

THE STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM

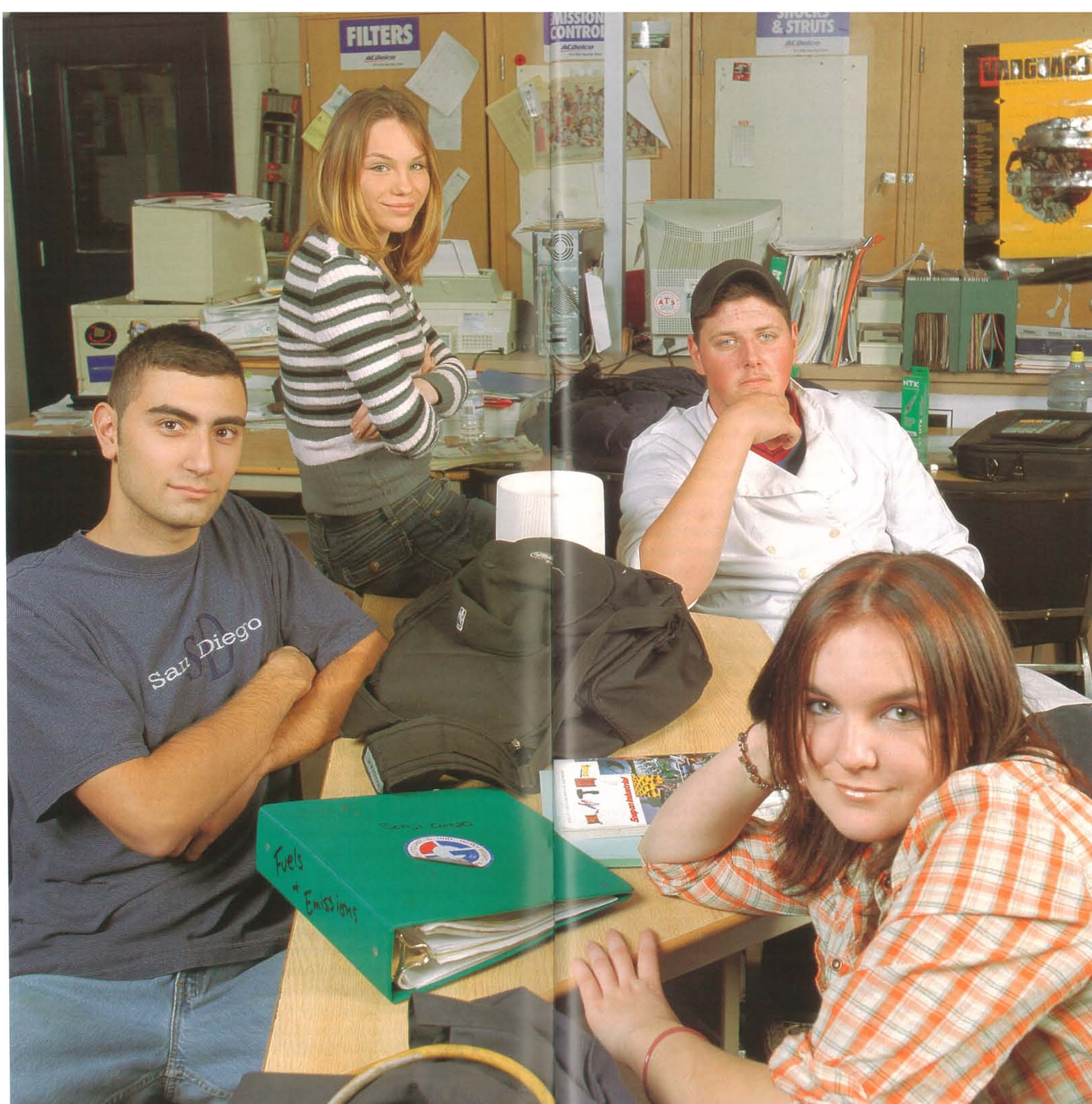
Attending to the struggling student

“All kids can learn” has become a popular claim in education circles. As educators, we state this belief publicly and passionately, but behind the scenes we worry about how to deliver on this bold declaration.

The kids on the cover of this magazine are our real success stories. They are the students who have encountered challenges and persevered. They are living proof that all kids really can learn. Students like Stephen, Marina, Michael and Dominique are in every school. They risk being missed unless schools act decisively. Marina shares her story: “I was just barely passing. I was afraid to ask the teachers for help. Then one of my teachers noticed and took an interest. She turned me on to OYAP [the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program].” She continues, “The teachers here give you all the support you need—they won’t let you fail.” Dominique has a similar story: “I was in all sorts of trouble. I was getting into fights but the principal kept guiding me and didn’t give up on me. The principal makes all the difference.” When Stephen was asked to give advice to principals about how to best support struggling students, he gave a sage, brief response: “Stay on ‘em.”

The Student Success Program, initiated by the Ministry of Education in spring 2003,

By Mag Gardner



has done much to refocus our energy on attending to the struggling student. Certainly before the initiative launched, educators had long recognized that there is no silver bullet for addressing all students’ needs. However, administrators still have golden opportunities waiting to be mined. This article suggests five ways administrators can champion struggling students without spending a nickel, hiring staff or inventing a new timetable. The best part is, we can start tomorrow. It begins by following Stephen’s advice and by changing our refrain from “all kids can learn” to “all kids will learn.”

CONFRONT THE MYTHS

Myths about learning abound in the education community. You’ve heard them: “He’s choosing to fail.” “It’s my job to teach; it’s her job to learn.” “He won’t learn until he gets some counselling.” It behooves us as leaders to not only insist that kids can learn, but to ensure they do. Larry Lezotte said it best: “We are now talking about compulsory learning and will no longer settle for compulsory schooling.”

And, just as there are myths about learning, there are myths about what it takes to be successful. Consider, for example, what these successful Canadians have in common: Wayne Gretzky, Christopher Plummer, Peter Mansbridge, Frank Stronach, Robert Campeau, Barbara Budd, Jim Carey, Rick Mercer, Oscar Peterson and Hazel McCallion. They have all contributed meaningfully to Canadian life and yet none of them went to university.

It seems that in our current culture, parents insist their children enter college or university directly from high school. The workplace is a consolation prize. As administrators, we worry that the workplace is a dead end that sets up our students for more failure. That is not necessarily so.

Kevin Whyte is one example. He chose not to invest money in college or university

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