

**BAKERSFIELD ADULT SCHOOL  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL**

Bakersfield county supervisors, elected by local citizens, make decisions each day that affect residents' quality of life – decisions changing zoning laws, managing county resources, supervising recreational activities, as well as other critical decisions. County supervisors play an especially important role in smaller metropolitan districts where these decisions often have a greater impact than in larger metropolitan areas. How better to understand their procedures than to attend the meetings, and even better, job shadow the individual supervisors for a day.

Each year since March 2003, Steve Carey's level 5 EL Civics students at Bakersfield Adult School, Kern Union High School District, have spent a morning attending a meeting of the Kern County Board of Supervisors. Prior to the meeting, students write an essay, choosing from seven topics such as, "How does a democracy work?" and "Why is it important to understand local government?" Students compete for the opportunity to shadow a supervisor, and those who wish to do so must prepare an oral presentation of their essay. Five student "shadows" and two alternates are chosen from students who gave oral presentations. These students shadow the supervisors by spending time in their offices learning about their duties and responsibilities. Students then sit in the board chambers with the supervisors as they hold the open session of their weekly meeting. Supervisors introduce the students to those in attendance, and students provide personal information about themselves: where they are from, how long they have lived in Kern County, their reasons for attending school, and their future goals. Students also accompany supervisors to the podium when they make public commendations. The rest of Steve Carey's students participate by sitting in the chambers as spectators. They listen to interactions during the meeting and observe the conducting of county business.

During the two years that Steve Carey's classes have attended meetings of the Kern County Board of Supervisors, 15 students have had been able to shadow a supervisor and sit beside the supervisor in chambers; another 100 have attended sessions in chambers to watch county government in action. Students have learned they have the right to participate in local decisions and have the power to help shape how local government operates. County supervisors have become acquainted with individual students and are now more aware of the benefits of adult education programs.

The success of the job shadowing process is evident in its influence on many students:

- One job shadow student received an invitation to talk to a citizenship class about what he had learned from his experience with the supervisor and what this experience meant to him.
- Another student said that she now frequently watches meetings of the Kern County Board of Supervisors on TV.
- A third student reported that after her supervisor-shadowing experience, she watched a replay of the meeting with her family and recorded it on video. She was proud to represent Bakersfield Adult School.

As Steve Carey stated, "This personal community involvement has changed the lives of these Kern County EL Civics students."