"We really do drink from the firehose here," remarks Karen Falkenberg, lecturer in educational studies. She’s watching dozens of excited middle-schoolers pass her temporary office on Emory’s Clairmont campus, a sea of milling t-shirts and backpacks interrupted here and there by Emory students two heads taller. The rising 6th-8th graders are between classes at Challenge & Champions (C&C), a summer program that teaches learning skills and health awareness—and one that doesn’t seem to suffer any of the connotations of duty or punishment that the phrase “summer school” might carry for a twelve-year-old.

At the moment Falkenberg is referring to her Master of Arts in Teaching students, whose intensive three weeks of observation, counseling and training at C&C will be bracketed by double “micromester” sessions, with classes morning and evening. But the firehose image isn’t a bad one for Emory’s involvement with local schools as a whole. Not trickle or drip, but full on. College faculty and students spanning disciplines as varied as Spanish and biology, mathematics and dance are bringing Emory’s emphasis on liberal arts excellence to area communities and schools.
Learning About Learning

This year more than sixty students attended C&C, from all over the Atlanta metro area. “We send out flyers to public school principals,” explains Falkenberg, who directs the program, now in its fourth year at Emory after being developed at North Carolina State in the 1990s. “And we also work with homeless shelters. That’s one of the beauties of it: some children are supported on grants for the homeless, others need partial tuition remission, and some can pay in full. Our teachers and counselors have no way of knowing which is which. Everyone is just here to learn.”

The desire, and the delight, are palpable. A visit one morning yields the arresting sight of twenty kids at an eminently distractible age focused intently on the tables in front of them, trying to work out with partners how to connect batteries and bulbs in a circuit. Another room holds (barely) a class called “The Secret Lives of Mathematicians,” a dozen hands straining to be called on to solve an equation. Soon they’ll go outside and throw tennis balls as high as they can, timing the return to earth with a stopwatch in a hands-on gravity experiment. “This is so cool,” one of them says in passing. “I wish school was always like this.”

Joseph Cadray, senior lecturer in the division, feels the same way. As coordinator of preservice teaching, Cadray is in charge of directing field experiences for his students. To him, learning about learning should be open and reflective, and it should happen on both sides of the desk. “Teaching can be a solitary activity,” he says. “That may seem incongruous, given a classroom full of students, but without intentional, guided reflection it really can be. And that doesn’t produce the best teaching. So we put a lot of emphasis on not only theory but sociology: knowing student backgrounds, knowing the community.”

And into the community they go. To prepare for certification in middle and secondary education, students in Emory coursework teach, tutor and observe in dozens of area schools, in nearby Decatur and DeKalb or farther afield in Clayton or Cobb—ten city and county systems all told. The schools get tutoring and faculty consultation; Emory students get practical experience in curriculum development and pedagogy. Everybody wins.

Talk to just a few of the people putting their scholarship to work outside Emory’s green borders, and you quickly begin to think differently about the “public” in “public schools.” Carole Hahn, Candler Professor of Education Studies, for instance, takes seriously the familiar injunction to “think globally, act locally.” Her course in comparative education aims, she says, to “prepare people to be global citizens, and to understand that ‘global’ doesn’t mean ‘over there.’” While EDS 312 requires all the readings, essays and exams you’d expect of an Emory College class, students must also tutor a local international student and interview someone educated in another country, keeping “learning logs” to reflect on the way this challenges their preconceptions of education and place.

Allison Bladon, now a junior, chose to tutor at the International Community School (ICS). “I spent two hours every Monday with a fourth-grader named Ella,” she reports. “We bonded over the fact that we both had parents from the Caribbean.” And while they worked together to conquer multiplication tables and spelling lists, they also learned about areas beyond their common experience. “Students there hail from all over the world, including war-torn areas like Sudan and Kosovo,” Bladon goes on. “Perhaps if more students had access to this we might see a decrease in prejudice.

“I learned just as much, if not more, from the students as they learned from me.”

