

A Happy PACE

By Vivian Labato and Abigail Chudwick

The PACE Alternative Education Program has a goal to “provide the BEST not the last chance for many students.” But in the mainstream educational system, PACE is a negative word. It is rumored that PACE holds misbehaved students who cannot act appropriately in a classroom setting. However, the students and staff at Ansonia High School do not know the truth behind the PACE doors.

When asked what they thought of PACE, mainstream students said, “I’ve heard alternative is where the unacceptable kids go.” “Alternative is a place for lazy students.” Even those who knew nothing about the program had a negative opinion of the program, “PACE has wild people; they’re like animals.”

Not only did negative rumors spread throughout the school, but they sent the wrong message to students transferring into alternative as well. One student described how “nervous” she was to actually join PACE because she didn’t want to be labeled as a bad student among the mainstream students.

But, behind those doors stand bright, intelligent students who strive for their second chance. Another student in the PACE program, stated, “If I didn’t come here, I would have had to drop out.” PACE motivates the students to work harder both in and out of the classroom. “I started getting better grades and I work two jobs, which I get credits for,”

Success is a common theme among the alternative program. Not only did the students say that they were happy to get the opportunity to join PACE, they also gave much of the credit for their success to the teachers. “It saved my education. This was my second chance,” said Jonathan, a soon to be graduate.

One student, who spent her freshman year in the mainstream high school, encountered many problems, including behavioral issues and low grades. “This program gave me a better attitude towards others. I’m not as mean as I use to be. I also received first honors and continue to do so.” The students value hard work and dedication, which often goes unnoticed in the mainstream school. Mrs. Keklik, who has been a social worker in the PACE program for eight years said, “It’s too bad people don’t see [PACE] first hand before they judge it.”

Mrs. Keklik says the PACE program has allowed the students to become a “family unit and bond with each other.” This environment also allows for the students to get the individualized attention that they need.

Mr. Carboni, a fifth-year teacher in the PACE program, mentioned that they “work closely with the individuals and have a good idea of what students need to graduate.” The students take the same classes and learn the same curriculum as the students in the mainstream school, but they have flexible deadlines for covering the work. “I don’t dumb it down. The students test the same way as those in the high school,” explained Mr. Wynne, a first year teacher in the program.

It was clear that the students and the staff had an unspeakable bond. “It makes you want to get up and go to work in the morning,” Ms. Isidoro, a teacher in the PACE program, said with a smile.

All the teachers care a great deal for those students, and they refuse to ever let them fail. “If they do not show up for a few days, then they better have a note or a good explanation. We will literally call home or show up at their house and bring work or bring them to school. Giving up is not an option here. We want to see everyone graduate and we want them to be proud of themselves. They call me the bounty hunter here,” Mrs.Keklik giggled.

The mainstream rumours have been proven to be incorrect and word of mouth has wrongly characterized the PACE program and its students. As Mr. Puglisi wholeheartedly described, “there are too many bad labels given to these good kids who only want a second chance for their high school diploma. I see a lot of kids written off or given up on who want to do better and are willing to try.” And after a day in PACE, it is clear that it is truly the place for Positive and Creative Education.