



FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN OAKLAND

In each of Oakland's full-service community schools, the mix of programs, services, and supports reflect the unique assets and needs of the students and families served. At Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School, partnerships have played a vital role in carrying out the school's STEM vision and in fostering a family-friendly culture committed to the health and wellness of students and their families.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL A STEM School with a Community Focus

It's a cold and rainy March morning, but the Spring showers haven't dampened the enthusiasm of the community of Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School. Young children and elders, staff, and community partners have packed the gym and classrooms. They're playing games, visiting exhibits, and learning about strategies to promote good health — a key indicator of students' academic success.

Each year, hundreds of adults and children participate in MLK's health fair, one of the many events designed to serve the school's 319 students and their families, as well as the broader community of West Oakland. The turnout and excitement is indicative of all that's working at this Pre-K-5 school: engaged staff and families,

strong community partnerships, and an understanding of the connection between academic success and the health and well being of students, their families, and the surrounding community.

"It takes all of us," says Principal Roma Groves, who's made it her mission to deepen the connection between the school, its parents, and the neighborhood. Since she became principal in 2009, Groves has embraced the community and its partners as key to her school's success. She's deepened long-time partnerships, such as with the Faith Network of the East Bay, and identified and cultivated new ones. And, with the support of both community partners and school staff, she's reached out to parents to tap their interests, wisdom, and

assistance in making the full-service community school a beacon for the West Oakland community.

"It's a dynamic school. Families are excited about what we have to offer," says Toni Hamilton, who has been part of the MLK community for more than 20 years, beginning when her two children attended the school.

For Hamilton, the full service community school model brings much-needed resources to parents and families in her neighborhood. Events like the annual health fair, as well as ongoing classes in everything from personal finance to cooking to computers, help parents develop the skills and knowledge they need to support their students. The work is paying off, she adds. "We had a waiting list this year!"

The Power of Partnerships

Partnerships, like that with the Faith Network, play a critical role in advancing and supporting MLK's mission and vision as a full-service community school. In addition to supporting the ongoing instructional program, partner organizations have been critical to the school's ability to expand MLK's offerings beyond the school day – from the afterschool and other co-curricular programs for students to the many educational and support offerings for parents and families.

"That's one of the secrets to our school's success," says Community Schools Manager George Henderson. "We've been very intentional about expanding our partnerships to meet the needs of our students and our community."

The annual health fair grew out of this commitment to matching services to the needs of MLK families. As it became clear that more and more families were dealing with chronic health issues like diabetes, hypertension, and asthma, school staff began exploring programs and strategies to foster healthier lifestyles. That's when Alpha Kappa Alpha, an African American sorority and longtime partner, agreed to champion the idea of a health fair that would bring together a wide variety of resources on the MLK campus. The first fair was held in 2010 and each year it has grown in size and scope.

