, the reports offer a statistically supported vision of what is possible when an excellent arts organization partners with an urban public secondary school to dedicate meaningful amounts of time, human, and financial resources to improve student performance.

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## P R O G R A M   D E S C R I P T I O N

Will Power to Youth is a nationally recognized youth development, enrichment, and employment initiative that employs young people to work their way through a Shakespeare play. Youth are challenged and guided through a series of experiences and activities that engage their hands, hearts, and imaginations in an art-making process. This process is designed to help them better understand themselves and each other, practice workforce skills, build academic resiliency and literacy skills, enhance their interpersonal communication, and nurture an appreciation for creative, artistic expression. The initial program and its follow-up components are meant to support youth through high school and into a successful transition to adulthood.



The Will Power to Youth process is a 200-hour, 7-week employment period that occurs during school break wherein young people are guided and supported by professional adult mentor-artists as they investigate, write, create, construct, and perform their own original adaptation of a Shakespeare play. [In so doing, Youth Participants learn the importance of community, communication, collaboration, and cooperation.](#) The initial 200-hour paid employment experience is augmented by a sequential series of follow-up programming and engagement opportunities that include cultural field trips, leadership training, tutoring, career and college counseling, and a culture of concerned, caring adults and peers. These follow-up, wrap-around services are available until youth complete high school and embark on post-secondary school transitions.

It is atypical for a nonprofit arts organization like The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles (SCLA) to engage in best practices youth development activities. These endeavors require a level of institutional commitment, expertise, and allocation of resources not readily or fully understood and appreciated by the leadership of most arts organizations. But, because of SCLA's vision – building community play by play – and its commitment to demonstrating that art-making must be an accessible process that equally involves all, special attention is focused on engaging under-served youth in ways that empower them to play central roles in their own personal transformations and transitions to adulthood. Will Power to Youth offers one such way.

**“It is atypical for a nonprofit arts organization to engage in best practices youth development activities”**

### H I S T O R Y

In the aftermath of the civil unrest in Los Angeles, WPY was created in 1992 to meet one of the most basic needs of urban youth: jobs.

Since then, WPY has served over 900 youth living below the poverty line. These youth typically have little access to theater programs, job training, academic enrichment, or other arts opportunities.

In the summer of 2007, the national replication of the program kicked off in Richmond, VA.

This independent evaluation surveyed youth who had completed WPY about their attitudes towards the program and its outcomes. Sixty-six of the sixty-seven youth who participated in 2001 returned the survey, providing input about why they chose to participate and how they felt about school, their future, and working with others. *Through this initial formal exercise, it was clear that Will Power to Youth resonated in a meaningful way with the youth it was designed to serve.*

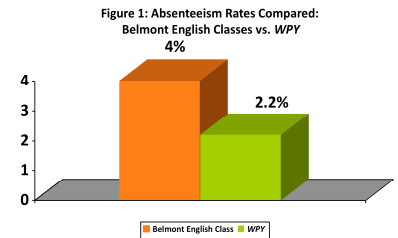
*“It is a program exceptionally well-received by its participants”*

The report compared youths’ performance and participation in WPY and their subsequent academic performance and attendance at Belmont High School.

R E S U L T S B Y  
T H E N U M B E R S

- 97% Youth felt either “a little” or “much more” more confident after the program
- 84% Youth believed that WPY helped with their future
- 77% WPY was “better” or “much better” than their traditional high school classes
- 95% Youth felt that their communication skills with peers improved
- 83% Youth felt they were better able to understand different people than when they had started WPY
- 94% Youth would recommend WPY to others

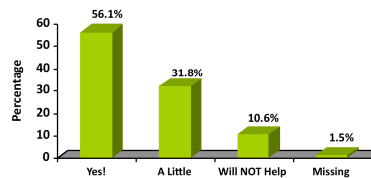
The youths’ commitment to the program was evidenced in their attendance. The average attendance rate for the Will Power to Youth program was 97.8%, whereas the same youths averaged a 96% attendance rate for their English courses (Figure 1, right).



