

Oak Park Unified School District Model Programs and Practices

District Information

CD (County District) Code: 5673874

County: Ventura

District (Local Educational Agency): Oak Park Unified School District

Demographics

Enrollment: 4,533

Location Description: Suburban

Overview

Oak Park Unified School District is a high performing public K–12 school district located in Oak Park, an unincorporated community in south Ventura County on the border with Los Angeles County, nestled between the cities of Agoura Hills, Westlake Village, and Thousand Oaks. The school district was formed in 1977 when residents voted to create a new school district to better meet the needs of its residents, beginning a long tradition of placing the highest priority toward ensuring a high quality education.

The comprehensive (grades pre-K–12) public school district serves approximately 4,600 students and comprises a preschool, three elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, as well as an independent school and a continuation school for students with unique needs. Students from the entire region are drawn to attend Oak Park schools with about 35–40 percent of students coming from neighboring districts via the District of Choice program as well as through inter district transfers and permits.

All of the district's schools are California Gold Ribbon schools and have been nationally recognized as Blue Ribbon schools. The district has also been recognized as a national Green Ribbon school district- the first in California- for its focus on environmentally progressive policies and practices.

OPUSD teachers and administrators frequently present at local, state, and national conferences and workshops to share the innovative classroom practices that make OPUSD a great place to learn. All that we do is geared toward our goal of “Educating Compassionate and Creative Global Citizens.”

Model Program/Practice

Name of Model Program/Practice

Teaching and Learning in a Climate of Care

Summary

Length of Model Program/Practice: 2–4 years

Description

OPUSD offers a program where students learn in a climate of care exemplified by our extensive counseling programs that nurture students' mental health and wellbeing, the food we serve them in the cafeteria, the cleanliness of the air in the classrooms, our modern facilities, the supervision we provide, and, most importantly, through the people that educate and care for our students each day.

Guided by our Goals and Moral Imperatives, as well as our LCAP, OPUSD strives to create learning environments that support the whole child. With our partnership with Challenge Success, an arm of Stanford University's School of Education, OPUSD has made significant changes to our calendar and policies to mitigate student stress. These changes include an "early start" calendar to reduce stress on high school students, a research-based homework policy, and updated grading policies that place learning - not grades - as our main focus.

Two task forces, the Safety and Security Task Force and the Safe Kids Task Force (SKTF), work hand-in-hand as we integrate a climate of care across campuses. The SKTF, comprised of board members, administrators, counselors, psychologists, and parents, addresses issues affecting social-emotional wellbeing. The members of SKTF discuss current challenges and oversees the Advanced Peer Counseling, Safe School Ambassadors, and the Where Everyone Belongs (WEB) programs, which place students at the forefront of creating a safe climate on our campuses. The Safety and Security Task Force handles site concerns such as threat assessment and training of campus supervisors on bullying and how to handle schoolwide threats or emergencies. The Safety and Security Task Force holds active shooter trainings, collaborates with the Ventura County Sheriff's department, and facilitates disaster drills at each site.

Nearly 10% of OPUSD students are eligible for special education services. Our program emphasizes collaboration with parents and inclusion of students with disabilities in a rigorous educational program. Special education staff and administrators participate in extensive training in evidence-based, child-centered, proactive strategies to build collaboration and trust while reducing conflict. Because of our inclusive practices, general education teachers play a significant role in program development and implementation. We do not operate "special day classes"; students with disabilities from preschool through grade 12 receive the majority of their special education services within the general education classroom. students with disabilities placed in general

education for less than 50% of their academic day. The focus on inclusive practices and collaboration with parents and teachers has resulted in exceptional academic achievement by the District's students with disabilities.

These programs and practices contribute to a District culture that is compassionate, empathetic, and focused on the success and wellbeing of all students.

Implementation and Monitoring

OPUSD maintains an open and continuous improvement process that encourages students, staff, and parents to take part in the evaluation and progress monitoring of our goals. Our website features a living document that highlights the ongoing actions we are taking in pursuit of our Goals and Moral Imperatives. The LCAP stakeholder input process provides us with the valuable perspectives of staff, students, parents, and community members. Members of the Board also provide opportunities for community members to meet and discuss current issues or concerns. With a focus on clear goals and open communication, OPUSD provides external monitoring.