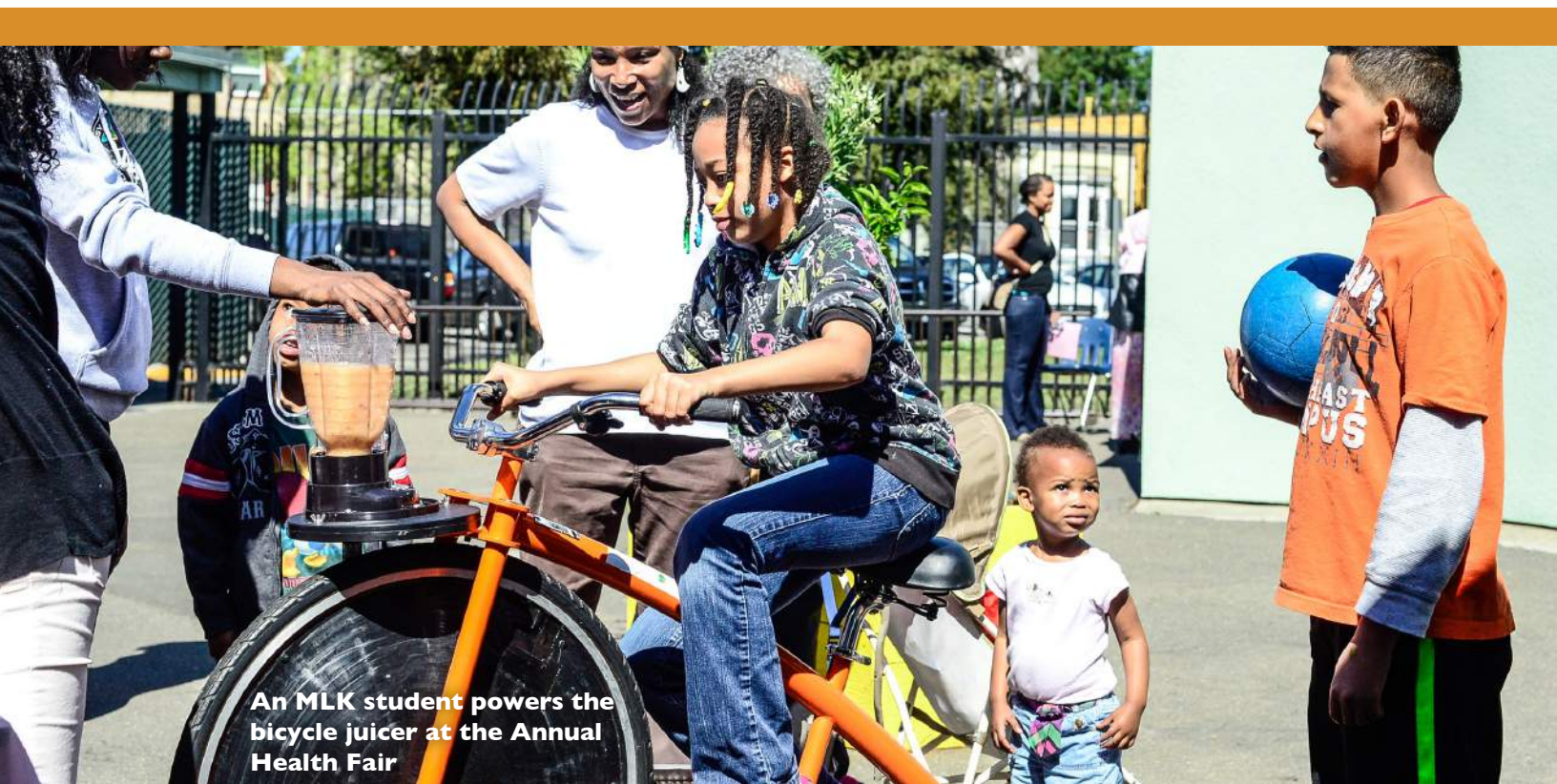
On the March morning in 2014, dozens of community groups and supporters are participating in the health fair, including the Black Nurses Association, the Ethnic Health Institute, and Champions for Change, a project of the California Department of Public Health, which promotes healthy lifestyles through nutritious recipes, cooking classes, and exercise strategies. Members of Alpha Kappa

Alpha are also out in force, as are members of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, whose job it is to provide lunch for the 330-plus adults and children who've come for the information — and the fun.

Take fourth grader Tayvion, for example. He's working the bicycle juicer, on loan from the school district's health and wellness department. The faster he pedals, the quicker the blender works to convert the fruits and vegetables that he's selected into a healthy drink. (The bicycle juicer is pictured below.) Nearby, another young student is translating for her mom as a health worker explains the importance of having her blood pressure checked and understanding what the numbers mean. Outside, the Breathmobile, a converted Winnebago, provides a one-stop-shop for students and their parents to learn about the risks and treatments for childhood asthma, which MLK students experience at a rate of 29.5 percent, the highest in the city.

"Each year the health fair just gets bigger and better," says Cheryl Chamber, president of Alpha Kappa Alpha. As with the asthma-related services, Chambers and her team work with the school nurse and other staff to identify key health concerns and then assemble partners who can provide the information and services families need. Understanding the toll that the daily challenges of housing or food insecurity and neighborhood gun violence take on families, Chambers and her team have expanded the focus to include mental health services.

"Mental health needs are not always talked about in the African American community," says Chambers, "but we can't be afraid to discuss depression or suicide. That's how people will learn about the resources and strategies that are available to treat these health issues."



An MLK student powers the bicycle juicer at the Annual Health Fair

HEALTH & WELLNESS

My health is my community's health.



Supporting Parents to Support Their Students

Promoting the health and well being of the whole family is just one way in which MLK staff support and partner with parents. “It’s a critical relationship,” says Henderson, who moved to West Oakland when he was 13 and has lived in the community for the past 25 years. Known as “Coach George” to many area families, Henderson has run a nonprofit youth basketball program for the past 15 years, serving many current and former MLK students. He sees families when he walks his dog or goes grocery shopping on weekends and is a familiar and welcome presence in the neighborhood and at the school, providing the “glue” that connects parents to the school and community partners.

