

Part I

The Breakthrough Movement



Breakthrough
COLLABORATIVE

Our Vision

Through the work of Breakthrough Collaborative, all children will have equal access to excellent **educational opportunities** and talented, **enthusiastic teachers** committed to students' educational success.

Our Mission

Breakthrough is a collaborative of programs that increase educational opportunity for **motivated middle school** students and encourage talented high school and college students to **pursue careers in education**. Breakthrough National establishes and promotes high standards, ensures the success of all Breakthrough programs, and acts as the national voice of the collaborative.

As a Breakthrough teacher, you have joined a movement. At 34 sites in 28 cities throughout the United States and Hong Kong, teachers will walk into classrooms this summer with the same mission in mind: to ensure that their young students will be prepared to enter and thrive in the most rigorously academic high school programs in this country. You are part of a widespread movement to help students make it through some of the toughest years in their school career when academic achievement typically drops and interest in school wanes. Alongside your colleagues around the country and world, you will play an essential role in preparing students for the best high school while teaching them that learning can continue to be enjoyable and meaningful.

Even after the summer program ends, there are still many roles that need to be filled during the school year. Each site coordinates a year-round program staffed by volunteers, which provides after-school tutoring and Saturday programs for Breakthrough students. You can remain connected to Breakthrough during the school year by volunteering to tutor students. Whether you volunteer at the same site where you taught or a different site halfway across the country, you will find motivated middle school students and talented high school and college students working together in pursuit of excellent educational opportunities.

Our Network

Atlanta	Austin	Boca Raton	Cambridge	Cincinnati
Denver	Fort Lauderdale	Fort Worth	Hong Kong	Houston
Long Island	Manchester	Miami	Minneapolis	New Haven
New Orleans	New York	Norfolk	Philadelphia	Pittsburgh
Providence	Sacramento	Saint Paul	San Jose	San Juan Capistrano
Santa Fe	San Francisco (2 sites)	Washington D.C.		

Breakthrough’s story begins in 1978 at San Francisco University High School. Lois Loofbourrow directed the program until 1991, when she left to start The Breakthrough Collaborative, formerly known as Summerbridge National. The program empowered middle school students to enter and thrive in college preparatory high school programs. Over time, word spread of this innovative, effective work, and Summerbridge San Francisco became the model for other schools wanting to initiate outreach programs in their communities. In 1991, Summerbridge National was incorporated to oversee, promote and support new sites. The first site to start up was a second program in San Francisco for younger students in 1989. New Orleans started in 1990 and Manchester in 1991. By 1995, there were 35 programs.

After this period of incredible growth, Summerbridge National underwent a strategic planning process to continue to unify the programs and infuse them with a commitment to the best practices of the original model, resulting in a stronger organization dedicated to a new level of programmatic excellence.

By 2002, a name change seemed both natural and timely. The name "Summerbridge" did not reflect the year-round nature of the program, nor did it fully represent the ideals of the program

The name “Breakthrough” underscores the value of the program experience for both students and teachers. We invited the broader Summerbridge community to submit their ideas and, ultimately, selected the name from the suggestions. Any site founded in or after 2002 bears the name Breakthrough. Sites founded prior to 2002 are engaging or planning for changes to their names.

Our Model

Breakthrough is a tuition-free program in which talented high school and college students teach middle school students with limited educational opportunities. They impart the academic, organizational, and social skills middle-schoolers will need to succeed in competitive high schools. During the six-week summer session students take classes in core academic subjects and participate in elective courses ranging from astronomy to African-American literature. A strong emphasis is placed on math and expository writing skills across the curriculum. Teachers expect full participation from every student, a real possibility since the rigorous classes have an overall teacher to student ratio of 1:4. Skills are also imparted outside the classroom. Daily all-school meetings provide opportunities for public speaking; field trips allow students to practice real-world interactions; and community service projects help students develop an awareness of the larger communities in which they live.

While the summer session is the hallmark of the program, after-school and Saturday sessions throughout the regular school year supplement the six-week session. Like the summer curriculum, the school-year activities complement and expand upon students' traditional school objectives, with an emphasis on skill-building and enrichment.