The vast majority of the respondents felt that WPY helped in some degree with their other classes (Figure 4, left).

Moreover, youth responded that the program aided in improving communication skills, particularly with their peers, and in helping them understand and respect different people – a key aspect of WPY’s philosophy.

Figure 2: Will WPY Help With Other Classes?



In rating the program overall, responses ranged from “very good” to “excellent,” (4.6 on a 5 point scale, with 5 being the highest rating). The

report concluded that WPY was shown to accomplish nearly all of its goals and that it is a program exceptionally well-received by its participants.

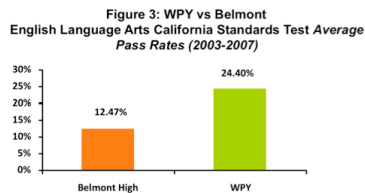
Built in 1923, Belmont High School resides in the Westlake, Belmont Rampart community, immediately west of and adjacent to downtown Los Angeles. It currently has 4,045 students enrolled, and the school reports that 90% of these students qualify for the Free Federal Meals program. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2006), 46% of children under 18, living in the school’s census tract, live below the poverty level.

The graduation rate at Belmont H.S. is 33%. Between the years 2003 – 2007, Will Power has served 158 youth from the greater Los Angeles area. Eighty-three of these youth – over 50% of the total – have attended Belmont, which is located two walking blocks from WPY’s permanent facility.

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In 2007, data collected by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was expanded by California State University’s Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative (PERC) to contrast the outcomes of Will Power to Youth participants with their non-participating Belmont H.S. peers. Researchers crunched the numbers on both

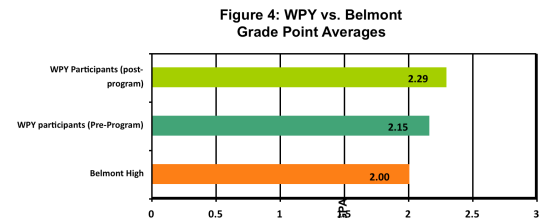
groups to compare English Language Arts California Standards Test (CST) scores, grade point averages (GPAs), and overall graduation rates. Three important results emerged:



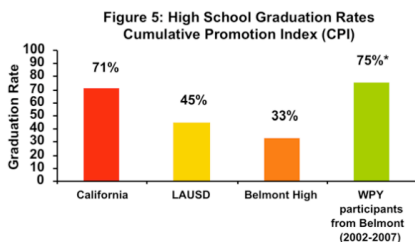
- **WPY participants scored 20% higher on average on the CST.** CST scores during the five-year period were averaged to gain a more comprehensive portrait of the performance of the two

groups. Figure 3 (left) illustrates that Will Power to Youth participants scored well above Belmont H.S. as a whole.

- **GPAs showed an improvement post-WPY.** GPAs of the two groups were also compared, and improvement was noted in WPY post-program GPAs (Figure 4, right).



- **WPY participants graduated at a rate that more than doubled other students at Belmont High School.**



Finally, the graduation rates of WPY participants were calculated from the school district and internal program records, which tracked students who had graduated, moved, or dropped out. These numbers were compared with the graduation rates for Belmont as a whole, as well as California and LAUSD, as reported in the Harvard Civil Rights Project (2005). The results represent a significant improvement over non-participants from Belmont (Figure 7, left).

2002

RECOGNIZED by The National Youth Employment Coalition's Promising and Effective "best practices" network as its first arts-based youth employment and development initiative with outcomes aligned with the common measures established by the U.S. Department of Labor for workforce attachment among youth.

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2003

PRESENTED with a "Coming Up Taller" Award by First Lady Laura Bush on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, in a White House ceremony. The "Coming Up Taller Award" recognizes and supports outstanding community arts and humanities programs that celebrate the creativity of America's young people and provides them with learning opportunities and the chance to contribute to their communities. These awards focus national attention on exemplary programs currently fostering the creative and intellectual development of America's children and youth through education and practical experience in the arts and the humanities.

