

## **Washington Open Elementary School Model Programs and Practices**

### **School Information**

CDS (County District School) Code: 43696746049035

County: Santa Clara

District (Local Educational Agency): Santa Clara Unified

School: Washington Open Elementary School

### **Demographics**

Enrollment: 325 students

Location Description: Suburban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: No

### **Overview**

“It’s all about the kids,” is a commonly repeated statement at Washington Open Elementary School (WO) but its secret is really all about the community coming together to support the kids. WO is a progressive, parent participation school with 325 students from kindergarten to 5th grade and 49 staff members, including 17 teachers, in the Santa Clara Unified School District (SCUSD). The school was created in 1973 to provide an environment where parents would be integrated regularly into the classroom as they wanted a more active role in their children’s education. A unique and supportive school program evolved and to this day the entire school community - parents, staff, students, and alumni - nurture and educate the whole child. In SCUSD, WO is the only progressive, parent participation school. Annually, over 600 parents volunteer in excess of 50,000 hours to the program.

WO’s progressive “360 model” centers on the entire community coming together to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of the whole child. Under district and state guidelines, the program accomplishes this by creating and teaching curricula that encourages experiential, small group learning through hands-on collaborative projects,

emphasizing problem solving and critical thinking, developing social skills, and fostering social responsibility through community service and leadership.

WO's progressive program is built around parent participation and engagement. Several times a week, parent volunteers lead teacher-designed centers, forming bonds with students and creating small learning environments. Many parents also work in various schoolwide and classroom committees directly supporting the 10+ field trips annually per grade, community building events, and fundraising, creating a close-knit community of parents across all grade levels. In addition, parent volunteers provide many extracurricular activities for students. One such example is the robust drama program where parents and staff members work over 3,000 hours each school year to support the 200+ students who take to the stage, at the local high school theatre, in 2 casts with 4 performances each.

The success of WO's progressive program is shown in measurable outcomes of student performance, parent involvement, staff satisfaction and a vibrant school climate. Parent surveys show that over 95% of parents have volunteered and attended school meetings. This indicates its program actively engages parents in the students' education. Staff report that students are motivated to learn, enjoy collaborating on projects, are encouraged to make decisions and practice empathy and respect for all community members. Over 203 students receive support in reading, mathematics, language development, and/or special education, ensuring that all students progress. The school community strives to continue the successful progressive learning tradition that distinguishes Washington Open.

## **Model Program and Practices**

Name of Model Program/Practice: Progressive Parent Participation

Length of Model Program/Practice: 8+ years

Target Area(s): Closing the Achievement Gap, Education Supports, Parent, Family, and Community Involvement, Professional Development, Visual and Performing Arts

Target Population(s): English Learners, Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: School Climate, Small Learning Communities, Parent Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics (Teachers, Instructional Materials, Facilities)

## **Description**

WO follows a progressive, parent participation philosophy that was adopted 45 years ago. Its mission is to nurture the whole child, providing a collaborative community that allows for a rich variety of real-world learning opportunities while balancing academic,

social, physical, and emotional needs, and encouraging creativity, curiosity, and a life-long love of learning. Parent, and even alumni, volunteers allow the school to meet these goals and exceed state and district expectations.

Stepping onto the WO campus, one is immediately immersed in a vibrant, welcoming community. Student art covers office walls, posters of casts from prior musical shows cover hallways, and students move through the campus making their way to breakout rooms to collaborate on school projects. Every Wednesday morning the community gathers together for Open Sing, when students, staff, and families join together to chorus songs like “This Land is Your Land” and “You Can Count on Me.”

After Open Sing, one might see stakeholders with heads together, crafting plans to create the best learning environment for each child. The 360 model begins early in the year when each student is assessed by the teacher, principal and support staff. From this, student success teams (SSTs) are formed for students needing social-emotional and/or academic support to meet standards or for enrichment. This proactive and ongoing intervention, ensures all students succeed and provides focused, thorough support for students with high needs and in underperforming subgroups.

Inside the classrooms, the 360 model appears in the form of students working in small groups facilitated by parent volunteers. One might hear a student explaining her process for solving a math problem, a student helping a peer read a word, or an adult sharing a life experience that connects to the day’s objectives. Teachers sit beside students, pulling those who need extra support while encouraging all to share their ideas. Outside, a group harvests the community garden or cooks food in the teaching kitchen. Primary students pair up with reading buddies and dive into books on a classroom floor while 3rd graders dress in costume to reenact the Pioneer Days. 4th graders work in teams to train for their Age of Sail overnight field trip aboard a ship while 5th graders conduct Revolutionary War Debates in period costume. All of these experiential learning activities support and extend the LCAP’s goal to create learning environments that cultivate the 4 C’s.