Our Students

We recruit students with a genuine love of learning who have demonstrated personal and educational promise that our program might enhance. Over 90% of our students are of color, 75% will be of the first generation of their families to go to college, nearly all are drawn from the public school system, and 68% qualify for free and reduced lunch. English is a second language for a substantial number of our students, and many are the first in their family to have an opportunity to attend college. Because children from ethnic minority and low-income backgrounds are more likely to attend poorly funded, less rigorous elementary and middle schools, they are also less likely to graduate from high school and, therefore, college. Breakthrough provides a valuable opportunity to supplement our students' traditional education and to set them, and keep them, on the path to college.

Our Teachers

Breakthrough teachers are creative, intelligent, and diverse.

Breakthrough teachers are talented high school and college students from around the country. They are bright, passionate, creative, and intrigued by learning and teaching – even if they are not necessarily planning to become teachers professionally.

Breakthrough teachers are ALL high school & college undergrads.

All applicants are students who are high academic achievers and passionate about learning and teaching. While teachers range from sophomores in high school to seniors in college, they work closely together as equals and colleagues.

Breakthrough teachers are active learners.

Our teachers are dedicated to creating an active learning environment for each other and their students. Most have never taught before, but all are able to learn to foster learning inside and outside the classroom.

Breakthrough teachers have diverse backgrounds.

Many Breakthrough graduates have returned to their programs as teachers. Our high school teachers come from local public, parochial, and independent high schools. College students come from schools nationwide. This summer, there will be approximately 750 teachers around the country and in Hong Kong.

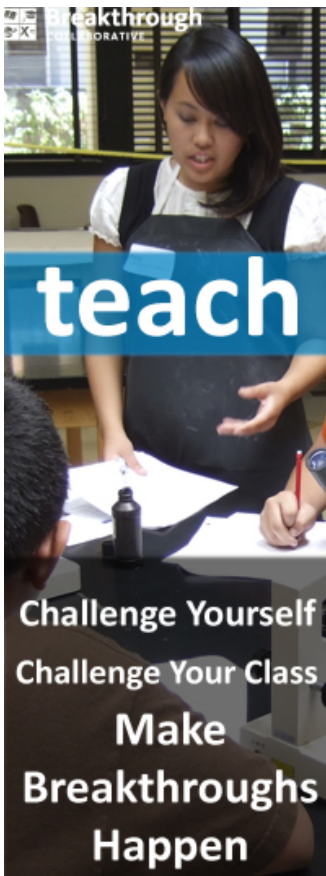
2007 Statistics

- 702 teachers
- 66% are of color
- Average GPA is 3.49

Breaking it Down:

Teachers

In April 1999, Breakthrough partnered with Stanford University and the American Institute for Research to conduct an assessment of its impact on program participants. Findings for former Breakthrough teachers include:



- **83%** report their experience made them more socially conscious and more committed to working for students from limited opportunity backgrounds
- **72%** went on to work in other educationally related careers or internships
- **72%** indicate their experiences strengthened their commitment to enter education
 - **50%** volunteer their time in other educational or youth advocacy programs

Whether Breakthrough teachers join Breakthrough because they want to pursue a career in education or they are converted to the field by their summer experiences, Breakthrough is a proven training ground for future educators and advocates.

Students

In the 1999 Stanford University and American Institute of Research study described above, the assessment team conducted a four-year longitudinal study of student participants. The goal of this study was to document the impact of Breakthrough on students. The findings include:

- **Over 90%** reported that Breakthrough prepared them for high school classes
- **Over 80%** reported that Breakthrough helped them learn what it takes to get into college
- **57%** were taking algebra or geometry in the 8th grade (vs. the national average of 25%)
- **Over 90%** of the 9th graders and over 80% of the 10th graders were enrolled in a mathematics course that put them on track for college
- **74%** of the 9th graders and 92% of the 10th graders were taking either biology or an advanced science course
- **49%** chose a high school other than their assigned public school (vs. 19% of national average)
- **Over 80%** believe that Breakthrough helped them to become better students
- **83%** engage in two or more extracurricular activities; 44% are involved in community service

The research shows Breakthrough has an impact on students' educational preparedness, decisions, and outcomes. This summer you will become a part of this movement; it will be up to you to maintain and increase these statistics through your teaching and daily interactions with the students.



