

**FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES PREVENTION PROGRAM STRENGTHENS  
STUDENT COMMUNITY AT SANTA MONICA HIGH SCHOOL**

**(Santa Monica, CA) April 24, 2006**—Facing History and Ourselves, an international non-profit organization dedicated to providing resources and professional development to teachers worldwide so students can explore choices and recognize the decisions in history that have led to group hatred and violence, recently joined forces with Santa Monica High School in response to incidents of inter-group conflict that took place at the school last spring. Facing History and Ourselves is a required, year-long course for the school’s approximately 850 ninth grade students.

“We turned to Facing History not only because of its reputation as a program of personal connection, relevance, and rigor, but also because several of our teachers knew firsthand the power of the approach,” said Tristan Komlos, “M” House teacher at Santa Monica High School. “Facing History transforms teachers, and by doing so, transforms students.”

The faculty, led by teachers Michael Felix, Mary Hendra, La Sonya Roberts and Daniel Braunfeld, re-drafted the school’s languishing and disconnected Freshman Seminar and replaced it with a newly developed course that uses lessons from history to help students make more responsible, positive and inclusive decisions in their daily lives. The course examines themes of identity, membership, choices, and participation and uses the organization’s classroom resources including *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*, *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement*, and *Twilight: Los Angeles*.

The impact of the partnership with Facing History became clear when the school community had to grapple with a blatant, public display of hate speech on the high school campus earlier this year. Graffiti littered the walls of campus, igniting fears of tension, violence, and retaliation. Instead of a replay of last year’s violence, the incident opened a dialogue among the students.

“We never imagined that after only five months, the experience of Facing History would have enabled students to express such a depth of understanding, empowered teachers to inspire change, and created the beginnings of a new kind of community,” adds Komlos. “I’m hopeful that four years from now, by continuing to partner with Facing History, our school will be one in which all students will share a common language to speak up for and act upon our collective values of respect.”

This partnership was made possible by a grant from Lloyd Cotsen, president of Cotsen Management Corp and former chairman and CEO of Neutrogena Corp., given through the Ahmanson Foundation to fund the training last summer of the 15 educators teaching the course. While the Ahmanson Foundation continues to provide ongoing support and training, Facing History is currently seeking additional funding to expand the program to the tenth grade next year and to meet the long-term goal of having every member of the student body experience Facing History as a required ninth grade course.

“Facing History and Ourselves is not an intervention program—it’s about preventing violence and prejudice, said Dan Alba, Regional Director of Facing History and Ourselves. “Working with the faculty at Santa Monica High School has allowed us to show students how to confront history in order to better understand their responsibility to each other and the larger community, and learn to act more ethically and compassionately.”

Facing History’s community program, sponsored by the Allstate Foundation, enhances the program’s effectiveness. Former Sudanese slave and now human rights activist Francis Bok will speak to program participants on May 19 at a ninth-grade assembly about his incredible journey from victim to upstander, and the empathy and awareness required to make such a remarkable transformation.

### **About Facing History and Ourselves**

Facing History and Ourselves is an international educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of collective violence, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. Facing History reaches 1.6 million students worldwide each year.

### **About Santa Monica High School**

Founded in 1891, Santa Monica High School serves over 3,300 students from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The student body's demographics are: White (non-Hispanic) 50.4%, Hispanic or Latino 30.8%, African American 11%, Asian 6.8%, Filipino 0.3%, Pacific Islander 0.2%, American Indian or Alaska Native 0.2%, and Other 0.2%.

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