

Convention Release
April 30, 2011

Two guest speakers focus on efforts to improve student success

Jason Shah and Benito Delgado-Olson are young men who are dedicated to reducing the achievement gap through innovative organizations they started. Here is a look at what they have achieved and their comments at the 112th Annual California State PTA Convention in Long Beach.

Jason Shah, founder of INeedAPencil.com

After witnessing the severe academic disadvantages faced by students in an urban middle school when he was 15, Shah decided to build a program to help level the playing field for college admissions among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Shah launched INeedAPencil.com, an online education website, in 2007 and has since grown the program to serve more than 36,000 students throughout the world, helping them to achieve an average 202 point score increase on SAT exams. Graduating from Harvard in May 2011 with an undergraduate degree in sociology and computer science, Shah hopes to continue seeing INeedAPencil.com grow, and launch new ventures that solve social challenges.

"It would be great if we could read about the achievement gap in history books and not newspapers," Shah told delegates.

Benito Delgado-Olson, executive director and co-founder of www.ktocollege.org

K to College was founded in 2008 by a handful of U.C. Berkeley students and alumni who had a goal of improving access to higher education for low-income students.

The K to College School Supply Initiative (SSI) provides free canvas totes filled with school supplies to students who are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. K to College, a volunteer-based nonprofit, in 2010 the SSI Program was funded by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act and allocates funds to pay for the cost of the totes to students in need. In 2010, the SSI provided school supply kits and dental kits to over 170,000 K-12 students across 24 California school districts.

Delgado-Olson said what holds many students back is a "materials gap," which his organization combats with the SSI totes. The kits are intended to inspire students and close the achievement gap.

"For a lot of these kids it's the only time they received a shiny new bag of shiny things that was just for them," he said. For some students, he added, it was the first time they had notebook paper.