“There’s a feeling of community you get around campus,” says Henderson. “No one feels we are talking down to them. We’re talking *with* them.”

That commitment to partnership has contributed greatly to a dramatic drop in suspensions and a strong feeling among students and parents alike that the school is a safe place, where bullying is uncommon and where differences are celebrated. Every teacher uses Second Step, a highly

respected classroom curriculum that teaches students important social and emotional skills that are critical to making good decisions and solving problems without aggression. The school’s small size and open layout make it difficult for conflicts to go unnoticed, and staff are quick to bring students and parents together to resolve issues, calling on the school site counselor or social worker to provide additional supports, when needed.

Parent education classes, such as one on positive discipline strategies, are designed to reinforce the culture and goals of the school and to provide parents with the support they need to support their students – inside and outside of the classroom. The school’s monthly calendar is chock-full of classes, discussion groups, and other activities to aid parents and deepen their connection to each other and to the school. The family resource center includes a computer lab, with instruction provided two days a week. And the commitment to healthy living extends throughout the school year, including a garden and a weekly farmer’s market to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, a cooking class taught by MLK parents, and a weekly walking group to encourage regular exercise.



Students in MLK's computer lab

Preparing and Modeling a Bright Future (STEM)

Over her more than two decades at MLK, Hamilton has seen many changes and improvements at the school. She's particularly proud of the focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), part of a district wide initiative spanning elementary, middle, and high schools in West Oakland.

The Oakland Unified School District's Strategic Plan named STEM education as important for all students, and identified West Oakland as the site for a STEM education "corridor" from preschool through high school. Providing a robust K-12 STEM curriculum that is deeply integrated into a full-service community school creates new academic opportunities and pathways for students, with the support they need to be successful.

At MLK, the STEM focus is woven into the school day and week and reinforced by a range of special programs that are made possible by the community school focus, including a STEM Lab, staffed by volunteers from Science Horizons, an initiative of the Faith Network. Working with current and retired scientists from throughout the Bay Area, students explore a different theme each month, as they put on their lab coats and conduct experiments or engage in activities that make science learning come alive, from computer programming to making ice cream. Each year, high school students from West Oakland's McClymonds High School, work as interns in the lab, serving as mentors and role models for the younger students.

Math and science nights are two more ways in which the school reinforces the STEM focus in a community school context. During these annual events, parents and students have the opportunity to engage in grade-level activities, exploring the concepts that students encounter as part of the new Common Core curriculum.

During Family Math Night, for example, the fourth graders in Thomas Henderson's class are teaching their parents about decimals and fractions. Elton is a little nervous at first, but he's excited and proud to share what he's learned with his mom and dad, and smiles with satisfaction when they try their hand at the problem solving.

"You really have to internalize knowledge if you're going to teach it," says Henderson, adding that observing the parent-student interaction provides him with one more data point as he assesses how well students know the material.

The following week, Mr. Henderson and his fourth graders are test driving a teacher-developed Common Core lesson on angles. Over the course of the 30-minute lesson, students are standing up to make angles with their arms, using pipe cleaners to determine whether angles are acute, right, or obtuse, and then demonstrating what they know through a short assessment.

Throughout the lesson, Henderson asks questions, encourages exploration, and gently guides students to test their answers using the pipe cleaners or to consult with a neighbor when it is clear they're still struggling with a concept.

Cementing the Vision, Strengthening the Core

Building on the school's strong foundation, Groves and her staff are reaching out to parents and community partners to enlist their wisdom and assistance in propelling Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School to the next level academically.

The 2014-15 school year marks the introduction of some important new strategies. The school's new literacy coach works collaboratively with teachers to develop interventions for struggling readers and to support the use of a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners. Additionally, three-week assessments in math and reading will provide students, parents, and teachers with the additional information they need to understand students' strengths and their gaps in skills and knowledge. Staff will analyze assessment data across grade levels to better understand and expand effective strategies and, when necessary, develop new ones. A school team will focus on the needs of students below and far below basic and, in partnership with parents, develop strategies to accelerate improvements.

Each step of the way, Groves and her team bring parents into the conversation – to understand the new assessments and supports available at school and to be partners in supporting the students who are struggling.

Integrated into all of these efforts will be an attention to encouraging and expecting students to take more

ownership of their own learning. “We want our students to be empowered and to know they can achieve at the highest level,” says Groves.