Reflections on Breakthrough: A Conversation with Lois

Lois Loofbourrow

Founder

Middle School Academics Specialist

*Thirty years after founding Breakthrough's first program, Lois Loofbourrow now works for Breakthrough Collaborative national staff where she serves as the Middle School Academics Specialist. A great resource to the network, Lois shares her remembrances of the early days of the program at University High School in San Francisco and how "Summerbridge" evolved into a national collaborative of **students teaching students** programs. In the following account, she shares her thoughts on the mission of Breakthrough, the roles of Breakthrough Directors and Heads of School, and the importance of remaining **student-centered** and **relentless in our ambitions**. It is always a privilege to spend time with Lois and to hear, in her own words, what Breakthrough is all about. In an attempt to share her voice and vision with the collaborative, Lois has summarized her thoughts, highlighting the key issues, so that we might pass it on to you.*

On the Beginnings of Breakthrough

Philosophically, the program was intriguing; we saw it as a way to build many bridges:

- Between public and private; privilege and poverty...
- Between neighborhoods with wonderful sights and those with few
- Between students with both strong preparation and those with weak
- Between middle school exploration and high school pathways
- Between segregation and integration
- Between classism/racism and equality/opportunity
- Between those in power and those who aren't
- Between the prejudices of the rich and the prejudices of the poor

Ideally, the program would help University High School be a school *of* the city, not one merely *in* the city. The seeds for a relevant outreach program began with the School's Board of Trustees and were supported by the Head of School, developed by a faculty committee, and started by co-directors.

The mission, even at the very beginning, was deceptively simple: to prepare predominantly inner-city middle school students for entry into rigorously academic college preparatory high school programs. We knew that middle school, developmentally, is a wonderful time for closing academic gaps as well as a time in which students make life decisions that will affect their academic futures.

We also knew that successful, college-bound students work hard. And, we knew that bright kids often drop out of school because, for so long, it is so easy for them. They aren't challenged until they are *challenged* (usually in high school), and they don't know how to handle it. Thus, we knew we needed to teach Breakthrough students the art of working hard.

Using the independent University High School, the public Lowell High School, and the Catholic St. Ignatius School as models of excellence and as standards by which we could measure our own success in preparing students for rigorous high schools, we developed an enrichment program around a theme-based curriculum. We observed that at our "standards schools" (UHS, Lowell, and St. Ignatius) expectations made a world of difference. At these schools, all students were expected to go to college, and 95% of them did. Even the most average students went on to college. We decided to have the same expectations for Breakthrough students as these schools had for their students.

Our aim was that our students would enter ninth grade without being "blown away." In developing our curriculum, we did a lot of research on what skills college-bound students must possess when they enter high school. We focused our curriculum around algebra readiness, expository writing, challenging literature, scientific exploration, and exposure to foreign languages. We worked to close the "skills gap" we saw in most of our students while providing acceleration and enrichment.

As a three year, year-round, tuition-free program, students came from diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds. The cost of the program was the students' commitment to full participation.

The no-tuition policy was controversial. Some people felt that families needed to make some monetary commitment in order to value the program. Ultimately, we thought, it seemed ridiculous to ask families who were working hard just to feed and clothe their children to reserve some of that money for this educational opportunity. We asked for a family commitment, but it was clear to us that we would never ask for money. We thought the commitment from the families WAS a tremendous cost of the program and therefore, had a strict 100% attendance policy for all key activities. Re-enrollment each year was also a serious process.

Because the program was small the first year -- 36 students, four teachers and 10 high school-aged "aides" -- the curriculum was planned collaboratively by the senior staff. Weekly field trips enhanced classroom exploration, and a five-day camping trip to the mountains was just one of the highlights. By mid-summer, I needed a martini and I didn't even drink!!

Memories of the Early Years: 1978 – 1982

We embraced criticism right from the beginning, and we tried to avoid complacency and smugness. We constantly questioned what we were doing. While what worked and what didn't work always intrigued us, we decided that we would not become experts on anything until the program had time to grow and mature. We thought this would take a few years, and we were right.