Hahn points out that this mutual learning can also occur in locales that “aren’t schools in the traditional sense, but are clearly education sites.” So while some of her students tutor at Cary Reynolds Elementary, others volunteer at Refugee Family Services (RFS), a facility for women and children north of Atlanta. “Many tell me afterward it was the best part of their week,” she says. Jill Ford, a graduate student, was so taken by the experience as an EDS 312 instructor that she is now writing her dissertation on teaching refugees in the public schools.

Ford describes her RFS involvement as “eye-opening and humbling. I’ve met and worked with children who’ve seen the worst life has to offer, yet are able to survive in miraculous ways.”

The College students she now supervises “talk to me of having learned an incredible amount about lives very different than their own . . . but also about a shared humanity.”

Science Matters

At Marsteller, senior lecturer in biology and director of the Center for Science Education (CSE), knows something about crossing the lines between higher education and the public schools, and about the rewards involved. She laughs at the proposed title Director of Acronyms, but it might be appropriate. With funding from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and with the help of Emory College science and administration colleagues, she oversees programs called STEP, PREP, GIFT, CREDIT and PRISM, among others, all geared toward getting public school teachers and students ready for higher achievement and greater opportunity. Hughes/CSE initiatives have improved the curriculum of schools across the Atlanta area and as far away as Alabama, affecting thousands of students annually.

Both the programs and the people get high marks. Joseph Lichter, a chemistry graduate student, calls Marsteller and the CSE’s Jordan Rose “two of the most helpful and encouraging
mentors I have encountered here at Emory” and the PRISM program “fantastic.” PRISM (Problems and Research to Integrate Science and Mathematics) teams undergraduate and graduate fellows for a full year with middle and high school teachers, engaging younger students with “real world” math and science via “problem-based learning.”

How does it work? “Take the periodic table,” Lichter says. “We tried to teach them the relevance of the organization of elements. That’s how Dmitri Mendeleev designed it: elements in rows and columns based on their chemical properties. We told them to imagine they were in Mendeleev’s apartment the night he was about to finish, when suddenly a big wind surges through the window and blows his carefully arranged note cards into a random mess.

“We gave the students that random pile of cards and asked them to put it together again.”

A more conventional approach might have been to teach methodically about “atomic radii, electronegativity and other properties,” says Lichter, “by just showing them the textbook figures.” But this way, he points out, calls upon intuition as well as memory. He quotes Einstein for support: “The value of an education in a liberal arts college is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think something that cannot be learned from textbooks.”

Emory PREP (Preparatory Research Education Program) tries to keep this in mind too. A summer residential program for public school students, PREP adds cultural activities to advanced instruction in math, science and literature. The 2006 theme was “Unmask Your Potential,” and it seems to have worked: six students last year were finalists for the prestigious Martin Luther King Jr. full merit scholarship, and three more won other scholarships. About twenty percent earn admission to Emory.

One of these was Morgan Dooley, who got involved in PREP as a rising high school senior and calls it “an awesome experience. It gave me my first taste of college life—the freedom, the responsibility, the limitless intellectual horizons. It was the reason I chose Emory.” Dooley, now at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, was enthused enough to work for PREP as a resident adviser and biology instructor once she arrived. “It was like going back into a time capsule,” she says. “I can remember what a critical period it was for me. . . . These programs give students the foundation to be successful for a lifetime.”

Emory Science Outreach (ESO) takes aim at the same target, but with an important difference: it’s run not only for but by students. Zain Ahmed, a College senior and president of ESO, started the organization last year after tutoring at a local high school and witnessing “the multifaceted issues faced by at-risk and disadvantaged students.” ESO volunteers offer themselves as career day speakers and guest lecturers, after-school and weekend assistants, tutors, mentors, science fair judges—basically “in any capacity requested by local schools and teachers,” he said. Ahmed can point to some impressive results. At Avondale High School, where he started a tutoring program, the passing rate on the Georgia High School Graduation Test improved from below 50% to almost 70% in barely a year.

Nithya Mani got involved with ESO early. As a freshman this spring she led a campus science fair for local public school students called Emory Science Olympiad, and she also tutors and mentors. With one class she even learned judo. “It really broke the ice,” she says. “They were teaching me the moves. It started to redefine the tutor/student roles a bit.” In ESO, Mani says, “We were able to form relationships
Above: The José Limon Dance Company holds a class. 
Right: Violinist Joshua Bell talks with students.
with the students. In many tutoring programs you just help a student one time, without any follow-through. But they remembered us. I really loved doing this.”