To bring the 360 model to life, the school relies on many key resources from both the district and community. This year, the district processed 600+ classroom volunteers and provided technology, instruments, and staff for music and PE. Each year, the site budget and the WO Parent Faculty Group (a non-profit) provide funds and volunteers to create the learning experiences that make WO a special place.

### **Implementation and Monitoring**

Stakeholders, particularly parent volunteers, are engaged in the 360 model. The majority of parents volunteer 4 hours per week in the class. In each grade, parents chaperone about 10+ field trips yearly. They also share unique talents; supporting the science fair, school gardens, ceramics, cooking projects, fundraisers, drama, and mentoring new families. They attend parent trainings and 2–6 class meetings per year.

At the teacher's direction, parents lead small group centers that form the core of the school's progressive program. Small groups rotate through math, social studies, science, and book clubs, reinforcing the 4 Cs. This model allows students to interact with multiple parents weekly, fostering strong adult and student bonds. It also allows teachers to spend focused attention on students to provide support or complete assessments.

Progressive practices also allow for larger-scale, thematic, hands-on learning. As examples, 3rd graders reenact Westward migration through Pioneer Days where they assume a pioneer persona and journey in wagon teams in the San Jose foothills. In 4th grade, students act in crews on a historic ship during the Age of Sail overnight in the San Francisco Bay. They learn and live California history.

WO closely monitors classroom work through its 360 model to evaluate the effectiveness of its instructional program, going beyond district-mandated assessments (F&P, Writing PBA, Math) to provide additional formative and summative assessments through Reading Intervention, small-group academic support and opportunities for enrichment and learning extensions. To ensure effectiveness, teachers, administrators, and non-instructional staff attend various professional development trainings offered by the district. They also receive supplemental professional development in targeted areas. For example, teachers received focused training in technology use, writing instruction, and growth mindset.

Frequent communication between all stakeholders distinguishes WO. Besides district communication streams like SchoolLoop, there is a yearly school wide meeting, biannual all parent training, regular meetings of SSC, ELAC, and the WOPFG. New parents receive 3 additional trainings per year. Social media connects WO adults, including alumni parents.

To evaluate the effectiveness of parent and community engagement, the district conducts the Healthy Kids Survey of students, staff, and parents, and SSC conducts an annual survey of parents and staff. The principal holds monthly community meetings to elicit feedback and shares it with staff and school committees. Teachers informally gather data from parents and students to share with the principal and staff. Parents and students regularly interact, creating a caring school climate that leads to essentially no suspensions/expulsions. Compared to the 3-year state suspension average rate of 3.8%, the WO average rate was 0.2%. To date, WO has had no expulsions. WO is a place people want to be.

## **Results and Outcomes**

As a result of the 360 model where the entire community is invested in educating the whole child, measurable academic growth has been realized school-wide and within the lowest performing sub-group. The number of students receiving support exceeds the district model as WO budgets for additional support staff in grades K–5. Overall, 203 students receive some form of academic support or enrichment. In addition to 22 students with an IEP served by the RSP team, 38 students who have not yet qualified

for special education receive weekly push in or pull out services from the team. In the speech therapy program, 30 students have an IEP and 9 others receive support. Staff monitors progress to assess the need for additional testing and services. English Learners thrive in the 360 team approach to student success and language-rich environment; 85% of the language learners met or exceeded the standards in math compared to 10.8% district wide and 79% met or exceeded the standards in ELA compared to 39% district wide.

At WO, all students have access to the services they need. As a result there has been a 6% increase in students who met or exceeded the standards in ELA in 2016–17. 85% of students met or exceeded standards in ELA, compared to 58% district wide and 48% state wide. In addition, WO students more than doubled the state average in mathematics; 80% of students met or exceeded standards compared to 49% district wide and 37% statewide. This is a 3% increase at WO from 2015–16.

Results from parent, staff, and student surveys are used to monitor WO program success. Surveys show that 100% of WO teachers feel that students are motivated to learn, have equal opportunities to participate in classroom discussions or activities, and participate in numerous extracurricular and enrichment activities. This unanimous opinion reflects a unique school culture where every student has regular access to enriching academic and extracurricular activities and the support needed to thrive. Survey data also shows that 100% of responding parents feel WO teachers communicate with parents about student learning expectations. This positive climate has resulted in no expulsions for the last 3 years compared to a district average of 0.13%. The 3 year WO average suspension rate was 0.2% compared to 4.13% in the district.

WO's 360 model allows for regular assessments of all students, skill-based instruction in small groups as well as adapting services and learning mechanisms to meet children where they are in the learning process. The whole community comes together to collaborate throughout the school year to provide a fun, engaging, and meaningful climate that supports the development of the whole child, thus making us all proud and grateful to be a part of WO's standout program.