We always went directly to kids and invited them to apply. It was never about asking teachers to “tap” kids. We wanted all kids in the schools where we recruited to hear about the program and to decide for themselves if it sounded like an opportunity they wanted to pursue. We knew that teachers, despite the best intentions, don’t always tap the right kids. Sometimes it is easier for teachers to pull the quiet kids or the kids who had exhibited motivation in the past, and we didn’t want to risk missing students by leaving the initial step in the selection process to teachers. It was essential that kids had the opportunity to self-select.

What surprised me the most about the program was how much planning had to go into each event. Occupational Field Trip Day took hours to set up. City Day, City Hall Day, Scavenger Hunts and Overnight Adventures just “didn’t happen.” There were details, details, and still more details. Without paying attention to careful planning, things could go awry quite quickly.

The students and their families took the commitment to the program very seriously. Parents came to everything and soon became a mainstay of the program. Parent volunteers fueled the program and some parents even taught mini-courses in the afternoons during the summer sessions. Parent conferences were held in the evening so working parents could be sure to attend. This commitment is what brought students to our office right from the start – and one of the greatest volunteer corps was born!

We learned so much during these first few years! The children were teachers; their teachers were teachers; their families were teachers. We learned how uneven the playing field is for many students; we started understanding how silent and deadly classism and racism can be; we started realizing our own misconceptions. We started to realize that the program had true merit.

Change for the Sake of the Children

Clearly, the carefully constructed curriculum of the first two summers did not address the academic needs of the students; we needed to individualize and fast! Some students were woefully behind academically, and others craved challenges in areas of strength. Some were ready for algebra; others needed to learn how to think mathematically. Many students were wonderfully creative; few knew how to develop and support topic or thesis statements in either a paragraph or expository essay. Most students had never studied a foreign language or been in a science lab; other students were still learning English as a second language.

We began to stress the importance of serving every child well – we needed to know their names, their academic strengths and weaknesses, the obstacles with which they were dealing, and the resources they could tap. The weaker students from the first two classes struggled in top ninth grade programs. We knew we needed to offer stronger exploration in science, rigorous foreign language study, and more opportunities for expository writing and critical thinking. Study skills needed to be built into each and every course. We needed to help the students see that a class that was “too hard” was not a sign

of personal failure. We needed to help our students thrive. Change needed to happen because of their needs. The program had become needs-responsive instead of fixed and inflexible.

What Worked Right Away?

Even from the start, the students loved the program! The high school students, who began as teacher aides, were capable of teaching! They were wonderful mentors and great friends to their students. The more the high school students talked to the younger students, the more the younger students bought in to the challenges ahead of them.

By the end of the second year, the program's students and their friends flocked to the host school to take both enrichment and skill-based tutorials and classes. Students from all three of our "standards schools" taught in the school-year program.

Field trips were adventurous, project-oriented, and always memorable. The power of well-executed field trips mesmerized all of us. They were held weekly and staff and students both looked forward to them. Even today, I remember all of the City Days and City Hall Days, and so do the "grown-up" students. I even remember many of the questions we asked on our adventurous Scavenger Hunts – find an example of serendipity; find concrete proof of your group's brilliance, an unusual foreign stamp, a list of the current best sellers in a Central American country. I can remember many of the wonderful and creative answers we received to these questions, too! It was experiential education at its best!

We also learned that our professional teachers were excellent at mentoring the high school students as they began to teach; it gave the professional teachers a chance to look at their craft, a chance to truly understand how students learn. The young teachers needed mentor teachers who loved their subjects and knew a lot about the art of teaching.

Our early master/mentor teachers brought the culture of students teaching students to reality. They were indispensable. We had master/mentor teachers in the areas of English literature and writing, social sciences, science, study skills, and math. Later, student Deans of Faculty were added, but they did not supplant the important master teachers. Master teachers worked in the same offices as the teachers to promote lots of talk about teaching and to be very, very accessible to the younger teachers. Master teachers were great listeners and keen supporters, and I also remember them as proactive and immensely honest. I even remember a couple of times when a class was "so bad" that they taught it for a couple of days, allowing the class teacher to observe and regroup.

