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.

CRITICAL LITERACY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SAYS connects high-risk youth to higher education. We use spoken word performance poetry as a doorway into the lives of young people, encouraging them to write, read and speak about themselves and their communities. This evidence-based approach to literacy and leadership development empowers disadvantaged young people to become authors of their own lives and agents of change.

SAYS engages in three domains, all centered around the empowerment of students, teachers and families. First, SAYS trains poet-mentor/educators from the neighborhood to work alongside teachers and after-school providers, building a critical bridge between the community and the school. Second, SAYS provides instruction to students (helping youth write and share their stories). Third, SAYS conducts large-scale professional development both in and out of the classroom through our residency programs and training of SAYS “Write Now” teacher-leaders.

The SAYS pedagogy has three key components:

- Learning how to reach students authentically is a precursor to successful teaching.
- Knowing who students are and where they come from allows educators to create meaningful and thought-provoking curricula.
- Reading, writing and speaking are the foundations of academic achievement, critical thinking and social justice within and beyond the school walls.
OUR SERVICES

SAYS specializes in kindergarten through university literacy education. The director, coordinator, poet-mentor educators and “Write Now” teacher-leaders have extensive expertise in both culturally-relevant instruction and spoken word performance poetry.

Services include, and are not limited to:
- Consultation on SAYS curriculum and culturally-relevant instruction
- Designing and producing school-wide assemblies and spoken word poetry events on and off campus
- Delivering instruction and support through the SAYS classroom residency program
- Providing after-school writing support to students
- Professional Development: providing training in effective practices to engage at-risk and high-risk students; promoting overall strategies to create student-centered learning environments
- Instructional Methodologies and Coaching: aligning curriculum to meet the goals of the Common Core State Standards

MEETING THE NEED

Many urban school districts are in crisis, and despite various reform efforts, the failure rate of students—disproportionately low-income students of color—continues to rise. The lack of strong literacy skills is an indicator that the education system continues to leave millions of children behind. Researchers and practitioners agree that children en masse need better reading and writing skills, as well as opportunities to use literacy practices in school and community contexts, yet there is less agreement about how to do it.

As a solution, the SAYS pedagogy engages participants in critical literacy: reading the world, the word, and one’s self in a new way. Building upon best practices, SAYS continues to find that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the reference frame of students, learning becomes more personally meaningful, students have greater interest and engage in school-based practices more readily, and achievement levels increase.

“SAYS is a life-changing program.”
- District Administrator, Sacramento City Unified School District

“SAYS is the glue that holds learning together.”
- Teacher, Twin Rivers Unified School District

LEARN MORE

For more information and to watch videos of SAYS in action, visit says.ucdavis.edu.

Find out how you can bring SAYS to your school by contacting Patrice Hill, Coordinator at 530-601-8088 or pathill@ucdavis.edu