



## Abbigale Hensley Class of 2012

Abbe Ryan came to Oroville in 1946 when she was a baby. She was in the first graduating class at St. Thomas School and graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1962. While at OHS she was a National Merit Scholar and winner of the J.C Nisbet Scholarship. As an outstanding scholar, she earned a place on the honor roll and membership in the California Scholastic Federation (CSF).

She was very active on campus, serving as a Tiger Tails newspaper reporter and was elected Student Body secretary. She was a member of the Drama Club as well as the National Thespian Society. She also held membership in the United Nations Club, the French Club and was a delegate to the State Model United Nations Assemblies. Her community service included 4H activities and president of the Catholic Youth Organization at St. Thomas Parish.

Following her high school, years, Abbe attended Mills College, Newcomb College, and in 1968, earned her bachelor's degree in history at California State University, Chico (CSUC). She then went on to do post-graduate work in Early Childhood Education at San Francisco State University and the University of Alaska Anchorage where she also received her elementary teaching certificate.

Virtually all of Abbe's volunteer, part-time, and full-time work has been in support of children and families. Her professional career in education began in Alaska, where her mother was born and raised. For the first seven years, Abbe coordinated local PBS Ready To Learn services at two public television stations, KAKM-TV in Anchorage and WETA-TV in northern Virginia and Washington DC. She created educational training materials and led workshops for early childhood professionals and parents. The goal was to improve learning experiences for young children using award-winning PBS children's programs, quality children's books, and related activities.

For the next five years, she managed the national outreach component of PBS Ready To Learn, a \$100 million 5-year grant, funded through the US Department of Education. There she managed agreements with 148 local PBS stations, published outreach training materials and reports, and online and video resources.

Moving back to Anchorage in September, 2006, Abbe then became the Founding Executive of Alaska's Early Childhood initiative, called Best Beginnings, a position she still holds. The initiative is a statewide non-profit public-private partnership that mobilizes people and resources to ensure that all Alaska children begin school ready to learn and succeed. Best Beginnings partners with communities all across Alaska to improve school readiness with a special focus on literacy and language development and increased public engagement with early childhood issues.

Abbe's community service in the state of Alaska is extensive. She has served as State PTA president, National PTA vice –president, and served on the Alaska State Medical Board and the Child Care Connection Board. She was appointed by the governor of Alaska to a five-year term on the Alaska State Board of Education, where she was instrumental in the development of the first set of state standards for education.

As a result of her extraordinary work and dedication to children, Abbe was awarded honorary life membership in seventeen PTA's throughout the country and the National PTA. Other honors and awards include a Legislative Citation from the Alaska State Legislature for PTA work, and the Women of Achievement Award from the Anchorage YWCA. In March, 2012, she received the Little Red Wagon Advocacy Award from the Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children.

Best Beginnings was recognized with the Alaska Community Service Award for Health and the Contributions to Literacy in Alaska Award.

A former Alaska State Board of Education member writes, "Abbe is an outstanding visionary leader, selfless community contributor, and dedicated child advocate. She is well known and respected across the state of Alaska and in many parts of the nation."

She currently resides in Alaska with her husband, a well-known Alaska Native leader. They raised four children who are now exemplary in their adult lives.