We soon learned that master teachers had to be keenly in-tune with the mission of the program. They also needed to be keenly aware of what is required in the toughest of college preparatory ninth grade classes. Our best master teachers, possessing both a deep understanding of Breakthrough's mission and a clear knowledge about the academic skills demanded by rigorous high schools, taught our young

teachers how to teach the skills that would be most important for their students' success. Without excellent master teachers to train and support our young faculty, we could have run a good program, but we would not have achieved our mission, and our students would not have developed the skills needed reached their academic and personal goals.

Understanding the Mission, Embracing the Work: 1983- 1989

By 1983, we were grounded in the seriousness of our work. We knew some of the students needed our help and advocacy throughout their high school years. We started tracking our students' progress and following them into college. We further understood that we had to be there for the families of these students. We began to understand the stress of filling out financial aid forms in a family where English is neither spoken nor written. Obviously, not all the students needed to remain closely affiliated with the program from middle school to college. Yet, for those who did, we were their academic lifeline. Helping them over the long term helped us better understand the need for programs such as Breakthrough.

Our students taught us that changing academic expectations is complicated. Crossing neighborhoods and changing friends is not done without a price. Financial stress went way beyond a financial aid grant. Each student had a story to tell, and this story was highly personal. By high school, the students needing assistance relied heavily on the program for guidance and support. By 1983, the program saw itself as an inherent part of University High School; working closely with the Admissions Office, Academic Affairs Office, and Community Service Office.

The program settled in during these years, concentrating on how to better help young people teach, weaning adults out of the classroom, and developing ways to incorporate study skills, critical thinking skills, and expository writing skills into all classes. And, of course, we added a third summer of the program, for students needing extra skill enhancement before high school.

By 1983, the classes were designed with the students' needs in mind. We did not fit students into set classes; we designed individual plans to assist the students. We tried to build research and inquiry skills into each of these classes, and we celebrated reading and library usage in general. In fact, on the very first field trip the students took in the program, one of their tasks was to get a library card. For many students, the local libraries soon became their homework sanctuaries. Some of our students came from homes that were simply too chaotic for quiet study. Healthy alternatives existed for some, but not for all.

By 1983, we knew that excellence in all the co-curricular events helped our students build self-esteem and leadership skills; excellence in the co-curricular arena also helped our students feel safe and secure and happy within the program. The club program helped the students belong; Spirit Day (borrowed from Lowell High School) helped the students work together and to see the power of laughter and good planning. All-School Meetings became a class for many of the program's key values: curiosity,

participation, inquiry, community, awareness, empathy, humor, warmth, appreciation, recognition, safety, excellence. Contests celebrated Shakespeare. I vividly remember a major summer contest on “The Role of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*.” *Words of the Day* skits made words like ubiquitous, gregarious, and indigenous commonplace.

Celebrations at the end of the summer were planned and choreographed so parents could come to an evening that was professional in nature to see their children speak and perform with grace and ease. We wanted the event to be excellent as a way of saying thank you to the wonderful parents who raised these amazing students.

Staff training on group presentations, appropriateness, and public speaking was extended to also include the subtleties of unconscious racism and gender bias. Training regarding drug and alcohol abuse was also given, allowing us to articulate our zero-tolerance of drugs and alcohol for the staff and students while engaged in the program. Afternoon enrichment classes allowed students to practice skills they loved or to experiment with new skills. The importance of choice was essential – we wanted to offer classes that appealed to the introvert, the extrovert, the quiet, the loud, the artist, the athlete, the chess fiend, the musician and the dancer.

By 1983, 10% of the freshman class of University High School was made of alumni from our program. By 1986, four of our students had been University High School’s student body presidents. The majority of our students matriculated at Lowell High School, an award winning academically intense public high school.

On Our Students

Always, we thought the students were perfect. Their skills, economic backgrounds, and personal challenges might differ, but we knew each belonged in the program; each would thrive; each would be able to teach us something. This is why we always went directly to the students and invited them to apply. Children of this age make life decisions; we wanted to tap into this quest for autonomy. We hoped all kids in the schools where we recruited would hear about our program and that some in each school would decide to tackle the intimidating application. We helped the students understand competitive admissions. We both despaired and cheered the huge number of applicants.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs was an important guide for us; we tried to make sure that the levels of the needs were addressed. We worked hard to make our program a safe place – a place free of violence, turf wars, drugs and alcohol, and stress. We did this through word games, silliness, and good, clean fun. We built a sense of belonging into the program in many ways -- student/staff phone directories, T-shirts, and, always, by making clear the ubiquitous ways that each student could give back, be they 11 or 20.