In the same vein, OPUSD has a culture that provides shared leadership among the staff and school sites. Teachers, staff, students, and administrators are deeply engaged in decision making through participation in more than 10 committees, each of which has a focus on LCAP goals and our Moral Imperatives. School site leadership teams are actively involved in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of programs and practices aimed at reaching our goals. This inclusive and deliberative decision making leads to adoption of shared goals.

At all levels, OPUSD creates a safe method for sharing concerns about student safety. Elementary counselors maintain a bullying reporting form, allowing parents or students to share relational aggression problems. The counselors and principals are able to promptly address issues before they become serious. These reports provide our staff with the information needed to investigate incidents, often relying on our ubiquitous security camera footage to corroborate reports. Students are counseled, disciplined, and provided follow up that matches the severity of the problem. School counselors lead monthly parent education workshops to help parents understand and respond to the social emotional needs of their children.

Both the middle and high schools maintain two methods for students and parents to help us monitor our climate. Both schools maintain anonymous reporting tools on their websites, which give students a way to report issues or safety concerns. Both secondary schools also have numerous student groups whose role is to build acceptance and a positive school climate.

OPUSD places a high priority on effective and positive collaboration with parents; this is a specific focus within the special education department. As a means of obtaining ongoing parental input regarding collaboration between district staff and parents, after every IEP meeting, parents complete a brief anonymous survey regarding their experiences (extent of collaboration, effective communication, satisfaction with

outcome, etc.) during the meeting. This allows the District to use real data to implement changes to the IEP meeting process in response to parental input.

Results and Outcomes

By teaching and learning in a climate of care, OPUSD provides an ideal environment for all students to thrive. As California measures and reports climate related data, our actions are proving to be successful. Our low suspension rate of .6% and graduation rate of 98.3% are two indications that students can succeed in our schools.

According to the CHKS, our elementary counselors' efforts have paid off. Students reported that they have developed awareness and skills on how to handle bullying. All of the 2016–2017 pre and post answers reflect an increase in positively handling bullying situations. With respect to identifying physical aggression and verbal aggression scenarios, the students showed an increase of 56% and 32%, respectively. The two biggest increases on survey statements applied to “I can do something about bullying,” which showed an 8% increase and “I know what to do if I am being targeted,” which showed a 13% increase. These responses are promising and encouraging for our staff. These items exemplify how a climate of care empowers students to take ownership of their school.

Similarly, middle and high school efforts have created a positive climate. Among all areas surveyed in the 2012–13 and 2015–16 Healthy Kids Survey for the middle and high school students, we were especially pleased to see the results related to school connectedness. Middle school saw an increase of 5% and high school saw an increase of 11%. To improve on these scores, we've increased the adult presence on campus by hiring more campus supervisors and counselors. These expenses are actions in Goal 2 of our LCAP. Our efforts paid off, as the scores reflect an increase in two key areas. In “caring adult relationships,” all grades, 7, 9, and 11, saw a significant increase, with grade 9 jumping 9%. High school connectedness is additionally challenged considering that 40% of our students live outside the boundaries of our school district.

Our focus on the whole child, our inclusive practices, and the ongoing collaboration with parents have positively impacted outcomes for students with disabilities. The District is especially proud of the achievement of our high school students with disabilities in the area of ELA; 54% of these students met or exceeded standards on the Spring 2017 CAASPP. Our ongoing collaboration with parents has significantly reduced conflict with parents. According to data from 2017–2018 parent surveys of their experience in IEP meetings, parents consistently report that they have opportunities to provide input into IEP meetings, that IEP meetings are collaborative, and that meeting outcomes are appropriate. Of note, despite extensive litigation in neighboring districts, there have been no due process filings by parents during the 2017–2018 school year. This allows the District to use funds for student programming, additional mental health supports, and professional development rather than costs associated with litigation.