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2005

INVITED by the Helping America's Youth initiative (launched by the White House at Howard University) to participate as its "Featured Presenter." Helping America's Youth is a nationwide effort to raise awareness about the challenges facing our youth, particularly at-risk boys, and to motivate caring adults to connect with youth in three key areas: family, school, and community.

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2006

INVITED by The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, which boasts a membership of 178,000 educators throughout the world, to participate as a "Featured Presenter" at its 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, themed "Educating the Whole Child."

LAUNCHED the pilot WPY Replication program in Richmond, VA which was supported by a Joint Agreement between The National Endowment for the Arts and Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to support the national replication of Will Power to Youth in Gang Reduction Areas throughout the United States.

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2007

CLASSIFIED as one of the country's "Top 50 Programs" by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

SELECTED as one of ten arts programs for inclusion in the groundbreaking report titled *The Qualities of Quality: Excellence in Arts Education and How to Achieve It*, released in 2008, by Project Zero, a 40-year-old institute dedicated to studying the impact of art on society, operating within the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University.

## A B O U T

**Professor Simeon Slovacek** is a tenured Full Professor in the Division of Applied and Advanced Studies in Education in the Charter College of Education at California State University, Los Angeles. Duties include teaching, research, scholarship, advisement, research and evaluation project grants and contracts administration, and charter schools creation. His areas of expertise include charter schools, research and evaluation methodology, testing, statistics, and technology in Education. He holds both a Ph.D. (1976) and M.S. (1974) in Educational Research & Evaluation Methodology from Cornell University, and a B.A (1971) in Physics from Syracuse University.

## R E F E R E N C E S

**California Department of Education** website ([www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov)) and the **School Accountability Report Card** available from the LAUSD website ([www.lausd.net](http://www.lausd.net)) for Belmont High School statistics.

**National Center for Education Statistics** website ([www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov)).

**Slovacek et al (2007) An analysis of Will Power to Youth graduation rates and academic performance indicators (2007)**. The study was conducted by PERC in conjunction with the Planning, Assessment and Research branch at the LAUSD. Building on this work, PERC, in collaboration with the SCLA program staff, carried out a comparison of WPY participant data. The study is best characterized as a quasi-experimental matched groups and reflects performance including graduation rates over an extended period of time (2001-2007).

**Slovacek et al (2001) Will Power to Youth evaluation report summer 2001**. The Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles, then known as Shakespeare Festival/LA, commissioned an independent evaluation of the program through the Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative (PERC) of the Charter College of Education at California State University. It was designed as both a comparison condition study and included measurements over a time period (one-group pre-test/post-test study).

**Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (2005) Confronting the graduation rate crisis in America**. This published study revised the drop-out rates in California high schools, in which Belmont High School was specifically noted. The quasi-experimental study design involved non-equivalent groups and recalculates drop-out rates for all California high schools, including those within Los Angeles Unified School District, using the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI). The CPI is based on the rates of which students are promoted from one grade to the next, in addition to the number who finally graduate. Because this indicator looks forward from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade towards graduation it is a more accurate estimate of the actual drop-out rate. The quasi-experimental study involved non-equivalent groups and recalculates drop-out rates for all California high schools, including those within the LAUSD, using the Cumulative Promotion Index.

## M E T H O D O L O G Y

- **Grade point average methodology**: Equivalence data were collected on the GPAs of both WPY students prior to starting the program and after, and Belmont High School students to demonstrate that both groups performed similarly academically, and that between-group differences are due to the impact of the program rather than being pre-existing. Figure 4 displays the GPAs for both groups of students, the near equivalence of both the WPY students (pre-program) and the comparison group GPA suggests valid comparison can be made with regards to academic performance and the improvement noted in WPY post-program GPAs.
- **Graduation rates methodology**: For those students whose graduation information was unavailable (approximately 18%), the average rate at which students move out of the district was applied to estimate the number of unknown students who were likely to have moved during the school year. The remaining students whose status was unknown were then counted as having dropped out.



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