We were always humbled by how important the program was to the students. I believe it is this humility that helped us fight mediocrity at every turn. It is my fervent belief that middle and upper income children can certainly put up with bouts of mediocrity because they receive so much stimulation, opportunity, and so many trips, lessons, etc. But our country's poorest youngsters have too much mediocrity in their lives; it is deadening! Breakthrough programs simply CANNOT invite kids to excellence and give them mediocrity. Mediocrity is a killer for a kid. Where will our students go if what we give them is mediocre? Our young teachers will find new opportunities; directors will move on in their careers. But what will happen to our kids if Breakthrough programs are not excellent?

Our desire to add excellence and sparkle to all the activities and to have the highest of expectations for teacher preparedness came from our desire to have our program's most disadvantaged students enlivened and motivated and surrounded by the celebration of excellence. When I first started becoming acquainted with the best of our independent schools, I was actually stunned by the lack of mediocrity everywhere I looked. Excellence permeates the halls and classrooms of these schools. The parents would never accept anything less. *Breakthrough has to be this good, too.*

During the students high school years, many students came back to work in the program as teachers, as office staff, as volunteers. Many, many tutored in the school year program which ran four afternoons a week out of University High School. Coming back and giving back was an early mantra of the program. Some students needed extra help as they navigated the high school years. We provided tutors when necessary, talked about summer options, connected with programs that could provide summer opportunities outside of San Francisco. Each year at Celebration, we invited our high school students to come and help us celebrate another year, another class entering the Summerbridge/Breakthrough family.

Holding on to our students and their histories was important to us.

On Our Teachers

As we moved to the "students teaching students" model, our younger teachers were all high school students. We thought they were wonderful; they were funny and bright and certainly remembered ninth grade. Soon, many of these teachers were our alums. The program matured with their insights and continued commitment. Slowly, we accepted college students into the teaching ranks – especially as our alums grew up. It is ironic that, in some ways, the college students took more time. Many wanted to teach the courses they loved in college; others stayed out too late at night being able to live a freer life style than their high school age colleagues. On the other hand, high school students seemed to be purer of heart and totally student-centered.

We found our best teachers came through the recommendations of their own teachers and, because we were so committed to our alumni, finding teachers in the program was never a concern. Breakthrough attracts a special kind of person.

We realized, early on, that we could never, never provide enough teacher preparation. After all, we were working in an intense, student-centered program. We knew that we were not a teacher-education program. The difficult teacher applications were slowly developed so that the young teachers would come equipped with clear expectation of the work and challenges the program would provide them. We created a structured training and support program built with outstanding professional teachers. Still, we always felt that our primary mission was helping our younger kids make big leaps. While being part of helping kids make these leaps can be a humbling and powerful experience for the young teachers, our focus was always clearly on our middle-schoolers and their success. We were to learn however, that the teachers felt they learned even more than the students they taught. Many would say that the experience of teaching in the program made them think more profoundly about education, about community, about equity than they had ever done before. We had underestimated our impact on our young teaching staff.

On Outcomes

We made a pact not to talk about our program for 10 years to ensure that when we wrote about the program, we would have statistics and data to back up the accomplishments of our students and personal stories that told of personal struggles and pathways that helped or hindered our students progress. We wanted to follow them into college and beyond.

We also decided that if anyone was interested in what we were learning and doing, they would be welcome visitors and we would be happy to share our methodology with others.

Within 10 years, we had the data to be able to say that 92% of our students went on to college, the vast majority to competitive four-year colleges and universities and that 72% of the college students who taught in the program entered the profession of education.

The voices of every student who entered the program gave back to the program and to each other in wonderful ways and helped to define the overall success of the program itself. In many ways for the younger middle school students and for the older high school and college students, the program became a dynamic lesson in community service, in giving to others, in receiving from others. From my viewpoint, we were growing leaders of all ages with heart.