Junior Alexandra Kamins also helped with the Science Olympiad last year, then organized a weekly science club at Harper-Archer Middle School. With the CSE's Jordan Rose she formed a “core group” of half a dozen seventh-graders and then “yanked other kids in from the hall.” Kamins says she was “surprised how little science they had been exposed to. But their glee when we exploded pipettes with dry ice to explore phase changes, or one girl’s simple comment after our circuit lab (‘No one’s ever explained electricity to me before’) brought me back every Thursday.”

Se habla Emory aquí

aving my own kids in the public schools—that’s part of the reason I got into this,” says Karen Stolley, associate professor and chair of Spanish, of her department’s deep involvement in Atlanta schools. “When I came here in 1992, we were just starting to see a need.” But with recent demographic changes, she says, “some schools are now 80 percent Hispanic/Latino. And there’s been increasing attention to the connection between K-12 and higher education.”

Stolley and senior lecturer Vialla Hartfield-Mendez, director of the Emory Scholars program, recently described some of the responses to this felt need. “I want our students to understand the Latino presence here in Atlanta,” Hartfield-Mendez says, so with grants from the Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP), the Institute for Comparative and International Studies and other sponsors, she has led efforts to strengthen the College’s ties to that community.

As with Emory’s other outreach initiatives, the results have been imaginative and varied. In a program called SHINE, which forges connections with older immigrants, and in service-learning courses such as “Writing, Context and Community” and “The Hispanic World: Culture, Society, Language,” College students do more than learn the speech and mores of far-off cultures. They translate in parent-teacher conferences, help with school newsletters and tutor as a way of creating “locally grounded global citizenship,” as Hartfield-Mendez puts it. Some work with young students on bilingual literacy; others help in a local program addressing domestic violence in Hispanic families. One program brought area elementary school kids together with teachers from Mexico and Emory undergraduates for a three-week summer “cultural immersion” in Mexican art and popular culture.

Some College students take these experiences into internships, directed studies, or honors theses. And some go further. “A student of mine moved to North Carolina and began a bilingual reading program,” Hartfield-Mendez says with pride. Other graduates are studying public health or medicine with an eye toward working in Latino communities.

Rachel Kotler, who took one of these courses as a senior, went on to teach “bridge” classes (parts of each day in two languages) at an inner-city school in Brooklyn. “I taught everything,” she says: “Spanish, Math, Social Studies. It was really rewarding, and very challenging.” In the process Kotler became interested in the policy aspects of multicultural education, and this fall she begins work toward a doctorate in education at Harvard. She has high praise for Hartfield-Mendez and the department: “Sometimes it only takes one professor, one class, to shape a path and a career.”

New Steps in a New Dance

r it might take a single visit from a musician, painter or dancer, or an invitation to the magic of museums and books, to turn some young person’s mind in a new and unsuspected direction. Julie Green, who manages school programs for Emory’s Michael C. Carlos Museum, uses a grant from OUCP to provide transportation and tours for students from five local elementary, middle and high schools. A similar grant for reading enrichment helps the Institute for Reading Development reach nearly 2,000 local students in a typical summer.

Artists in the Emory Coca-Cola Artists in Residence Program reach out in their own ways, drawing area school kids to Emory (or visiting them at their schools) for programs as varied as the artists themselves. The program, in place since 2004, specializes in music but also includes theater, visual arts and dance. Consider a few snapshots: members of Urban Bush Women and the Jose Limon Dance Company conducting high school dance classes; the Zagreb Saxophone Quartet fielding questions about music careers at a middle school assembly; internationally renowned classical guitarist Eliot Fisk in an interactive performance with elementary students.

“Some of these students have never been to a college campus,” remarks Tracy Clark, assistant director for programming at Emory’s Schwartz Center for Performing Arts. “So it helps make the possibility of a college education more tangible for them. And the residence program gives them an amazing arts experience that, hopefully, they’ll remember for a lifetime.”