At a first-ever school wide retreat, members of the school community came together to deepen relationships, refine their mission and vision, and develop a plan for translating the vision into reality for MLK students and families. It was an opportunity to pause and reflect on the strong foundation that has been built and to imagine together the programs, practices, and strategies that will propel the school to the next level.

“We want our students to be empowered and to know they can achieve at the highest level.”

For Principal Groves, it was an opportunity to bring together diverse roles, experiences, and perspectives, to strengthen the partnerships that are critical to the school's success, and to dream big about the future of their small school in West Oakland.

“My dream is for our school to become a California Distinguished School,” says Groves, with the characteristic enthusiasm and smile that families at MLK have come to know and appreciate. “The way we are moving, I believe it is possible.”





A high school student mentors kids at MLK



An exercise class at MLK



An MLK student
in the school garden



Literacy work in
an MLK classroom

A Summer STEM Boost

In addition to the regular school program, students from Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary school get a summer STEM boost when the Summer Engineering Experience for Kids (SEEK) program comes to town. This three-week camp is part of a national effort run by the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), and provides 300 students from around Oakland the opportunity to engage in science in action — from rockets to robots to balloon-powered jets. The program is free to participating students and families.

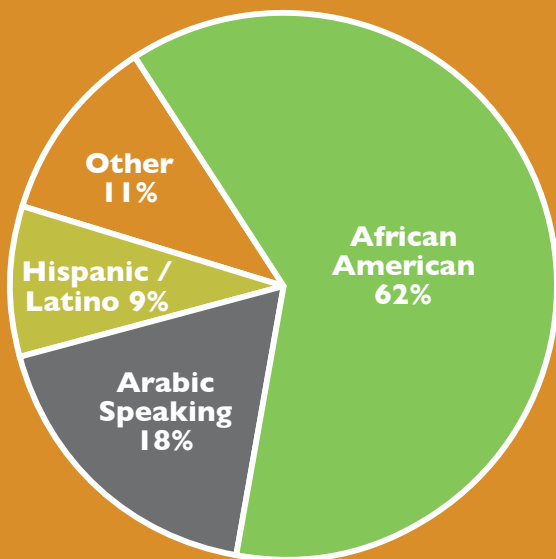
On the Saturday morning orientation, hundreds of parents and children pack the MLK multi-purpose room as they prepare to learn about the much sought-after program. The guests of honor that morning are the several dozen young men and women who will serve as teachers and role models during the three-week camp. One by one, all of the young men and women — current college students or recent graduates — walk up on stage and introduce themselves and share their field of study. Each introduction is met with applause and loud cheers, the likes of which are often reserved for athletes or rock stars.

NSBE Chairperson Sossena Wood received some of the loudest applause of all when she shared that she is working on her doctorate in bioengineering. The 26-year-old listed off some of the statistics that illustrate just how under-represented African American men and women are in STEM studies. “Less than one percent of PhD candidates are African American; less than five percent of students enrolled in engineering programs are African American; and out of the 96,340 bachelor’s degrees awarded in engineering last year, only 3610 were awarded to African Americans.

“Those stats don’t matter, though,” says Wood. “What matters,” she told the parents, “is that you hold your child’s hand all the way until they look like me.”

And then, turning to the students in the room she imparted a message that they would hear often during the summer program and throughout the school year at MLK, “The community you live in does not have to stop you. You are meant to be an engineer or a scientist. You look like me. You’re from my hood. I know it is possible.”

2014-15 DEMOGRAPHICS



Number of students: 319

Students' Home Language

English: 71.7%

Spanish: 5.2%

Cantonese: 1.2%

Vietnamese: 0.3%

Arabic: 18.5%

**Students Receiving Free/
Reduced Price Lunch:** 93%

Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School

West Oakland, the roughly 6.5 square mile neighborhood in which Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School is located, was formerly hailed as the “Harlem of the West,” in recognition of its once-thriving jazz scene and its distinction as home to the largest African American community on the West Coast. Although the demographics of the area are changing, the area remains home to numerous African American families, many of whom have lived in Oakland for generations.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS, THRIVING STUDENTS: Key Themes in Community Schools

A full-service community school shares much in common with one of Oakland's stately old oaks. Just as our beloved oaks need deep roots and healthy branches to grow and thrive, our schools need to be rooted in caring, respectful relationships and to cultivate strong partnerships if they are to provide students with the safe and supportive environment they need to be successful inside and outside of school.



**OAKLAND UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT**
Community Schools, Thriving Students

FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
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